The Role of Grammar Instruction in Japanese EFL context: Towards Communicative Language Teaching

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Announcements:

- The 2019 International Conference on Quality of Life will be held at Kyoto Pharmaceutical University from Sept 28-29 or October 5-6 or 26-27, 2019 (TBA). Further information can be found at http://as4qol.org/icqol/2019/

- The 2018 International Meeting on Quality of Life was held recently. Proceedings as well as photos and other information can be found at http://as4qol.org/icqol/2018/

More information at http://as4qol.org/

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Abstract

This paper aims to investigate the role of English grammar teaching in promoting better communication by students. The first section introduces a model of the different uses of English around the world. In the era of globalization and technology, English is the nearest thing there has ever been to a global language. Typically, English is divided into three categories: English as a native language (ENL), English as a second language (ESL), and English as a foreign language (EFL). Japan is one of the EFL countries that provide almost no opportunities to use English. The second section introduces an overview of the backgrounds of Japanese EFL context. Over the past several decades, the Japanese educational system has been undergoing major changes to meet the demands for English skills required to adapt to a rapidly changing globalized world. However, significant results have not yet obtained since there has still been a strong influence of the exam-based Grammar Translation Method in actual EFL classrooms. The third section mentions that the Japanese government has instituted a series of radical reforms with the 2020 Tokyo Olympics and Paralympic Games just around the corner. Moreover, it provides a brief review of literature on the notion of communicative competence. The final section attempts to gain insights on how 'metalanguage' has the potential to help Japanese EFL learners enhance their cognitive process and their awareness about the target language inside a classroom.

Keywords: grammar teaching, communicative competence, metalanguage, EFL

1. English as a lingua franca in Japan

In an increasingly globalized world, gaining English language skills has been an integral part of being able to meet the challenges of everyday life. Of the several thousand languages used around the globe (the number of lan-
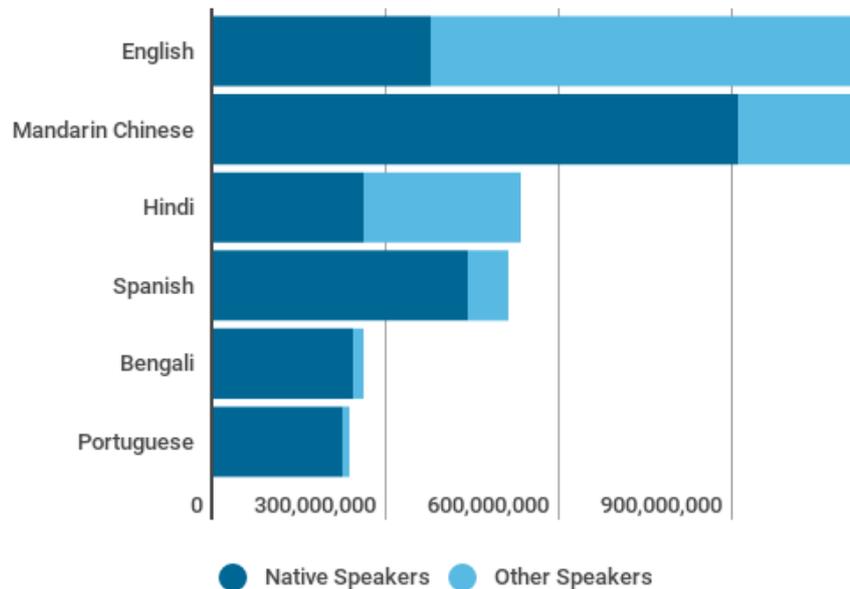
Figure 1. Languages with the most speakers in the Ethnologue: this shows the numbers of total speakers of each language. In terms of native speakers, Mandarin Chinese and Spanish surpass English, but English is the most widely spoken language worldwide in total.

guages is constantly in flux), what made only English rise to the status of a nearly universal language? According to the latest update of the *Ethnologue*,[1] a widely respected encyclopedia of the world's living languages, in terms of the number of native speakers, Mandarin Chinese (around 1,299 million) ranks first, followed by Spanish (around 442 million) and then English (around 378 million). What is the most striking about English is that the number of nonnative speakers of English is much higher than that of native speakers and this is rapidly increasing all over the world. Because of the colonial influence of the British Empire and then the spread of American culture, English has become the most widely spoken language in the world when including nonnative speakers (Figure 1). Concomitantly, its roles and functions in international discourse have also changed, and English now serves as the most used means of communication and interaction internationally among people with different first languages, which has led to the somewhat etymologically incongruous turn of phrase 'English as a lingua franca.' More generally, English has earned its place effectively as a global language largely due to the growing need for a common language functioning on a global level. This has affected large parts of the world, most notably the online world, where no borders exist. As is shown in a 2018 survey by W3Techs[2] (Table 1), English is the most popularly used language online, with about 50 percent of the most visited websites having English-language homepages. With the ever-growing expansion of the Internet, the dominance of English as a global language online has come to significantly impact the role English plays in people's lives.

As this rapid expansion of English is a phenomenon affecting real and online life, it is natural that new varieties of English have emerged. Kachru (1985)[3] has contributed greatly to our understanding of the di-

Table 1: Top 10 languages used on the Internet

|	2017 1 Dec	2018 1 Jan	2018 1 Feb	2018 1 Mar	2018 1 Apr	2018 1 May	2018 1 Jun	2018 1 Jul	2018 1 Aug	2018 1 Sep	2018 1 Oct	2018 1 Nov	2018 1 Dec	2018 23 Dec
English	51.1%	51.2%	51.3%	51.8%	52.0%	52.2%	52.3%	52.5%	52.9%	53.1%	53.4%	53.6%	53.8%	53.8%
Russian	6.7%	6.8%	6.8%	6.6%	6.5%	6.4%	6.3%	6.2%	6.1%	6.1%	6.0%	6.0%	6.0%	6.1%
German	5.6%	5.6%	5.6%	5.8%	6.0%	6.1%	6.2%	6.3%	6.3%	6.3%	6.3%	6.2%	6.1%	6.0%
Spanish	5.1%	5.1%	5.1%	5.1%	5.1%	5.1%	5.1%	5.1%	5.1%	5.0%	4.9%	4.9%	4.9%	4.9%
French	4.1%	4.1%	4.1%	4.1%	4.1%	4.1%	4.1%	4.1%	4.1%	4.2%	4.1%	4.1%	4.0%	4.0%
Japanese	5.6%	5.5%	5.3%	5.0%	4.7%	4.4%	4.2%	4.0%	3.7%	3.6%	3.6%	3.5%	3.5%	3.4%
Portuguese	2.6%	2.6%	2.6%	2.7%	2.7%	2.8%	2.8%	2.9%	2.8%	2.9%	2.9%	2.9%	2.9%	2.9%
Italian	2.4%	2.4%	2.4%	2.4%	2.5%	2.5%	2.5%	2.5%	2.5%	2.4%	2.4%	2.4%	2.4%	2.3%
Persian	1.7%	1.7%	1.7%	1.8%	1.8%	1.8%	1.9%	1.9%	1.9%	2.0%	2.0%	2.0%	2.0%	2.0%
Polish	1.7%	1.7%	1.7%	1.7%	1.8%	1.8%	1.8%	1.8%	1.8%	1.8%	1.8%	1.8%	1.8%	1.8%
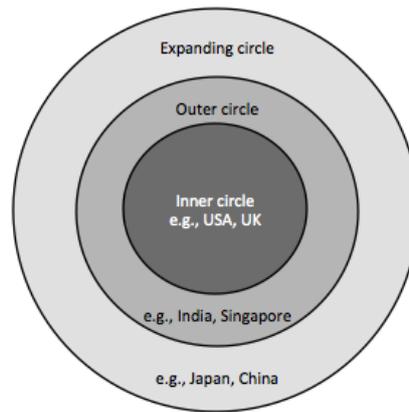
Figure 2. The 'three circles of English' as conceived by Kachru (1985): this model has proven one of the most influential and widely used models to describe the different varieties of English.

versity of world's English by classifying the varieties of English into three circles of English: the Inner Circle, the Outer Circle, and the Expanding Circle, as shown in Figure 2. He states that these circles show "the type of spread, the patterns of acquisition and the functional domains in which English is used across cultures and languages" (p.12). The English of the Inner Circle is typically that of native speakers and in this context it is called English as a native language (ENL). The Outer Circle represents nations colonized by Britain and the United States where English is widely learned and seen as English as a second language (ESL), exemplified by India. The Expanding Circle includes nations where English is widely used as a means of international communication but has no historical and governmental links with their mother tongues, and where English is being learned as a foreign language (EFL). Here, two different approaches towards English learning or teaching should be distinguished: an ESL classroom and an EFL classroom. The former is used in the context of teaching English to multilingual or multiracial groups in a country where English is the official or the dominant language. On the other hand, the latter is used in the context of teaching English to (generally) monolingual groups whose members share the same non-English language culture. Japan is classified as an Expanding Circle country where we learn English as a foreign language, or an additional language.

At present, the educational system in Japan is based on a so-called '6-3-3-4 system' (6 years of elementary school, 3 years of junior high school, 3 years of high school, and 4 years of university), and English education officially starts in the first year of junior high school at the age of 12-13. Being a compulsory part of the curriculum, English has become the most frequent foreign language Japanese EFL learners have been exposed to inside a classroom. Outside the classroom, there is also extensive evidence that English has cemented its status as a lingua franca, and that the demand for obtaining English skills has become stronger in every corner of the country. The English Language School industry is without a doubt huge; it is quite easy to encounter advertisements for English conversation classes on public transportation or on TV. In bookstores, a wide variety of books on how to acquire English skills are available. Like other countries, the Internet plays an important role in our daily lives and has great potential to become a greater part of educational life. Above all, the frequent use of the SNS (i.e., social networking services), where interaction with people in English globally is easily made possible, greatly encourages more and more Japanese people to become familiar with the most widely used language. Many online-related English words (e.g., *upload*, *tweet*, and *post*) have been added to Japanese vocabulary as they are and we come to use such English-origin loan words without considering them out of place. Thus, it is no exaggeration to say that English is the most influential and widespread foreign language for Japanese people outside the classroom as well as inside the classroom. However, for many Japanese people, English is just a subject taught in class and seen as an optional skill to offer a potential path to better education and better career. The biggest reason for this is that Japanese language environment almost completely eliminates the need to communicate in English. In other words, a Japanese EFL context means being much less able to be exposed to the target language outside the classroom. Thus, the classroom environment is the critical area for the development of sufficient EFL proficiency in Japan.

2. Backgrounds of Japanese EFL students

Figure 3[4] lists one index of English general proficiency, the 2018 EF English Proficiency Index (EPI), which aims at ranking countries by the average level of English language skills among those adults who took the EF test. The EF EPI was devised in response to the demand for a standardized measurement of English proficiency across countries. Japan is placed 49th among the 88 countries and regions listed and is ranked 11th among Asian countries. The general level of English proficiency of the Japanese people is categorized as low when compared to others internationally despite the fact that Japanese are required to study English for many years.

English proficiency basically includes all four skills of reading, listening, speaking, and writing; the knowledge of vocabulary and grammar rules, which forms the backbone of any language, lies at its basis. For the purpose of accomplishing complete communication, we are required to read, listen, speak, and write well while choosing appropriate vocabulary and using correct grammatical forms. In particular, when people grieve over their limited language ability, they generally mean productive skills (i.e., speaking and writing), not receptive skills (i.e., reading and listening). Clearly, both output abilities are the weakest ones for most Japanese. Therein lies a troublesome question that has been asked many times: why do Japanese people find it rather hard to communicate in even basic English? Actually, whether in spoken or written form, most Japanese struggle with using everyday English phrases (e.g., how to introduce oneself and how to give directions), let alone expressing their thoughts or opinions on demanding or challenging topics (e.g., climate change, agricultural production, etc.). With a population of an estimated 120 million, there are only a small number of Japanese who have a proficient or strong command of English.

The process of learning is complicated and multifaceted, and therefore there are many factors that might have a significant influence on language learning (e.g., aptitude, intelligence, personality, or learning style). It would be impossible to satisfactorily list all the reasons for this in one place. Given the tremendous impact of the classroom environment on fostering EFL learners' abilities, Japanese people's

Global Ranking of Countries and Regions

	Very high		High		Moderate		Low		Very low
01	Sweden	13	Poland	28	India	45	Georgia	66	Iran
02	Netherlands	14	Philippines	29	Nigeria	46	Chile	67	Morocco
03	Singapore	15	Switzerland	30	Hong Kong, China	47	China	68	Tunisia
04	Norway	16	Romania	31	South Korea	48	Taiwan	69	Honduras
05	Denmark	17	Croatia	32	Spain	49	Japan	70	El Salvador
06	South Africa	18	Serbia	33	Lebanon	50	Pakistan	71	U.A.E.
07	Luxembourg	19	Portugal	34	Italy	51	Indonesia	72	Nicaragua
08	Finland	20	Czech Republic	35	France	52	Albania	73	Turkey
09	Slovenia	21	Hungary	36	Costa Rica	53	Brazil	74	Jordan
10	Germany	22	Malaysia	37	Dominican Republic	54	Ethiopia	75	Venezuela
11	Belgium	23	Greece			55	Guatemala	76	Syria
12	Austria	24	Slovakia	38	Belarus	56	Panama	77	Azerbaijan
		25	Bulgaria	39	Senegal	57	Mexico	78	Kuwait
		26	Lithuania	40	Uruguay	58	Sri Lanka	79	Oman
		27	Argentina	41	Vietnam	59	Peru	80	Kazakhstan
				42	Russia	60	Colombia	81	Algeria
				43	Ukraine	61	Bolivia	82	Myanmar
				44	Macau, China	62	Egypt	83	Saudi Arabia
						63	Bangladesh	84	Afghanistan
						64	Thailand	85	Cambodia
						65	Ecuador	86	Uzbekistan
								87	Iraq
								88	Libya

Figure 3. The world's largest ranking of countries and regions by English skills: Sweden ranks first for English skills. Overall, Europe shows remarkable English proficiency.

low level of English output proficiency could possibly be blamed on the way English is taught and learned at schools to begin with. In fact, Japanese English language teaching has been under severe criticism for shortages of its practicality and efficiency with little or no emphasis on the communicative aspects of the target language. Until recent years, Japanese EFL curriculum had long been dominated by the strong influence of the Grammar Translation Method, which is the classical way of teaching. Even during present phase of shifting towards communicative language instruction, this method is still applied in actual EFL classes. It has several characteristic traits: memorization of vast amounts of vocabulary; learning complex grammatical rules; and word-for-word translation back and forth between English (the target language, L2) and Japanese (mother tongue, L1). Students mostly spend a huge amount of time on practice based on rote learning. Consequently, the method tends to create a teacher-centered classroom with students serving as passive and receptive listeners.

Certainly, some Japanese learners of English have successfully passed through this teaching practice, and not all classes based on this method have ended up in failure. Nevertheless, the conventional Grammar Translation Method has easily earned a negative reputation because of too much emphasis on developing an unbalanced emphasis on certain English skills (i.e., reading skill and grammar for the most part) and on avoiding grammatical mistakes (i.e., accuracy-based). Kikuchi (2006)[5] pointed out that this might mainly be the result of the examination-driven nature of the EFL education system in Japan. University entrance examinations play a pivotal role in discussions of English language education since they are the eventual goal of 12-year formal and supplementary education. Certainly one of the biggest reasons Japanese students study English is to ultimately pass university entrance examinations, and this may possibly outweigh other reasons. Assessments of receptive skills are highly valued and assessments of productive skills are much more restricted in current university English entrance examinations in Japan. As English skills are tested in the form of an entrance examination, English education at the secondary level has almost entirely been targeted to meet students' demands for passing strict and grammar-focused university entrance examinations. Teachers and instructors in Japanese EFL classrooms devote themselves to engaging students in memorizing complex English grammar rules and difficult vocabulary for such exams.

This situation also applies to Japanese university students with at least six years of formally secondary school education learning English based on this method. After entering university, most Japanese university students except those who are deeply interested in English tend to be much less motivated to study English at university since their goal of passing the entrance examinations has been achieved, and they are now focused on setting and achieving goals related to their dream future; that is, if they do start to learn English it is again for a test again, such as for certification to improve their career opportunities. At present, it can be said that the most popular English test for Japanese university students who hope to demonstrate their English proficiency is the TOEIC (The Test of English for International Communication) due largely to its focus on business English essential for corporate advancement. The Institute for International Business Communication (IIBC), which administers TOEIC test, announced the number of examinees taking TOEIC in 2017 as totaling 2,703,000, as detailed in Table 2.[6] Actually, there are three forms of the test (i.e., the TOEIC L&R, the TOEIC S&W, and the TOEIC Bridge), and the standard form is the TOEIC L&R, which accounts for about 90 percent of all tests administered. In this paper, TOEIC refers to the TOEIC L&R. Introduced in 1979, TOEIC is composed of multiple-choice questions and is only designed to assess aspects of reading comprehension and listening comprehension. Although ETS (1986)[7] showed that TOEIC scores are relatively closely related with other English tests such as TOEFL (the Test of English as a Foreign Language), which measures English proficiency integrating the four English skills, there are a number of criticisms of the test with regard to whether or not it is valid to measure English general proficiency by only assessing the degree of receptive skills. According to a 2013 survey[8] conducted by IIBC, approximately 70 percent of public companies and corporations were taking their applicants scores into considerations at the time of recruiting and hiring, and the number of test

Table 2: The number of examinees for each test of TOEIC in 2017

TOEIC Listening & Reading Test	TOEIC Speaking & Writing Test	TOEIC Bridge Test
2,481,000	38,000	184,000

takers has been steadily increasing. Not only are job applicants and employees frequently asked to meet certain target TOEIC scores before and after joining a company, but TOEIC scores also have come into wide use in educational institutions including universities when evaluating student proficiency levels. Whatever views people may have about the test, studying English for TOEIC has become an essential part of their language learning in school life; therefore, university students continue to stick to the traditional educational practices so that they can achieve success in traditional multiple-choice language examinations designed for accuracy. Subsequently, this kind of learning style might discourage them from enhancing their true English proficiency and communicative competence for survival in a competitive global world.

3. Towards communicative approaches

Since the 1990s, in response to extensive criticism for lack of productive English practice in the exam-driven English educational system, Japan's Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT) has been endeavoring to set criteria for English learning in Japan that would increase Communicative Language Teaching in the EFL classroom. In 1999, MEXT first started to emphasize fostering students' communicative competence in English in a Course of Study, marking a significant shift from a conventional grammar-focused teaching in favor of a new communicative teaching (e.g., Shimizu, 2010; Tada, 2016).[9, 10] In 2002, MEXT announced a report entitled *Developing a Strategic Plan to Cultivate "Japanese With English Abilities"* (i.e., the Strategic Plan),[11] maintaining the importance of children acquiring English communication skills. The following year, as part of a 5-year plan to reform the foreign language education system, it released a document called *Regarding the Establishment of an Action Plan to Cultivate "Japanese with English Abilities"* (i.e., the Action Plan)[12] which stated that instruction should emphasize acquisition of basic and practical communication skills enabling children to conduct daily conversation in English. Amid growing calls for earlier English education, in 2011 MEXT decided to introduce English Activities in Japan for fifth and sixth grade students.[13] In line with this policy, not only elementary schools but also junior high schools and high schools were experiencing the English educational reforms with a view to dealing with globalization. MEXT (2009)[14] issued a Course of Study which argued that English classes at the upper secondary school level should be basically conducted through English in order for students to have more opportunities to be exposed to English in the classroom. At each stage of English language learning from elementary school to university, more concrete measures related to English education were taken to meet needs where communication was required. In order to foster integration of the four skills for better communication, MEXT had long insisted that classes should be shifted from a teacher-centric to a student-centric approach. In accordance with the reforms, Japanese EFL instructors and students have been striving to develop the kinds of communicative classrooms which meet MEXT's academic requirements, but many trials have yet to demonstrate significant positive results and many challenges still remains for English language education in Japan: for example, insufficient exposure to English inside and outside the classroom; lack of teacher training; and the ongoing deep-rooted influence of test-based classes.

With less than two years to go before the start of the 2020 Tokyo Olympics and Paralympic Games, MEXT has finally started getting serious about English education in Japan; a series of radical education reforms throughout elementary, junior high, and high schools have been proposed by MEXT (2014a)[15] so that students can develop English skills required to communicate as global citizens. Of great significance are the reforms of earlier national education and university entrance examinations. Previous efforts to begin scholastic English education early have been moved even earlier Starting in 2020, all elementary schools are supposed to introduce compulsory English lessons for fifth and sixth graders. Accordingly, third and fourth graders are required to take part in English Activities. Also, a new standardized university admission exam system is to be first introduced in the 2020 academic year and fully incorporated in 2024 after a transition period. The new examination will assess all four abilities of test takers comprehensively. Under the proposed policy for administering the new exam, students are allowed to utilize privately run English tests such as TOEFL and EIKEN (the Test for Practical English Proficiency). It is the Japanese government's long-cherished hope that Japanese EFL teachers and students will focus more on productive skills and this move will help improve the quality of education based on communicative competence. In the wake of a series of the changes, however, many people concerned have become upset and perplexed about the new complexity of the system. One possible reason behind this might be that the

concept of communication espoused by MEXT for communicative teaching is so new and thereby may require particular effort to understand, especially for those immersed or used to traditional approaches, so that there had been some degree of controversy and confusion regarding how communicative teaching should be carried out in Japanese EFL classrooms.

Here it is important to clearly outline what 'communicative competence' means and then offer possible ways to achieve Communicative Language Teaching. It wasn't until in 1966[16] that Dell Hymes, one of the most renowned figures in linguistic anthropology and sociolinguistics, coined a term 'communicative competence.' As opposed to Noam Chomsky's (1965)[17] idealized notion of 'linguistic competence,' Hymes (1972)[18] placed more importance on competency for actual language usage, arguing that linguistic competence alone is not capable of generating effective communication and that a language user needs to have an understanding of language as it is really used in authentic and concrete situations, which is the concept of communicative competence. He mentioned that "a normal child acquires knowledge of sentences not only as grammatical, but also as appropriate and that he or she acquires competence as to when to speak, when not, and as to what to talk about with whom, when, where, in what manner" (p.277). Following this claim, Canale and Swain (1980)[19] and Canale (1983)[20] defined communicative competence in terms of four components as follows:

(a) <u>Grammatical competence</u> refers to the ability to have the knowledge about language code (e.g., vocabulary, pronunciation, and linguistic semantics) and create grammatically correct utterances.

(b) <u>Sociolinguistic competence</u> refers to the ability to adjust one's speech to fit the situation, or sociocultural rules of use (e.g., how to use language appropriately in a given situation) and produce sociolinguistically appropriate utterances.

(c) <u>Strategic competence</u> refers to the ability to use communication strategies skillfully when communication problems or breakdowns arise (e.g., paraphrasing and asking).

(d) <u>Discourse competence</u> refers to the ability to combine ideas and produce coherent and cohesive utterances.

The notion of communicative competence has since become a central and influential one basically in all areas of applied linguistics. In light of foreign language teaching, in particular, these four components of communicative competence should each be highly respected; however, Japanese EFL teachers and instructors have traditionally focused on grammatical competence. Under the current school system, there are two possible ways to overcome the educational obstacles on the path to better communication. One way is that the policy changes should be properly directed and targeted to improve the quality of education by taking other factors (i.e., sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competencies) into consideration; Ultimately, our challenge we should be to develop a holistic approach English instruction, but as Torikai (2017)[21] has argued, it would probably take a while before the four domains of communicative competence can be central to good education practice. The other way seems feasible relatively soon; it is to look more closely into the specific details of grammatical competence for ways overcome the educational obstacles. We should keep in mind is that 'grammar' is not opposed to communication in the framework of communicative competence since grammatical competence is one of the four significant factors of establishing better communication; therefore, a further look at the potential effects of grammar on communication competence is warranted.

4. The potential role of grammar teaching

The concept of grammar is prevalent throughout the Japanese EFL environment, and the main reason proposed for grammar education is that it is useful for the improvement of reading, writing, listening and speaking. Nevertheless, it is often misconceived as a boring and frustrating subject by most Japanese EFL students; this is because grammar teaching is easily associated with teacher-oriented classrooms and tiresome worksheets, which are a reflection of the Grammar Translation Method. The exam-based techniques often used in grammar teaching requires students to memorize a hugely complicated system of grammatical rules and exceptions, and it is extremely easy to imagine that most students cannot help becoming passive participants in class and may feel frustrated and demotivated by tedious and repetitive tasks (e.g., Falout & Falout, 2005; Falout et al, 2009).[22,23] Certainly, it can significantly deprive them of

motivation and autonomy, but it is imperative to reiterate here that communicative competence should include grammatical competence. It is not grammar *per se* that is to be blamed, but the way it is dealt with in classes. Effective grammar teaching is a matter that demands careful consideration.

In learning a foreign language, it is noteworthy to obtain the knowledge of the target language as well as the ability to understand and express oneself in the language, especially in an EFL context suh as the one in Japan. Generally speaking, the process of the second language (L2) learning is completely different from that of first language (L1) learning. Children are directly acquiring knowledge about the world while indirectly acquiring their L1 language. L2 refers to learning a nonnative language in that nonnative environment. Although the range of L2 learners' learning environments is extremely diverse, a typical Japanese EFL learner starts to learn L2 when entering junior high school, and the L2 learner generally has a limited opportunities in their environment for developing L2 proficiency. In other words, achievement of L2 proficiency requires additional resources for explicit learning: Japanese EFL learners must make the most advantage of their direct L2 knowledge to better understand the target language. What is called 'metalanguage' has a possibility of serving this an important function. 'Metalanguage' is a technical term used in the context of learning and teaching, defined as "declarative knowledge that can be brought into awareness and that is potentially available for verbal report" (Anderson, 2005, p.427).[24] More generally, 'metalanguage' is the language teachers and learners use to describe and talk about the English language, and metalinguistic knowledge is a form of explicit knowledge.

Whether opportunities for learning L2 learners should be explicit or implicit is highly controversial in the discussions of grammar teaching, but Hu (2010)[25] emphasized that there are a large number of empirical studies that have shown a strong connection between L2 learners' metalinguistic knowledge and their L2 proficiency. Fujiwara (2015a)[26] examined the effects of explicit knowledge on Japanese university students' understanding of dative alternation in English. In a quasi-experimental research design, higher-intermediate proficiency EFL students from two linguistic homogeneous classes in a university were placed in an experimental group and control group before being evaluated via the same grammar judgment test. Explicit instruction based on Cognitive Linguistics (CLI) was used with the experimental group. In the meantime, the control group received the traditional instruction based on rote learning. Results indicated a significant difference in their L2 proficiency and motivation to learn English grammar: the CLI teaching instruction encouraged the entrenchment of participants' grammatical knowledge regarding dative alternation and enhanced their motivation to further learn English grammar. Subsequently, Fujiwara (2016b)[27] conducted a similar experiment on Japanese university students with lower-intermediate English proficiency which suggested that an advantage of using explicit knowledge in grammar instruction was appreciated by students. Prior to that, however, content with explicit instruction was generally altered by making metalinguistic material easier so that lower-intermediate proficiency EFL students could understand dative alternation better due to their low proficiency because preliminary investigations had revealed that metalinguistic knowledge had no positive effects on lower-intermediate proficiency learners' performance (Matsumoto et al, 2015).[28]

In the same vein, Tokunaga (2014)[29] argued that very simple 'metalanguage' (e.g., noun and adverb) was not recognized by many low to intermediate proficiency Japanese university students. Furthermore, Iida (2014)[30] pointed out that L1 skills are necessary for the development of L2 skills, and emphasized that it would be difficult to use L2 effectively without sufficient knowledge of L1. To gain a better understanding of what and how much 'metalanguage' works effectively and efficiently in grammar instruction, the relationships between 'metalanguage', L2 proficiency, and L1 skills need further consideration and sophistication.

Nevertheless, metalinguistic knowledge appears to have some pedagogical necessity for effective grammar teaching. A clearer view of how L2 proficiency is given in Gass (2013)[31] who viewed the process of L2 acquisition as having six levels in the learner's conversion of input to output. Between or within these levels, there can be a number of factors which affect language learners' learning process, but Figure 4 shows a simplified model of his theory. First of all, learners need massive amounts of input in the target language in the form of listening and
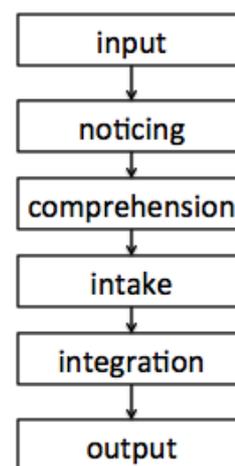
Figure 4. A cognitive model of second language acquisition: this model is a summary of the model in Gass (2013).

reading. Not all input is automatically stored in students' memory: there is a lot of input they do not notice unless they pay particular attention. Noticing serves an important role in storing perceived information in short-term memory. The process of noticing the form of the target language helps promote comprehension through means such as rephrasing, repeating, and reorganizing. As a subset of total input, he called what learners have internalized after processing intake. Corder (1967)[32] defined the intake as follows: "the simple fact of presenting a certain linguistic form to a learner in the classroom does not necessarily qualify it for the status of input, for the reason that input is "what goes in" not what is *available* for going in, and we may reasonably suppose that it is the learner who controls this input, or more properly his intake" (p. 165). At the final level to output, integration plays a crucial role in storing perceived information in long-term memory, which will helps learners adapt gradually to an effective automatic processing of L2. Later, learners will be able to utilize the knowledge as output.

Noticing linguistic elements in the target language is considered to be an important cognitive process by which learners convert input into output for second language acquisition. No matter how much input they are exposed to, input alone is not enough; therefore Schmidt (2001)[33] claimed that "second language acquisition is driven by what learners pay conscious attention to and notice in the target language input and what they understand the significance of the noticed input to be" (p.26). Noticing can be sometimes paraphrased into the concept of consciousness-raising in that consciousness-raising also results from the drawing of learners' attention to features of the target language. Whatever people may call it, it is especially necessary to pay attention to and be aware of features of the target language if learners are to use correct forms appropriately. In order to gain attention, fuel their motivation and autonomy, and trigger high L2 proficiency, it is 'metalanguage' that first facilitates learners' cognitive process by stimulating them to "notice" since they can also then reflect on their own target language. As mentioned above, after long-term exposure to the Grammar Translation Method, Japanese EFL learners have become negative about the way grammar is taught in Japanese schools. Most of them are demotivated and have insufficient L2 proficiency in English language learning. Even though there seems to be no clear single direct path to achievement of high L2 proficiency, there are several steps in cognitive model of second language acquisition. Once the first step of noticing is activated, this could lead to the next step in comprehension. Also, it is highly anticipated that implementing consciousness-raising as part of teaching can keep students motivated, encourage the development and use of student-active teaching activities, and lead students to think that English is more than a subject required to pass a test but rather a skill required for better communication. Although further studies are needed in order to examine what activities can be consciousness-raising, creative output activities (e.g., speaking tasks and writing tasks) are highly recommended so as to further stimulate noticing. As Swain (1995)[34] has argued, the activity of producing target language is a way EFL learners become aware of and understand their linguistic problems, and it is extremely important to recognize the gap between what we want to say and what we can say, which yields meaningful noticing.

5. References

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