# Classroom interactions under the Immediate Method

# - a case study.

Tim Marchand

Kansai Ohkura

timmarchand@gmail.com

## 1. Introduction

Over the years teaching oral communication classes to third year junior high school students at Kansai Ohkura, I have come across many challenges in conducting satisfying lessons with meaningful communicative outcomes, and so it was with great interest that I attended the Immediate Method (IM) workshop at the 2004 JALT conference in Nara (for details see Azra et al. 2005). The IM was originated in French classes at the University of Osaka to deal with specific challenges found there (especially large classes with low student motivation), and has since been adopted by teachers of German and Japanese at the university level as well. More recently IM has been developed for teaching English at the beginner level, with the textbook *Immediate Conversations 1* (Brown et al. 2004) specifically designed to be used in junior high school classes. From April 2005 Kansai Ohkura has been using the textbook for its third year junior high school classes, and this paper looks at the results so far from an action research project examining the effectiveness of the IM in five of those classes.

## 2. Classroom challenges

The immediate method was developed in response to challenges typically facing teachers in the Japanese classroom context. So before setting about evaluating the method, it is worth spending a little time looking at what those challenges are, from the specific (particular to the teaching context at Kansai Ohkura), to the general (found in many Japanese classrooms). (See table 3, column "challenges").

One of the greatest challenges seems to be one of time. Naturally large classes delimit the opportunities that any one student may have to speak up in class, especially when it comes to interacting with the teacher. Averaging 20 students per class, the class sizes at Kansai Ohkura are not as big as some of the others that the IM has been designed to fit, but they are large enough to make meaningful conversational practice a difficult, rather than a given, outcome. Moreover, time is limited in another sense: oral communication classes at Kansai Ohkura are scheduled just once a week, and coupled with other vagaries of the school's scheduling policies, on average there are just twenty-five 45-minute classes in a school year. That equates to less than one hour of teacher attention per student in a whole year. Not only does this affect the possible range and depth that a

course can realistically cover, but also learner retention and even motivation as well.

Another feature of the oral communication class (especially at Kansai Ohkura perhaps) was the lack of a clear purpose: the curriculum was defined by the textbook, and when I first started at Kansai Ohkura, I was expected to plug away through the units one by one, almost regardless of the students' interests in the material or their handling of it. There were to be no tests, grades or homework and in no way did students' performance in class have any affect on the rest of their school lives. In this environment, how is one to measure progress? What constitutes learner achievement? The lack of clear goals also meant it was difficult to feel the sense of accomplishment, again affecting not only student but also teacher motivation. A demotivated class can become a disruptive class, with the teacher wasting precious time on discipline rather than pedagogy. This problem of disruption may also occur when there is a disparity in skill levels, with both the students who find tasks too easy and the ones who find them too difficult becoming disengaged, or in the words of Csikkszentmihalyi (1985), lacking *emergent* motivation.

However perhaps even more demotivating from a teacher's perspective is the reticence on the part of the students to participate, which has been linked to the education system itself in Japan. For example Williams (1994, p10) points out that:

> "Traditionally the technique employed in most classrooms is of a
> lecture style, where the teacher remains standing behind a desk at
> the front of the class and the students receive information as the
> teacher lectures. Little input is ever solicited from the students, and
> it is instilled that a classroom is a place where one listens and
> learns but does not speak."

In contrast to this, suddenly they come across a teacher asking them to not only speak up, but speak in English, and to each other! They are being required to voice their opinions and answer questions that do not have a clearly right or wrong answer. It is no understatement to call this a classroom culture shock.

Anderson (1993, p102) found that one of things that troubled Western language teachers the most in Japan was that students rarely volunteered answers:

> "Most Japanese will only talk if specifically called upon, and only
> then if there is a clear-cut answer. But even if the answer is
> obvious, it may be preceded by a pause so long that the instructor
> is tempted to supply the answer first. This type of pause -- or even

a true silence -- does not necessarily signify an unwillingness to comply, but may simply indicate that the student is too nervous to respond, or too uncertain of the answer to risk public embarrassment."

It is also commonly acknowledged that Japanese students tend to be very shy when speaking in front of the whole class. Doyon (2000) offers an in-depth look at the topic of shyness in Japanese classrooms, where he refers to the work of the anthropologist Takie Sugiyama Lebra. Lebra identified three interactional domains in Japanese society: ritual, anomic and intimate. The traditional classroom culture in Japan is typically a *ritual interactional domain* replete with formalities, conventional rules, and highly *guarded* behavior. On the other hand a person in the *anomic interactional domain* feels both considerable social distance, and a lack of concern for the opinion of others, sensing no need for formalities and no desire for intimacy - which may perfectly describe some of the more disruptive students who are not fully invested or integrated into the collective sense of purpose of the oral communication class.

In order to overcome shyness in the classroom, Doyon recommends moving toward the *intimate interactional domain,* a domain where more open communication and displays of spontaneity are likely to prevail. For Doyon, this means, among other things, creating intimacy between students (by revealing personal information about themselves), removing the "teacher's mask" (becoming more friendly with the students) and moving away from the evaluation paradigm.

## 3. Immediate Method

The actual mechanics of the IM have been dealt with in more detail elsewhere (for example this volume, or see Azra et al. (2005), Marchand (2006)), so for now I would like to just focus on the three key principles, and how they relate to the challenges mentioned above. (See table 3, column "response").

1) Students systematically use "meta-communication" expressions - tools which aid in keeping the conversation going, even when they encounter unknown vocabulary;

2) Students are frequently interviewed in small groups or individually, and receive a score based on their oral performance;

3) Their scores are kept on a "Progress Sheet", which they are responsible for.

The first key element is the use of meta-communication phrases (MCP's) which are presented

early and recycled frequently to enable smooth communication to continue when situations occur that typically hinder this. For example the question recommended to be taught first is "What's -- in English". This allows the class members to find the vocabulary needed to answer questions, as well as encourage curiosity and spontaneity. Also the response "I don't know" is a key phrase found in the first unit, which should give the students an acceptable way to say something when they do not know what the answer is, preferable to the silent response that seems to prevail in many classrooms.

Other MCP's that may be introduced early on are identified in table 1. All of these are idealized examples that may occur during the presentation stage of, for example, Unit 4 of *Immediate Conversations 1* (which deals with the key phrase "How are you today / How about you?") Typically during the presentation stage, as a class the students translate vocabulary items in vocabulary boxes, usually with the teacher fronting the activity. At this stage, and crucially during the oral interviews, the IM relies upon the teacher recycling and encouraging the use of MCP's as much as possible.

Table 1

| **T:** What's *tsukareta* in English?<br><br>**S:** Pardon?<br><br>**T:** What's *tsukareta* in English?<br><br>**S:** I don't know. | **T:** How do you say *tsukareta* in English?<br><br>**S:** I don't understand the question.<br><br>**T:** What's *tsukareta* in English?<br><br>**S:** It's "tired". | **S:** What's *tsukareta* in English?<br><br>**T:** It's "tired"<br><br>**S:** How do you spell it?<br><br>**T:** T, I, R, E, D. |
|---|---|---|
| Example   MCP's: | What's --- in English?<br>Pardon?<br>I don't know<br>I don't understand<br>How do you spell it? | |

The second key element is the oral interview, the regular in-class tests. The interviews consist of 2-3 students being tested at any one time in some corner of the classroom, away from the attention of the other class members (and subsequently a more *intimate* domain). The tests are significant in their regularity (at least once every other class), and they provide opportunity and

time for every student to interact with the teacher. In fact they can be seen to be the motor that drives the whole method, and in stark contrast to Doyon's advice to move away from an evaluation paradigm.

The third key component of the IM is the "Progress Sheet", which every student is given at the start of the year. This sheet in itself is supposed to have pedagogical value: by giving the students responsibility not to loose the progress sheet (and in fact personalize it with photographs etc.) the students are supposed to understand that they themselves are responsible for their learning and accomplishments. As a result, lost sheets are expected to be rare and the students should be sufficiently motivated to not only perform well in the tests, but practice well in pairs prior to the tests. This is important as a teacher occupied in testing small groups away from the centre of the class is not in a position to control a large part of the class for a large amount of the time

## 4. Action research

In order to investigate the effectiveness of the IM in my context, I started doing some action research, which at the time of writing is still in progress. To date there have been three components to the research: the research diary, lesson recordings and a mark-off sheet for MCP's occurring in the class.

In the diary, I note lesson plans before the start of each class, and write brief observations after each class – usually in the 15-20 minutes between classes. In another section I keep a journal of thoughts after periods of reflection, and when inspired by background reading.

It soon became apparent that class recordings would be necessary, and these started after the third class. The lessons have been recorded on a small digital recorder which the students quickly grew to ignore. After each day of teaching I would listen to the classes again and review the notes I had made, it also helped me check the accuracy of my MCP sheet.

The MCP sheet was born out of the realization that in practice there were two types of MCP – spontaneous and prompted, and also 5 classes. (See table 2).
The 5 classes of MCP are:

        Class A – Correct *meta-communication* phrase

        Class B – Imperfect *meta-communication* phrase in English

        Class C – Response in Japanese to the teacher

        Class D – Response in Japanese to a classmate

        Class E – Silence

Table 2

Spontaneous / Prompted

| | QUESTION | | | ANSWER | IT'S JUKU |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *What's cram school in Japanese?* | | | | |

Spontaneous:

| ANSWER | IT'S JUKU |
|---|---|
| Class A MCP | *Pardon?* |
| Class B MCP | *One ore* |
| Class C MCP | *mo ikkai* |
| Class D MCP | *nante* |
| Class E MCP | ……… |

PROMPT

| ANSWER | IT'S JUKU |
|---|---|
| Class A MCP | *Pardon?* |
| Class B MCP | *One more* |
| Class C MCP | *mo ikkai* |
| Class D MCP | *nante* |
| Class E MCP | ………. |
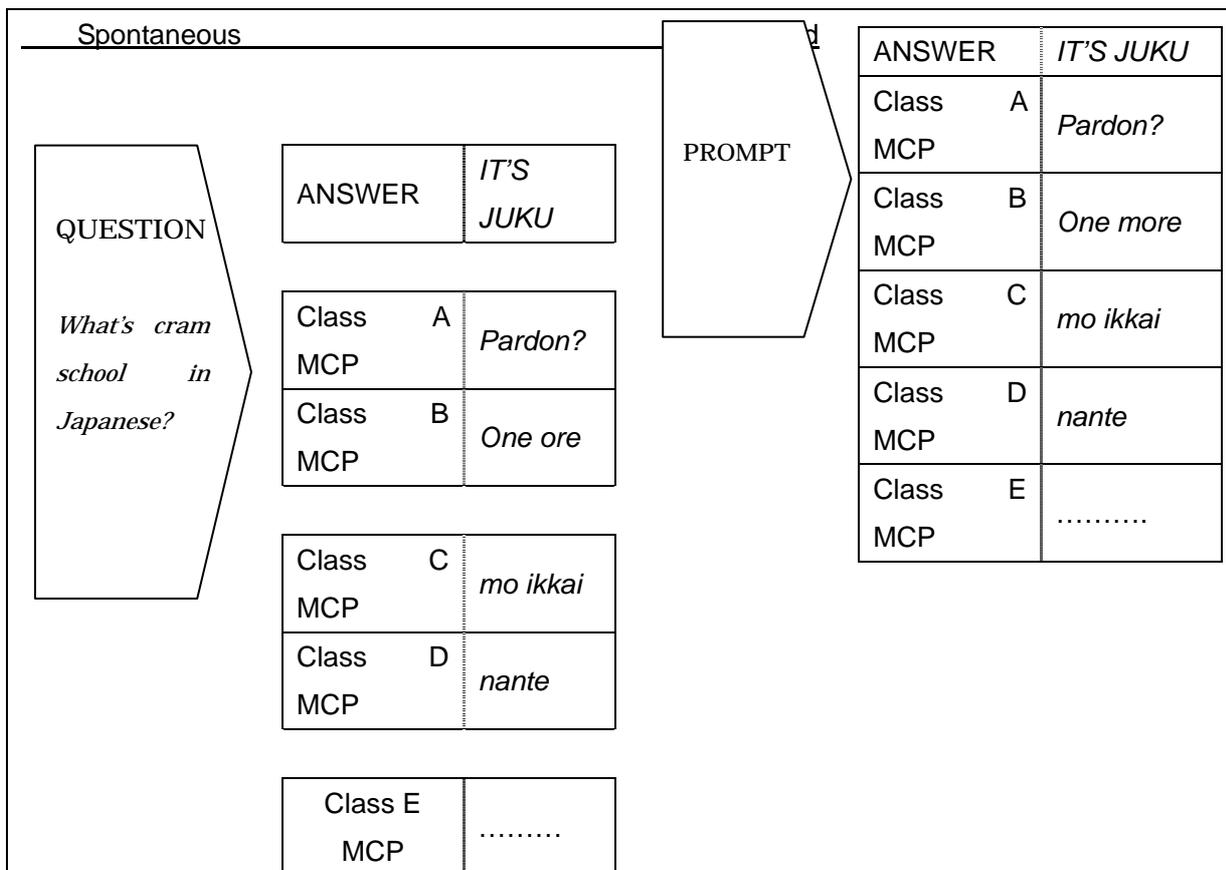
Class E, D and C MCP's are often followed by a prompting from the teacher, or even a class mate to produce either an appropriate MCP in English, or an answer. I found that Class B is sometimes followed by a prompt (such as a correction) or ignored, whilst naturally Class A MCP's allow the dialogue to flow naturally.

So for example if the question "What's cram school in Japanese?" is asked and the student did not hear properly, the Class A response might be "pardon", Class B "One more" (which might be corrected or might be ignored) Class C *eh* or *nani* to the teacher, class D seeking collaboration in Japanese from another student to help negotiate the meaning of the question, and class E the silent response.

To keep track of how often these MCP's occur during class, I hold a mark-off sheet with the five main MCP's (mentioned in table 1), and record each time I perceive an MCP (of any class and type) to have occurred. At the end of the day when I listen back to the class recordings, I also check the MCP sheets.

## 5. Recordings

The transcribed recordings offer a rich look at the interactional structure of the classrooms under the IM, so it is worth taking a look at a variety of these. Extract 1 has been taken from an oral interview with three students being tested on the key phrase "How do you spell --?" At first blush, this "test" seems to have gone very smoothly. There is very little hesitation and few silent responses on the part of the students, almost no code-switching into Japanese and with good evidence for an intimate interactional domain (plenty of laughs, and note the spontaneity of line 43 when the student recalls Humpty Dumpty).There are also many MCP's being actively used in this extract. There are 6 occurrences of "I don't know", 5 of at least Class A or B forms of "How do you spell --?", 2 of "What's – in English?" and one "Pardon?" from the students. All of the "I don't know" MCP's occur spontaneously, while the "What's – in English?" MCP's are all prompted: by the teacher's question "Can you ask me" in line 20, and "Can you ask me a question" in line 48.

**Extract 1** (see appendix for transcript conventions)

| Class 4 / *"How do you spell --" test* / June 3rd |
|---|
| 01  T:  I see. That's good (..) And Umm:: (…) >Do you know< What's (.) err::: (...) |
| 02  *megane* in English |
| 03  S1:  (1.0) It's (..) glasses in English |
| 04  T:  Glasses. How do you spell glasses |
| 05  S1:  (..) I don't know |
| 06  T:  Okay |
| 07  {laughing} |
| 08  T:  How do you spell glasses |
| 09  S2  I don't know |
| 10  T:  (..) Okay. Do you want to ask me? |
| 11  S3:  (.) How:: do you (.) spell (..) glasses |
| 12  T:  Er (.) It's G, L, A. (..) S, S, (.) E, S |
| 13  {writing} |
| 14  T:  L |
| 15  S1:  S, E {laughing} |
| 16  T:  L, A, S, S, E, S. (..) Okay. **Um**m:: How do you say:: (.) *tenjou* in English |
| 17  S2:  It's (…) I don't know {laughing} |
| 18  T:  Okay. How do you say *tenjou* [in English |
| 19  S1:  [I don't know |
| 20  S3:  (..) I don't know |
| 21  T:  Okay(.) Can you ask me |
| 22  S3:  How (..) What? (.) What s:z *tenjo* in English |
| 23  T:  In English (..) Umm:: It's **cei**ling |
| 24  (2.0) |
| 25  S3:  Pardon? |
| 26  T:  Ceiling |
| 27  S3:  Cei::ling |
| 28  T:  Yes |
| 29  {laughing} |
| 30  T:  Okay? |
| 31  (1.0) |
| 32  S1:  [How do you spell] |
| 33  S3:  [How do you spell it |

| 34 | T: | Ahh: (..) It's C, E, I, L |
|----|-----|----------------------------|
| 35 | Ss: | °C, E, I, L° |
| 36 | T: | I, N, G |
| 37 | Ss: | °I, N, G° |
| 38 | T: | That's right. Good. Ceiling |
| 39 | S1: | (xxxxxx) |
| 40 | T: | Okay. err:: (.) How do you say *kabe* in English |
| 41 | S2: | (.) I don't know |
| 42 | S3: | It's wall |
| 43 | T: | wall |
| 44 | S2: | Ah::: (..) Humpty Dumpty! |
| 45 | T: | Humpty Dumpty, that's right! |
| 46 | {laughing} | |
| 47 | T: | Um:: okay, how do you spell wall? |
| 48 | S2: | Wall, okay W, A, L, L |
| 49 | T: | That's right. Good. Okay that's good. Can you umm ask me a question |
| 50 | S1: | (2.0)   What's *yuka* in English |
| 51 | T: | er it's floor |
| 52 | S2: | How do you [spell |
|    | S1: |               [How do you spell it |
|    | T: | Ah: F, L, O, O, R |

What is more interesting is that the first three occurrences of "How do you spell --?" are all prompted, at first by a direct question in line 9. The ones uttered in lines 31 and 32 take a bit more time to be prompted (lines 23-30). The first pause (line 23) encourages the "Pardon" response and it is only after the "Okay?" and another awkward pause that the students seem to realize they are expected to ask the follow-up question "How do you spell--?" But now this pattern has been set, the final utterances of that MCP (lines 51 and 52) occur quite spontaneously. It would be wrong to say that this extract is representative of most of the recordings most of the time. The students in question were usually the most motivated members of that particular class, and many of the MCP's had recently been the target phrases of previous lessons. But it offers a glimpse of what the IM is trying to achieve. The next extract reveals a more typical response at the early stages of implementing the IM.

**Extract 2**

| Class 4 / *"How do you feel" test* / June 3rd |
|---|
| 01      T:         Good after**noon**! |
| 02      S1:       Good after[noon] |
| 03      T:                   [Good afternoon] |
| 04      S2:                [good afternoon= |
| 05      T:                      =Okay. No:w (.) |
| 06      how do you feel |
| 07              today |
| 08      S1:       *eto:: eto* (..)    *eto* I'mu feeling fine. |
| 09      T:         You're feeling fine. Good. How about you. (1.0) How do you feel |
| 10      S2:       *(xxxxx)* oh:: feel    *(xxxxxxx)* |
| 11      Ss*:*       *(xxxxxxxxxxxxxx)* |
| 12      S2:       (...) I'm feeling *(xxxxx)* I'm feeling *(xxxxxxx)* |
| 13      T:         I feel, |
| 14      S2:       (1.0) I (1.0) I feel *kekkou tte nani?* (..) I feel |
| 15      S3:       (xxxxxxxx*)* *boku wa jibun teki wa nani nani (xxxxxx)* |
| 16             *boku-* I'm feeling *naninani (..)* I feel *naninani* |
| 17      S2:       (..) I'm feeling:::u |
| 18      S1:       *(xxxxxxxxx)* |
| 19      S2:       *Ah kore* (xxxxxx)    (1.0) I'm feeling::u (1.0) sleepy |
|         T:         Sleepy. Okay. You seem to be sleepy. |
| Note:   Lines 17-18, S1 refers S2 to a task sheet where the students were to match feelings with pictures. "*Ah kore"* indicates S2's realization of what he can use to answer the question*.* |

Here we have an example of students helping each other in order to achieve a meaningful response to the teacher's questions. After a hesitant start, S1 is able to answer the teacher's question in line 7. It is clear though from the next exchange that S2 is not so lucky (line 9). What follows is a team effort in finding an answer, with a significant amount of code-switching (and Class D MCP's) in action. In line 13 S2 is asking for clarification of the Japanese word *kekkou*, and in lines 14-15, S3 helps him out further by suggesting the form of an appropriate response ("I'm feeling *naninani,,* I feel *naninani*"). It is only when S1 in line 17 refers his classmate to the task sheet they had been working on (which listed a lot of feeling adjectives), that S2 marks his enlightenment ("*ah kore"* in line 18) and proceeds to answer the question.

In extract 3 we see more collaboration by neighboring students, this time introducing an

appropriate MCP into the interaction.


**Extract 3**

| Class 3/ *"Where do you --"* presentation / June 24th |
|---|
| 01   T:                  Oka::y (..) what's (.) go to cram school (.) in Japanese. |
| 02   S3:                °(…) *ee? (xxxxx)*   (..) *c*ram school   *tte nani*° |
| 03   S4:                °(..) *(xxxxxx)* cram school *wa (..) (xxxx)*   *shiranai*° |
| 04   S5:                ° *(xxxxx)* I don't know° |
| 05   {laughing} |
| 06   S3:                *(xxxx)* (..) I (..) d[on't (..) |
| 07   T:                                 [you don't= |
| 08   S3:                                   =know |
| 09   T:                  (.) you don't know. (..) Okay. (..) Ask me (.) ask me |
| 10   S3:                (2.0) What's cram school (..) in Japanese |
| 11   T:                  er: (.) **cram** school is *juku* |
| 12   Ss:                °*ehhh*?°(..) |
| 13   T:                  *juku* (..) okay? |

The teacher asks the students for the Japanese equivalent of the phrase "go to cram school" in line 1, which is responded to by S3 with a typical Class D MCP ("cram school *tte nani*" or "what's cram school" in a softened voice to a classmate). In line 3 S4 declares her ignorance ("*shiranai")* followed by S5 in the next line helpfully supplying the correct MCP "I don't know", which S3 duly employs in her next turn (lines 6 and 8). The teacher then prompts the student to ask using the familiar MCP "What's – in Japanese?"

In the following extract (extract 4), turning to one's classmates again seems to be the preferred response given the chance. In line 2 the teacher responds to S4 who seems to be having trouble with a vocabulary item ("eat out"). In the next line, S4 utters a Class B MCP ("what's .. in Japanese", failing to include the unknown phrase into the question pattern), however her turn is interrupted by two of her classmates (line 4 and 5)

In line 6 the teacher tries to prompt the questioner again, but now S4 instead turns to her friends with the same question in Japanese ("*nante iu n daroo"* in line 7 and *"nante iu n daroo…* eato outo" of line 9)

**Extract 4**

| Class 5 / *"Where do you - -" task* / June 24th | |
|---|---|
| 01 S4: | (xxxxxx) eat out (xxxxx) |
| 02 T: | Do you have a question? |
| 03 S4: | °do (.) I have a question° (..)[what's (..) in Japanese] |
| 04 S3: | [ (*xxxxxx*) Sta::backsu?] |
| 05 S5: | [ (xxxxxxx) ] |
| 06 T: | Wh- Wha- (..) Ask me please. |
| 07 S4: | *nante iu n daroo* |
| 08 S3: | *eh?* |
| 09 S4: | *nante iu n daroo* (..) eato (.) outo |
| 10 {laughing) | |
| 11 S5: | *dakara* = |
| 12 T: | =What's= |
| 13 S4: | =What's (..) what iszu (...) eat out (..) in (.) in |
| 14 Japanese. | |
| 15 T: | Good. What's eat out in Japanese. Once more? |
| 16 S4: | What's mean |
| 17 T: | ° no°(.) What's eat out (.) in Japanese |
| 18 S4: | What's (.) eat out (..) |
| 19 T: | in Japanese |
| 20 S4: | in Japanese |
| 21 T: | *gaishoku* |
| 22 S4: | it's *gaishoku*? |
| 23 T: | it's *gaishoku, gaishoku suru*. Yeah. |
| 24 (2.0) | |
| 25 T: | okay? (.) Think about that,(.) concentrate on that one |
| 27 (1.0) | |
| 28 S9: | What's starbucks? |
| T: | Starbucks is a:: **cof**fee shop |
| Note: | The students have been given a task sheet where they have to guess where the teacher goes to do different activities, i.e. matching verbs with places (e.g. read the newspaper / in Starbucks) after which they ask me a series of yes/no questions. |

The teacher then prompts the student into action again with his interjection on line 12, which finally results in two utterances of the target MCP (line 13 and lines 17-19). At the end of this extract in line 27 comes a question from another student, quite independently of the previous episode, and quite spontaneously too. This kind of willingness to ask questions out of turn marks a significant

step away from *the ritual interactional domain* previously described, and it is an encouraging sign that familiarity with using MCP's does indeed help pave the way for a more communicative classroom.

Extract 5 also contains an example of a student prepared to call out and ask the teacher a question, even if it means interrupting the flow of the lesson.

**Extract 5**

| Class 2 / *"How do you come here" presentation* / September 16th |
|---|
| 01  T:        Oka:y (.) **fina**lly, let's have a look at the grree:n box. |
| 02  (1.0) |
| 03  S1:       °*mo ikkai yutte (xxxx)*° (.) [once (.) |
| 04  S2:                                                              [once] |
| 05  S1:                                                                      [once again, please? |
| 06  T:        Which one. The last one? |
| 07  S1:       Last (..) las-= |
| 08  T:                                  = So::: (.)   by train, bus and on foot. |
| 09  S1:       by trai:::n, (.) |
| 10  S2:       °train° |
| 11  T:        bus |
| 12  S1:       °bus° (..) an:::do: (..) |
| 13  S2:       bus and footo |
| 14  S1:       and (..) an::::do (.) on foot. |
| 15  T:        on foot. |
| 16  S1:       thank you:: |
| 17  T:        you're welcome. (1.0) Oka::y, we're looking at the green box now |
| Note:    The green box refers to a vocabulary box found in the text book. |

In line 1 the teacher starts giving new class directions, but S1 spontaneously interrupts the passage to the next stage of the lesson plan, by indicating that she needs to hear the last answer again. At first in line 3 she begins to do this in a soft voice in Japanese (Class C MCP), before breaking into an appropriate English phrase, with the help of her friend (lines 4-5).

As these extracts show, there are signs of increasing spontaneity in the interaction patterns during the various stages of the IM lesson. What is also marked is the relative absence of long, silent responses. Instead Class D or even Class C MCP's are preferred, and it is to be hoped that having built a level of intimacy in the classroom that permits the students to ask questions (albeit in Japanese), that in time those questions will proceed step-by-step up the Classes of MCP until most of the interaction is in English (Class B or better). For a first look to see whether this may be the case, let's briefly look at the results of the MCP mark-off sheets.

## 6. MCP usage

This is still a research project in progress, but for now we can see some preliminary findings. (Marchand ibid. has a more thorough review of the occurrences of MCP's).

Figure 1



**Spontaneous Vs Prompted MCPs**
*(Silences not counted)*
**(P) = Presentation     (T) = Test**

| Date | Spontaneous | Prompted |
|---|---|---|
| June 10th (P) | 13 | 45 |
| June 17th (T) | 25 | 38 |
| June 24th (P/T) | 27 | 42 |
| Sept 2nd (P) | 28 | 57 |
| Sept 9th (T) | 26 | 22 |
| Sept 16th (P/T) | 44 | 30 |
| Sept 30th (P) | 54 | 29 |
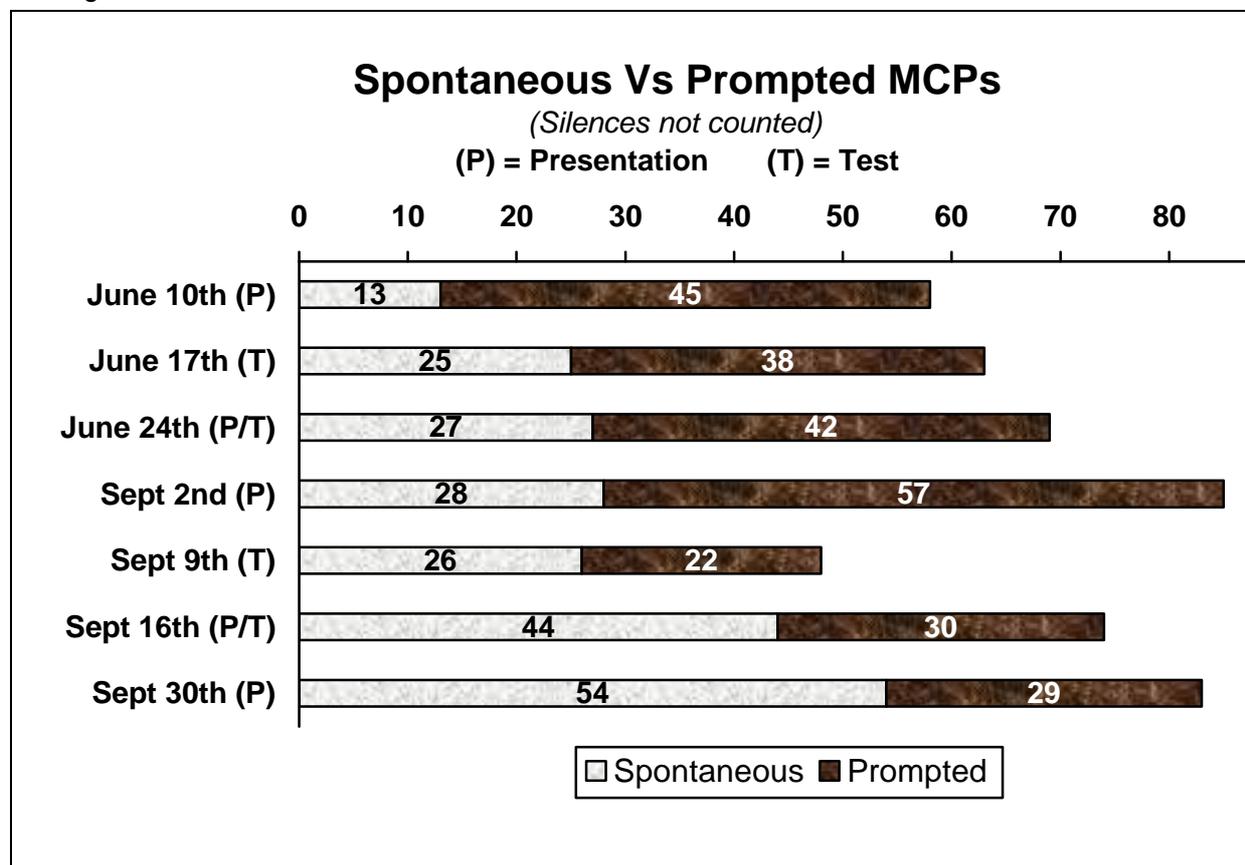
Figure 1 compares the number of spontaneous and prompted MCP's as they occurred over the period from June 10th to September 30th. As can be seen, there is a slight improvement in the ratios between the prompted and unprompted, especially in the last couple of weeks in September. The exception to this trend is the large number of prompted MCP's on September 2nd, which could be easily explained by the return to school after a lengthy summer break.

Figure 2 shows the spread of spontaneous MCP's overall as divided by Class. Again in the last two weeks of September, there was a marked shift towards class A MCP's, which in the main come from the relatively simple "I don't know" responses. This MCP is particularly prone to what could be described as a "ripple" affect, where after one student had successfully responded with an "I don't know", many others readily follow suit.

As has already been noted when examining the recordings, Class C and D responses tend to be preferred to Class E, with Japanese responses outnumbering silences in every week except June

3rd. Also as figure 2 shows, the silent responses themselves seem to come and go, and according to my research diary notes, they were especially noteworthy on hot days. Which shows that is important to remember that there may always be external factors that can affect the success of a class.

Figure 2



**Total Spontaneous MCPs by Class**

| Class | A | B | C | D | E |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| June 10th (P) | 3 | 5 | | 5 | 10 |
| June 17th (T) | 8 | 2 | 4 | 11 | 2 |
| June 24th (P/T) | 12 | 2 | 9 | 4 | 3 |
| Sept 2nd (P) | 13 | 6 | 2 | 7 | 1 |
| Sept 9th (T) | 13 | 1 | 5 | 7 | 9 |
| Sept 16th (P/T) | 26 | 9 | 6 | 3 | 2 |
| Sept 30th (P) | 29 | 12 | 7 | 6 | 7 |

□A □B ■C ⊡D ■E
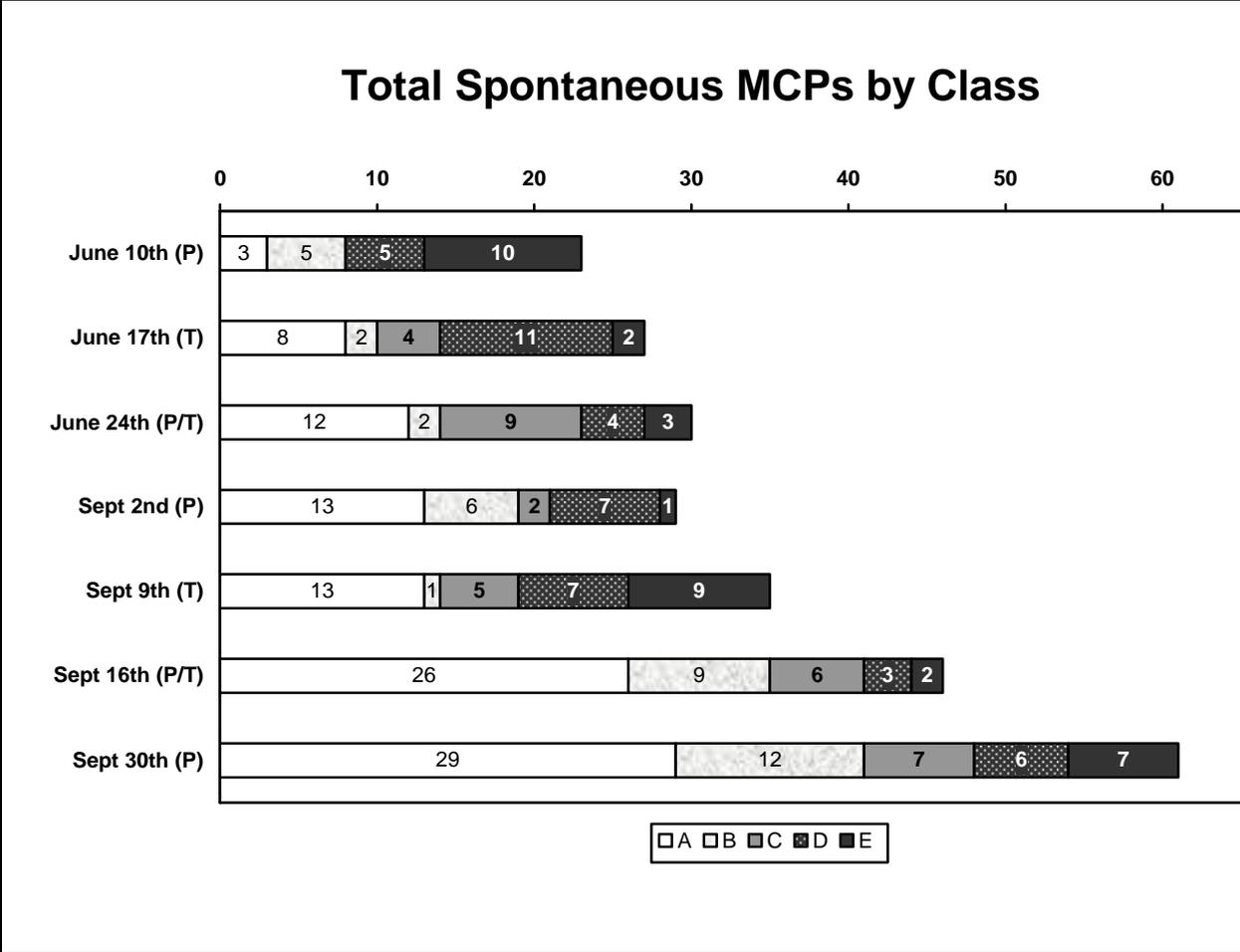
## 7. Conclusion

Naturally many of the time constraints remain, but with the regular oral interviews of every student there has been plenty of teacher-student interaction evenly spread among the class members.

In terms of results, the Progress Sheet has been somewhat successful in maintaining interest, and to date only 2 have been lost. However it is still too early to tell whether there has been significant progress made across all the classes – although the use of MCP's, which are increasingly both spontaneous and accurate, shows encouraging signs.

Anecdotally it would appear that this year's classes are better behaved than previous ones, and it seems that I am spending less time on disciplining the classes, and more time talking with them.

However the IM demands of isolating the teacher from the majority of the class while he or she is conducting the oral interviews means that there are still moments when the students may lose focus on the task at hand. This is especially true after they have completed the tests; this really is "dead time" which to date seems to be inadequately filled by supplementary written exercises. As has been noted, there is evidence of significant code-switching during tasks, and while this may be beneficial in the short-term to encourage more involvement and engagement in the class, its long-term effects on retention and even acquisition have to be wondered. Also the teacher-fronted presentation stage while providing a familiar framework, in which the students can become more relaxed and spontaneous, may breed a lack of engagement among some students as it becomes overly routine.

Finally the IM does seem to have made an impact on classroom culture – there are indicators of increased spontaneity in the classes and certainly less guarded behavior on behalf of the students. It is hoped that these are signs of the classroom moving towards the intimate interactional domain, and it remains to be seen whether the increasing use of MCP's can provide the bridge towards more meaningful communicative outcomes.

Table 3

|  | *Some challenges in an oral communication class* | *The IM response* | *The IM result?* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Time | large class sizes / limited class time / lack of practice opportunities and T-S interaction / problems of continuity and retention | guarantee interaction with every student / each stage reinforces core phrases (MCP's) | many of the constraints remain / less time wasting / considerable T-S interaction |
| Results | no clearly defined course purpose / teaching "the textbook" not the "class" / no tests or grading | progress sheet to measure achievement / students given personal responsibility | 2 progress sheets lost / good response to the oral tests / too early to comment on progress |
| Motivation | various motivation levels / various skill levels / disruptive behaviour / teacher motivation | every-day life lesson topics allow students to talk about themselves / progress sheet gives *goal-orientated* motivation | some students still disruptive during testing stage / frequent code-switching during tasks / occasional lack of engagement during presentation stage |
| Classroom culture | classroom experience / culture shock / the silent response / shy students / *Lehbra's* interactional domains | MCP's to overcome typical blocking situations and the silent response | more spontaneity in the class / increasing use of a limited number of MCP's |

# 8. References

Anderson, F. (1993). The enigma of the college classroom: Nails that don't stick up. In P. Wadden (Ed.). *A handbook for teaching English at Japanese colleges and universities* (pp. 101-110). New York: Oxford.

Azra, J.l., et al. (2005) The Immediate Method. In Bradford-Watts, K., Ikeguchi, C. and Sawanson, M., (Eds) *JALT2004 Conference Proceedings.* Tokyo: Jalt.

Brown, S., Brewer, J., et al. (2004) *Immediate Conversations 1.* Osaka: Alma/Immediate Press

Csikszentmihalyi, M. 1985 Emergent motivation and the evolution of self. In Kleiber, D. A. and Maehr, M. L. (Eds) *Motivation and adulthood. Advances in motivation and achievement, Vol. 4:* 93-120. Greenwich: LAI Press Inc.

Doyon, P. (2000) Shyness in the Japanese EFL Class *The Language Teacher,* 24 (1), 10-11.

Jefferson, G. (1984). Transcription notation. In Atkinson, J. M. & Heritage  J (Eds) (1984) *Structures of Social Action* Cambridge University Press

Lebra, T. (1976). *Japanese patterns of behavior*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.

Marchand, T. (2006) The Immediate Method – immediate results?. Sawanson, M.,et al. (Eds) *JALT2005Conference Proceedings.* Tokyo: Jalt. (in press)

Williams, C. (1994). Situational behavior and the EFL classroom in Japan. *The Language Teacher,* 18 (5), 10-11.

# 9. Appenddix

Notation conventions (adapted from Jefferson 1984)

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| (xxx) | incomprehensible | (..) | pause |
| {   } | commentary, e.g. {laughing} | (…) | pause up to 1 second |
| Wha- | aborted utterance | (1.0) | timed pause |
| : | elongated sound, e.g. fo::r | = | fast connection, latching |
| °oh° | low volume | [   ] | overlapping talk |
| **cram** | emphasized or stressed | . (period) | falling intonation |
| >yup< | high tempo | , (comma) | continuing intonation |
| <I don't know> | low tempo | ? | rising intonation |
| (.) | micropause | *shiranai* | code-switching, i.e. Japanese |