

Addressing Specific Needs: The Evolution of *Easy Nursing English*

特定の必要性に答えるために生まれた産物、「看単！」

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Summary

The specific needs of students is a primary concern of language teachers. The English for Specific Purposes (ESP) field emerged as language teachers and researchers began to realize that general English education may be insufficient in preparing students for their futures in various disciplines. In this paper we describe the process in which we prepared a nursing English vocabulary workbook, grounded in ESP and vocabulary methodology as well as an awareness of the specific needs of nurses in Japan. It is hoped that such a workbook will serve as a model to instructors of students in other disciplines, who hope to address students' needs by providing a balance of discipline specific and general English tasks.

Background

Addressing learners' specific needs is a primary concern of language instructors (Brown, 1994). This concern led to the development of the English for Specific Purposes (ESP) field, after instructors recognized that general English skills may not adequately prepare certain students for tasks that they will encounter in their careers (for an overview of ESP goals, see Widdowson, 1998 and Hyland, 2002). For example, scanning medical journal articles for target information is a skill that would serve medical students well.

A problem, however, is that English teachers typically lack the disciplinary knowledge of students in specific fields, and may have a superficial knowledge of the tasks they assign to students (Spack, 1988). This can cause a situation in which the teacher may potentially do more harm than good (Swales, 1990: 72-73). One solution is for English teachers to work with disciplinary experts, planning courses together or engaging in team-teaching (for example, Gimenez, 2008, and Russell, 1994). However, such an arrangement requires much time and resources, and may not be possible in many teaching contexts. Thus, teachers are often on their own to find ways to add a specific flavor to a general English course.

In this paper, we describe the process by which vocabulary sheets created by the authors for students in the Nursing English course at Kagawa University developed into a vocabulary workbook (Willey, McCrohan & Shibata, 2009). The applications of such a book design for general English courses will then be discussed.

Perceived needs

Nursing English was the title of a general education course offered for third year nursing students at the Faculty of Medicine campus. The purpose of this course was to help students become aware of nursing issues through English readings.

One of the authors (Willey) began teaching this course in the spring of 2005. He soon found that students lacked a basic knowledge of medical and nursing vocabulary. Many students did not know the names of common illnesses, body parts, or specific hospital wards. The textbook did not focus on developing basic vocabulary, and Willey began drafting word lists with English terms and Japanese equivalents, each list centering on a specific theme (such as illnesses and hospital equipment). These word lists were inspired by and modeled after lists produced by Shibata for medical students' English classes, and contained about 20 words per list. They were used as weekly quizzes by both Willey and Shibata in their classes. It was thought that these quizzes helped students to build knowledge of basic yet essential English terms. Students also seemed to appreciate the solidity that these quizzes gave the course.

In 2006, the reading-oriented textbook used in the previous year fell out of print, and a more user-friendly, four-skills-based nursing English textbook was employed. This book did introduce basic nursing English vocabulary, but the arrangement in the textbook was not conducive to review and quizzing. Willey and Shibata continued to use supplementary word lists centering on specific themes. Through consultation with medical doctors and nursing instructors these lists were modified and expanded upon.

When approximately 20 word lists had been produced, Willey and Shibata agreed that the lists could be fashioned into a workbook to be used as a supplementary text or for self-study purposes. Shibata contacted Nanzando, a reputed publisher of medical English texts, and negotiations began in early 2007. Shortly thereafter McCrohan joined the group of authors.

Project beginnings

Shibata proposed a vocabulary workbook with one word list per chapter, including quiz pages with perforated edges that could be removed. The proposed workbook was intended to serve as a supplementary text for a nursing English or general English course taken by nursing students, or as a self-study book for practicing nurses. However, Nanzando editors felt that designing a book with detachable pages would be difficult, and as an alternative suggested a vocabulary workbook similar to the one we had proposed, including exercises. The editors hoped that the proposed text would be usable as a supplementary and self-study book, as well as the main textbook of a course. Exercises and additional tasks were thus deemed necessary.

After the project was formally approved, Professor Keiko Kishi Imai, one of Japan's most distinguished nursing researchers and educators, was contacted by Shibata. Professor Kishi agreed to write the prologue and provide professional advice. We realized that at least one year would be required to complete the project, allowing time to consult with nursing professionals to ensure accuracy.

We settled on the title *Kantan*, meaning “easy;” the kanji for this title (看单) was also a form of wordplay, suggesting “nursing words.” Easy Nursing English was made the subtitle. We wanted the exercises in the workbook to be simple and easy, their purpose being primarily to allow students to see words and expressions used in context, so that they would have more than a “dictionary” understanding of these terms.

Our responsibilities were allotted in the following manner: Willey, as first author, communicated with Nanzando and designed the word lists, quiz pages, and a dialogue for each chapter; McCrohan designed all exercises; Shibata worked with practicing nurses and medical doctors from the Kagawa University hospital to check all Japanese terminology, and designed the Teacher’s Manual, including an answer key and translations of all exercises.

Chapter layout

Basic medical terms (such as names of specific hospital wards and anatomical terms) were grouped in the first half of the book. Communicative expressions useful in nurse-to-patient interaction (such as instructions and expressions of encouragement) were placed in the second half. A total of 18 chapters were planned. University English courses typically contain 15 class meetings per semester, and it was felt that the three extra chapters would allow the instructor to select chapters most relevant to students. We thought that instructors should be able to move through the book as they pleased, and did not need to proceed in a linear chapter-by-chapter fashion.

Vocabulary lists

The vocabulary lists were meant to form the core of the book, and selecting, arranging, and defining these words and expressions consumed the most time. Here we also received the most help from nursing and medical professionals. Our intent was to include basic medical terminology and phrases that would be useful in helping nurses to communicate with foreign patients. As much as possible, we tried to include words that lay people would understand. It was also thought that focusing on basic medical and nursing terms and phrases would make the workbook accessible to instructors without backgrounds in nursing.

In the word list for each chapter all *kanji* in Japanese equivalents included the *hiragana* pronunciation above them, so that native English speakers—as well as native Japanese teachers without nursing backgrounds—would be able to pronounce them. Failure to include these pronunciations, we believe, makes many nursing and medical English textbooks inaccessible to English teachers, as well as to students, who are just learning these terms themselves and also may not know their pronunciations.

Finally, it was decided that North American English usages would be used, mainly because Japanese students are more familiar with them. This would also prevent the book from becoming too cluttered by including both British and North American usages and spellings (for example, gynaecologist (Br) / gynecologist (Am)).

Exercises

The first page of each chapter presents a maximum of 25 new words and phrases with Japanese equivalents. On the following pages, three Exercise tasks help students to understand and remember the target vocabulary. Throughout the book we have tried to present sentences in the exercises in context, highlight common collocations and introduce fixed or almost fixed expressions. This is in line with research regarding memorization and retention of lexical items (Lewis, 1993, 1997).

Exercise 1

In each chapter, Exercise 1 gives 10 English words or phrases, with their Japanese equivalents out of sequence. Students are asked to match the English word/phrase with its Japanese equivalent on the left. This simple exercise gives students the chance to check if they have memorized the target vocabulary.

Exercises 2 and 3

The second and third exercises vary in design but generally show a progression from easy to slightly more difficult. Since the workbook is divided into 5 sections, we tried to keep a uniform style for Exercises 2 and 3 within each section.

In Section 1 (Basic medical words), Exercise 2 consists of ten contextualized sentences with 2 vocabulary items from the chapter included in each sentence. However, only one vocabulary item is correct and students are asked to choose the correct one. Care was taken to make sure these sentences were as natural/ as possible in a Japanese context. One flaw, we have found, in many Nursing English textbooks produced in Japan is that the dialogues sound as though they would never occur in a Japanese hospital context. A goal in producing this workbook was not to help foreign patients feel as though they are in their home countries while visiting the hospital, but to enable nurses to speak to these foreign patients as efficiently as they would speak to other Japanese patients.

In Section 2 (Anatomical Words) and Section 3 (Illnesses and Emergencies) the vocabulary presented consists of technical words that may be new to students. Therefore, rather than focusing on their understanding of the vocabulary as in the first section, we focused on the basic spelling, form and class of words. The exercise took the form of unscrambling words, filling in missing letters or filling in simple tables. These exercises enable students to review the spelling and translation of the words, aiding in memorization.

In Sections 4 and 5, where the focus changed from individual vocabulary items to full sentences and questions, Exercise 2 also changed from focusing on spelling/word forms to sentence construction. Typically, students were given one half of a sentence or question and asked to find the connection phrase. Students were then asked to rewrite the complete sentence. This type of exercise had a dual purpose: to check students' understanding of the sentences as well as to aid in memorization.

Throughout the book, Exercise 3 is more challenging than Exercises 1 and 2, and was designed to check students' understanding of vocabulary in context. Generally, in the first part of the book (Sections

1-3), students were given ten sentences with words missing. The missing words could be found in a box underneath the exercise, which also included a few “dummy” words. In Sections 4 and 5, which focus on communication phrases, Exercise 3 took the form of question/response or statement/response dialogues. Students are expected to read the sentences or question given and, using hints in the question or statement, write a suitable reply. Occasionally the students are given the patient’s reply and they then must write the question the nurse asked. Students may do this exercise individually or in pairs, with each student taking turns to read and answer. Even if students complete this as an individual written exercise, students may then be asked to practice pronouncing the sentences aloud, since proper production of these phrases is an essential part of learning them.

Dialogues

At the end of each chapter, a dialogue between a Japanese nurse and a foreign patient was included. This dialogue was intended to show target vocabulary in context, as well as provide instructors with a reading exercise with communicative applications—students could be instructed to read the dialogue aloud with partners, and memorize and perform parts of the dialogue in groups or before the class.

Like the sentences in the exercises, the dialogue was intended to capture, as much as possible, plausible patient-nurse interaction in Japan. Reference books in Japanese focusing on interaction with and the common problems of foreign patients were first consulted (Kobayashi, 2002, 2006). Dealing with foreign patients without health insurance cards, for instance, is one common problem. Thus, in one of our dialogues, a man who has just begun a new job arrives without his health insurance card; in another, a nurse must deal politely with an upset patient, who demands that her daughter be given priority. In two others, nurses must explain illnesses or conditions that were insufficiently explained by the doctor—a situation that the authors have experienced on several occasions.

Readers may also notice that Western patients are distinctly in the minority. This was an intentional move. Many nursing English textbooks produced in Japan are filled with patients with stereotypical Anglo-Saxon names, like “John Smith” and “Mary Watson.” However, this predominance of Western patients connotes the cultural imperialism that has been associated with the spread of English (Pennycook, 1994). Moreover, it does not mesh with reality. The vast majority of foreigners residing in Japan come from China, Korea, Brazil, the Philippines, and Peru (in that order); only about two percent of all foreigners living in Japan come from the United States (Japan Association for International Health, 1998). In both the exercises and dialogues we thus attempted to present a diversity of patients, from countries where English is not spoken as a first language, such as China, Bangladesh, and Uganda, as well as from European and English speaking countries. We hope to dispel the assumption in the minds of many Japanese students that communication in English means communication with a native English speaker. Interactions in English with a non-native speaker are, in reality, more likely.

Extension task

In order for the book to be able to stand alone as a primary textbook, if required, an extension task was added at the end of the book. After finishing a chapter, instructors can have students, working in pairs, complete this extension task in class. The task asks students to write their own short dialogues using vocabulary or expressions in a target chapter. Students then practice speaking their dialogue, and perform in groups or in front of the class. Such a task would allow instructors to encourage students to practice language-related skills, such as intonation and gesturing, which may form core goals of the class syllabus. Many instructors, moreover, may appreciate the inclusion of a task that allows for collaboration and language production. However, if the workbook is used primarily as a supplementary text this extension task need not be used.

Discussion

Through this project we have gained an appreciation of how much time and effort is involved in designing an ESP textbook. Our lack of knowledge of the nursing field compelled us to work closely with several nursing and medical professionals, and their suggestions and guidance have given the book authenticity. Having surveyed many nursing and medical English textbooks produced in Japan, we have found that many books have a hastily-prepared quality, filled with mistakes and unnatural English and Japanese expressions.

However, although our workbook clearly has an ESP function, we believe that it can be used as a workbook even in a general English course for nursing students. The book has been designed so that language teachers without nursing training can use it in classes without having to spend much extra preparation time.

As such, we feel that this workbook would make a suitable supplementary textbook for the English Communication SW (Speaking and Writing) and English Communication LR (Listening and Reading) courses for second and third year nursing students, offered at the Faculty of Medicine campus in place of Nursing English. All second-year students at Kagawa University have already completed one year of TOEIC-focused, general English classes during their first year. Many second year students, we have found, seem to want English tasks more closely related to their fields. Some of these tasks can be found in departmental courses (*senmon kamoku*), such as Medical English. However, general English courses can help prepare students for these departmental ESP courses by providing students with basic vocabulary knowledge. Vocabulary development is a crucial component of language learning, and it is especially important in a language with a vocabulary as large as English (Wang, Liang, & Ge, 2008).

Instructors teaching other English classes, such as Advanced English for Engineering students, may also wish to incorporate similar discipline-specific vocabulary-building materials in their classes. Focus can still fall on particular skills, such as presentation and practical writing, but vocabulary development exercises, perhaps assigned as extra-class work, can be included. This may lead to greater student

satisfaction. Through such an approach, instructors can merge general English education goals with ESP elements, thereby producing a class that effectively addresses students' needs.

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