

The Maru/Batsu System: An Approach to Increasing Instances of Verbal Language Output in Japanese University Language Classes

Gordon Wilson
Steven Silsbee

Keywords

Motivation, Participation, EFL, ESL, Second Language Classes, Japanese Students

Abstract

The “Maru/Batsu System” is a method of motivating students to participate in class. It provides explicit expectations for student language production and gives immediate feedback to encourage language production and effective study behavior. Instances in which each student uses the target language in interaction with the instructor are tallied. Students are responsible for carrying out a minimum number of instances of language production. Good response rates were achieved with Japanese students, even with low-level, required English classes. In addition to this, we confirmed that throughout all of the class samples, the system could be functioning with efficiency within the first lesson in which it is introduced.

I Introduction

The “Maru/Batsu System” is a method of motivating students to participate in class. It provides explicit expectations for student language production and gives immediate feedback to encourage language production and effective study behavior. Instances in which each student uses the target language in interaction with the instructor are tallied. Students are responsible for carrying out a minimum number of instances of language production.

Some Japanese students often hesitate to participate in class (MacIntyre et al., 1998; Yashima, 2002). Even students who wish to actively participate in class often tend not to due to various cultural and classroom expectation issues (Shimizu, 1999; Kitano, 2001; Chamot, 2001). This causes a great deal of difficulty in language classes in which communication plays an important role (Swain, 1985). The Maru/Batsu system allows students who wish to speak out in class an excuse to do so and motivates shy students to speak in class.

In addition to this, especially in required classes, there are students who attend class only to satisfy the language requirement and attempt to participate as little as possible. Despite every effort to make participation as easy as possible, some students will not do exercises that will not be turned in and not carry out communicative interaction that is not done with the teacher (Geen, 1994). The Maru/Batsu System provides a framework for rewarding this work.

We have been using the method that will be described below over the last three years with great success. The students that are taking the classes in which this method is used are non-English majors with low-level English skills. The classes are required. In spite of conditions that often result in a low level of student participation, we have extremely high class participation levels, as we describe in the results section.

In the remainder of this paper we describe the implementation of the Maru/Batsu System and the results we have achieved. We begin with a thorough description of the process in Section 2. In Section 3, we describe and analyze our results in using the system, and in Section 4, we discuss directions for further study beyond this basic introduction.

II The Maru/Batsu System

In this section, we cover an approach to teaching that we've found to be most compatible with the Maru/Batsu System, preparation that the instructor will need to carry out before using the system in the class, how to carry out the process of the system itself, how to integrate the system into common classroom interactions and exercises, and how to deal with difficulties while using the system.

1. Prerequisites for successful implementation

Without a positive environment created by the instructor, a reward system of the kind we describe can be interpreted as Pavlovian rather than as an instrument used for encouraging social interaction. With the Maru/Batsu system, we are requiring students to use unfamiliar language and by measuring their behavior hold them accountable for doing so. In order to avoid creating a high stress, high risk environment, it is especially important when using the Maru/Batsu system to remove as many negative affective factors as possible. We have found that the following principles help to create an environment conducive to risk taking—the challenge of using unfamiliar language and taking risks is met with immediate feedback and a sense of progress even when students inevitably make mistakes. General principles of interaction with students (Brown, 2001) and principles directly related to task-based learning (Willis, 1996) will help in facilitating a good environment, however we have found the following core principles to be most associated with success when using the Maru/Batsu system.

- Make participation as easy as possible:
 - ⇒ Do ample preparation and schema building for the interactions.
 - ⇒ Give written examples when possible.
 - ⇒ Give students adequate preparation time, dependent on the complexity of the task.
 - ⇒ Provide a large number of opportunities for the students to interact.
- Maintain a positive environment in the classroom
 - ⇒ Attempts at communication are positively re-enforced, whether right, wrong, accurate or inaccurate
 - ⇒ Visually express to students communicative receptiveness even when communication is not successful.
 - ⇒ When communication fails, transition the focus to the next student with the understanding that the next interaction will provide clues that will help. Return to the previous student to provide a second chance when possible.

2. Preparation

At the beginning of class, we distribute 'role slips' which the students fill out and pass back to the front of the room to be collected by the teacher. When the slips are collected, the instructor calls out each name and places the slip onto an open space on the podium or front table corresponding to the position each student is seated in the classroom. This creates a daily seating chart that can be easily adjusted as needed during the class.

The instructor explains to the students that they will receive a mark for each voluntary interaction with the instructor that takes place in English. These normally consist of answering questions that the instructor asks the class, asking questions either in front of the class or individually, providing examples elicited by the teacher. It should be made clear that students will receive positive marks whether the answer is right or wrong, or if the question has mistakes.

Correspondingly, the instructor explains that students will receive negative marks for behavior that is not appropriate in class. In our classes these include: talking while the instructor is speaking to the class, sleeping in class, doing something not class related, i.e. homework from another class or using their mobile phone, speaking Japanese during times when they should be practicing English, and not doing an activity without attempting to seek help.

On the 'role slips' these positive and negative marks are recorded as "○" and "×" accordingly. The negative marks will cancel out the positive marks and potentially create a negative score, however this has never happened in our classes. Students are informed that collection of a minimum acceptable number of these marks is necessary for their grade (Locke, 1996). The number will depend on the class size and the amount of communicative interaction between the instructor and students. Requiring a minimum of one positive mark per class on average works well for classes with 30 to 40 students.

Classroom Communication – After the students have been given the ground rules for the process, they are given worksheets with common classroom communication phrases and exercises to give them practice using them. These minimally include:

- What does _____ mean?
- How do you say _____ in English/Japanese?
- How do you spell _____ ?
- I don't understand.
- I don't know.

Once the process has been explained to the students and they are armed with phrases that will allow them to begin interacting, the process can begin. With these phrases alone, they can respond to anything the instructor says that they do not understand. From this point on, silence is no longer an acceptable response when interacting. Students normally pick up on the process quickly. Those who don't can be individually encouraged.

At this point, we also explain that 'I don't know' is sometimes a perfect answer to a question and a normal answer in natural communication. We then give examples, such as 'What is my mother's name?', or 'What is in my coat pocket?'

After the explanation, we distribute a thorough explanation of the system written in Japanese, which we have included in the Appendix. This is written in their native language because they may not completely understand the system as it is explained in English and it is given after we have introduced the system so that they pay attention to us rather than relying on the written Japanese.

3. The process

We then proceed to give positive and negative marks to the students and include and adapt activities that give students opportunities to collect positive marks. Activities that are included in most textbooks work well within this framework. There are several basic activities that make good use of this process. Below are a few of the staples that we have consistent success with.

It may take some encouragement for the first students to volunteer a question or answer, but once the ice is broken, there will be no shortage of students volunteering to participate.

Most of these tasks preview or review the target content of the lesson (Bygate, 1996) and therefore reinforce the content in addition to providing feedback and a motivation to participate.

Introducing New Words - Before doing an activity, we ask students to take one minute and circle all the words on the page that they do not know. When the minute is up, we tell the students to ask us the meaning of words they have circled. Students begin asking questions and we provide explanations. The following dialog illustrates this process.

Student A: What does 'spend' mean? (One positive mark is given. Often the target word is incomprehensible.)

Instructor: I don't understand. How do you spell it?

Student A: S-P-E-N-D (One positive mark is given for understanding and replying appropriately, although later in the year, each interaction receives only one positive mark.)

Instructor: Oh, yes. Spend. It's about the same as 'use' and you say 'spend' when you talk about using money or time. For example, I have five dollars to spend for lunch. Do you understand?

Student A: Yes.

Instructor [Addressed to everyone]: How would you say 'spend' in Japanese?

Student B: I think its 'okane wo tsukau.' (Student B gets a positive mark)

Instructor [Addressed to everyone]: Does that sound right?

[Students nod in agreement.]

Instructor: Does anyone have any more questions?

Checking Answers - When a regular classroom activity is completed, we ask students to provide the answers. This gives students a chance to answer a question and receive a positive mark, gives other students a chance to check their answers, and provides everyone with additional input of the target structures and vocabulary, often doubling or tripling the number of instances the students will encounter the target content (Logan, 1988). This also gives students motivation to do classroom work that will not be turned in because the answers can later be used to accumulate positive marks.

Recycling - In our classes, we often use interview formats of various kinds. Either before or after students have practiced the interviews as pairwork, we have the group as a whole ask the instructor the interview questions, giving them positive marks for asking the question. Students are to take notes on the instructor's replies, which will be used in the next step of the activity. Our replies intentionally contain extended answers that provide extra content.

Student: Where are you from? (A positive mark is given.)

Instructor: I'm from America. I was born in Oregon and lived there for twenty-six years.

After we have been asked all the questions, we go through them again and ask the students what our answers were, giving positive marks to students who provide answers.

Instructor: O.K. Where am I from?

Student A: You are from America. (A positive mark is given.)

Instructor: Do you remember anything else?

Student B: You lived there for twenty-six years. (A positive mark is given.)

4. Minimum Instances of Participation

Although this system normally results in multiple students raising their hands in response to an elicitation, occasionally a teacher can get no reply when addressing a question to the entire class. When this occurs, we implement a minimum requirement of one instance of participation for that day. This means that if a student has no instances of participation for that day they will not be counted as having attended the class. When this is implemented, we state clearly and in a friendly manner that not replying is a question is very strange when communicating. They have been explicitly taught how to reply if they do not understand or do not know the answers to a question and giving no reply is not an option in natural communication. The reaction to implementing a minimum number of instances of participation is usually that someone will answer the question or state a lack of understanding. This is either a student who had not accumulated enough instances for the day, or an active student who chooses to help the others out. Implementing a minimum has been necessary not more than twice within a year in any of our classes and not at all in some classes. It is most likely to become necessary in early morning classes and occasionally after lunch. It is important that this element of the system is explained in the syllabus in Japanese.

When announcing the minimum, be sure to maintain a positive attitude, so it is not seen as a punishment, but as a motivational nudge. When doing this, it is especially important to express positive regard and respect toward the students. It is easy to imagine this being interpreted negatively if a basis of mutual respect is not already established with the students. We try to approach the implementation of both “×” (the negative correspondent to the *maru*) and *minimum instances of participation* with the attitude of “sending someone back” when playing a board game.

It is important to follow up the implementation of *minimum instances of participation* with an individual word of encouragement to each student who has no “○’s”. Up to this point, it has never been necessary to actually count a student as absent when doing this. Students who seem to have emotional problems that make it impossible to participate in class on that day, can be told to formulate a question and ask it after class. (When we do this, we always continue with a few more follow-up questions to give this student a bit more experience interacting. Followed by positive feedback, this usually results in the student finding the ability to participate minimally in later classes.)

III Results

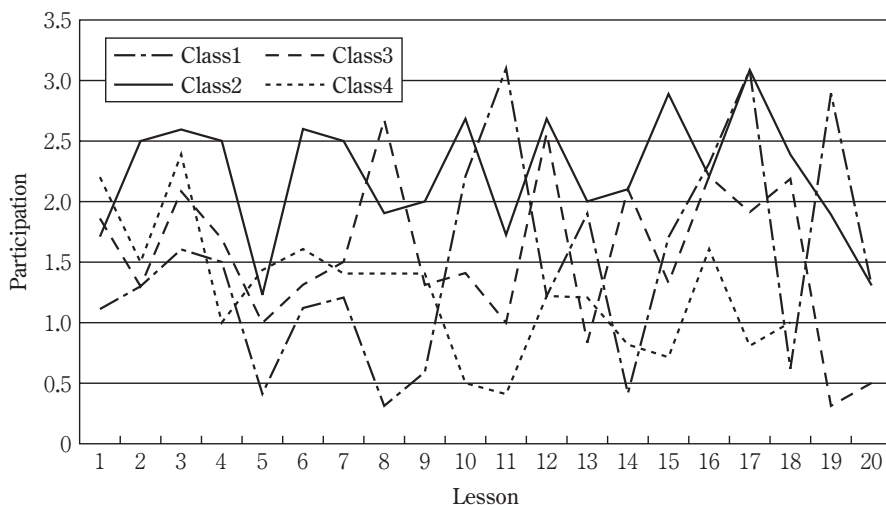
In 90 minute classes containing 30 students we typically found 40 to 70 instances of voluntary language production from students. The range was typically from 1 to 5 per student. The mean for all students in the study throughout the year was 1.64 instances of voluntary participation per class. Students attempting to volunteer more than five times in one class was not uncommon, but as this can take opportunities away from other students, we usually called on other students when one student was monopolizing the interactions. Also, instructors subtly encourage quiet students to volunteer or intentionally call on them

when they do volunteer, so the high and low occurrences are intentionally manipulated by the instructors. Also, the mean instances of participation for a class can vary a great deal depending on the method or exercise being used and is even effected by the instructor's energy level (i.e. the student's level of activity can mirror the amount of enthusiasm expressed by the instructor), so this is not simply a measure of student response to the system.

In table 1, we can see that the tendency is for the students to average between 0.5 and 3.0 instances of voluntary participation during class. This remains consistent throughout the year with a tendency to drop toward the lower end within the last few classes. Classes with low numbers during the year are usually the result of a lesson that does not accommodate much interaction and the low numbers in the final classes are likely due to students being confident that they have collected enough points for the grade they wish.

The numbers remaining consistent even from the first class suggest that the Maru/Batsu System is easily implemented and there is no observable learning curve on the part of the students. The instructors involved in the study were all experienced with the system, so the data does not reflect whether the same can be said for instructors new to the system.

Table 1 Mean Instances of Student Participation for Each Lesson by Class



Participation: mean instances of participation by student
Lesson: individual 90 minute lesson

Out of 4 classes, the *minimum instance of participation* condition was implemented five times throughout the entire school year. This means that while using the Maru/Batsu system, only five out of an estimated 4000 elicitation received no response from the class as a whole. This has made it possible for us to maintain a 100% rate of student voluntary participation—which means that not once during the year was it necessary for us to point to a student and elicit an answer.

IV Conclusion

In this paper, we proposed the Maru/Batsu System and showed that with it, good response rates can be achieved with Japanese students even with low-level, required English classes, which are notorious for

extremely low levels of voluntary participation. In addition to this, we confirmed that throughout all of the class samples, the system could be functioning with efficiency within the first lesson in which it is introduced.

It is recommended for further study to measure how the Maru/Batsu System compares to other methods of instruction. Also, it will require further study to see if the degree of participation we have achieved translates into better test scores or higher degrees of student satisfaction with the class.

A video of the Maru/Batsu system as described here and materials for implementing the system is available on the Internet at the following URL: <http://www.hannan-u.ac.jp/~wilson/MaruBatsu/MaruBatsu2.htm>.

References

- Brown, H. D. (2001). *Teaching by Principles: An Interactive Approach to Language Pedagogy*. White Plains, NY: Pearson Education.
- Bygate, M. (1996). Effects of task repetition: Appraising the developing language of learners. In J. Willis and D. Willis (Eds.), *Challenge and Change in Language Teaching*. Oxford: Heinemann.
- Chamot, A. (2001). The role of learning strategies in second language acquisition. In Candlin, C.N., General Editor. Breen, M.P., (Ed.) *Learner Contributions to Language Learning: New Directions in Research*. Applied Linguistics and Language Study. Pg. 25-43. Essex, UK: Pearson.
- Geen, R. G. (1994). Social motivation. In B. Parkinson and A. M. Colman (Eds.), *Emotion and Motivation*. London: Longman.
- Kitano, K. (2001). Anxiety in the college Japanese language classroom. *Modern Language Journal*, 85, Pg. 549-566.
- Locke, E. A. (1996). Motivation through conscious goal setting. *Applied and Preventive Psychology*, 5, Pg. 117-124.
- Logan, G. D. (1988). Toward an instance theory of automatization. *Psychological Review*, 95, Pg. 492-527.
- MacIntyre, P. D., et al. (1998). Conceptualizing willingness to communicate in a L2: A situational model of L2 confidence and affiliation. *Modern Language Journal*, 82, Pg. 545-562.
- MacIntyre, P. D., et al. (2001). Willingness to communicate, social support, and language-learning orientations of immersion students. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 23, Pg. 369-388.
- Shimizu, K. (1999). A survey of expectations of and characteristics attributed to native-speaker English teachers and Japanese English teachers by Japanese university students. *Journal of Intercultural Communication*, 3, Pg. 53-74.
- Swain, M. (1985). Communicative competence: Some roles of comprehensible input and comprehensible output in its development. In S. Gass and C. Madden (Eds.), *Input in Second Language Acquisition*, Pg. 119-139. Rowley, MA: Newbury House.
- Willis, J. (1996). *A Framework for Task-Based Learning*. London: Longman.
- Yashima, T. (2002). Willingness to communicate in a second language: The Japanese EFL context. *Modern Language Journal*, 86, Pg. 54-66.

Appendix A

Maru/batsu explanations (まる・ばつシステムの説明)

授業中への積極的な参加は点が与えられます。教師は皆さん個人の参加点を授業ごとに記録し、1年間記録しつづけます。参加点は成績評価で重要な要素となりますので、この部分は特に注意して読み、積極的に授業に参加してください。

授業の始めに出席カード ('role slips' といいます。) が配られますので、各人記入して教師に返してください。カードは集めた後、教師がそれぞれの名前を呼び、教壇上に着席順に並べられます。(一回授業でこれを経験すればどうということか分かります。)

自発的に英語で発言した学生は各発言につき参加点 (〇ひとつ) を受けます。大抵は、教師が質問したことについて学生が答えるという形式になります。点はクラス全体と個人の両方に対して与えられた質問の返答に与えられ、さらに教師に対しての学生からの質問や、教師が例を挙げるよう指示された際の応答にも与えられます。答えや質問を間違えたとしても、点が与えられます。

これに反して、私語、居眠り、その他の不適切な行為（たとえば他の授業の宿題をすること、携帯電話の使用、英語の練習中に日本語を使うこと、指示が分からない際にそのまま放置しておくこと等の授業に適当でない行為）はマイナス点（×）の対象になります。

各学生は最低、授業ごとに○をひとつ得ることが期待されています。そのため、基本的には、単位取得には最低23個の○が必要になり、30個はB評価、38個はA評価の対象となります。参加点は1年を通して平均され、ひとつ×（マイナス1点）を受けたり、欠席をした場合には、○をもうひとつ得ることが必要となります。

実際に行ってみれば簡単だと思うことでしょう。全学生が必要な参加点を得られるように授業は計画されています。次の表現を使うことができれば、全く問題は無いはずですが。（次のクラスルーム・コミュニケーションのセクションも参照すること。）

- What does _____ mean? (…の意味は何ですか?)
- How do you say _____ in English/Japanese? (…は英語/日本語で何と言いますか?)
- How do you spell _____? (…のスペルは何ですか?)
- I don't understand. (分かりません/理解できません。)
- I don't know. (知りません。)

以下のポイントは忘れないで!!

Important Points to Remember

_____授業中、英語で質問、応答することで参加点（○）がもらえます。

_____教師の質問への答えが間違っても、正しい答えと同様に○がもらえます。

_____年間の授業数が26回の場合、全部で26個の○が単位取得のために必要となります。積極的に発言しましょう。

_____簡単な英語のフレーズ5つを覚えることによって、教師と最低限のコミュニケーションが確実にできるようになります。

クラスルーム・コミュニケーション Classroom Communication

学習事項の多くは教科書からでなく、授業中のインタラクションからです。まる・ばつシステムの説明セクションで多少触れましたが、ここでもっと詳細の説明をします。

授業では教師と学生間の会話がたくさん行われます。初めの1、2回の授業では教師がどんなことを言ったとしても（たとえ理解できなかったとしても）、返答できるようにいくつかの短い会話を練習します。自然なコミュニケーションを行うということを目標としているので、質問に返答しないという選択肢は認められません。会話の相手が自分に分らない単語を使った場合や質問を理解できない場合、ネイティブ・スピーカーはどう対応するのでしょうか？ こういったことも授業でカバーする予定ですし、皆さんそれぞれが対応できるようになってもらうつもりです。

こういった問題の対処法の載ったプリントを配布しますので、完全にこれらをマスターするまで（あまり難しいことではありませんが）必ず授業に持ってきてください。そして、こういったフレーズを使うことで参加点（○）を間違っていたとしてももらえることを忘れないでください。

目標は練習することです。授業はいわばバッティング・センターのようなものです。実力より少々難しいことを練習し、ボールをたくさん打ちそこなう場所なのです。目標は上達し、いつか試合でボールを打てるようになることです。たまに答が分からなくて“I don't know”とか、質問が理解できなくて“I don't understand.”と言わなければならないことがあるでしょう。それでも構いません。（参加点はそれでももらえます。）担当教師はその場合他の学生に同じ質問をするのでしうから、次にもう一度質問されたら答えられるように注意して答えを注意して聞いてください。こんなことが起こった場合は、そのターゲットを覚える可能性は、単に教師の説明を聞くだけよりもずっと高いのです。ラッキーだと思いませんか。:)

初日には教師の言うことが分かりにくく、20%ほどしか分からないかもしれません。全体像の見えないパズルを感じるかに似ているかもしれません。教師の言っていることを山勘でも答えてみましょう。間違っていたら、それはそれで間違っていたということに気付くだけの話です。（ついでに参加点をもらえることだし…）他の学生の応答を真似してみて、教師の質問とその学生の答えの関連を発見することも可能です。（授業ではたくさん考えてもらいますよ！）すぐに上達して、教師の指示が簡単に分かるようになるはずですが。学期末に一番目につく進歩は、教師の言っていることを理解できるようになることでしょう。けれども初日はとても難しいかもしれません。ま、あまり心配

しないでください。

授業で問題行動とみなされるのは、トライしつづけずにあっさりあきらめてしまうこと位です。

以下のポイントは忘れないで!!

Important Points to Remember

- _____ 学習事項は教科書に載っていることだけではありません。教師と会話することから多くを学ぶはずですよ。
- _____ 間違いは当然のことですし、学ぶ上で重要なことです。授業中はどんどん間違えましょう!
- _____ あきらめずにトライし続ければ、単位が取得できます。(もちろんたくさんを身に付けられます。)

(2005年10月24日受付)
(2006年2月2日掲載決定)