Made in English

The English language is called an "international language" because it is used as the Internet language of choice by those who want to adapt to an increasingly globalized world. It is believed that the country will become more complex when it comes to using the language. How do English speakers ensure that English speakers? And how should English be taught? Yomiuri Shim bun Staff Writers Natsuki Shimbun explored the issues by looking into English education in colleges.

Offered 4,000 positions to this spring's 200 graduates. The graduates landed jobs at top information technology companies such as Sony, NEC and Hitachi.

Resetting the student

While Aizu uses English as a tool to teach computer science, Tokyo's Tama University takes a completely different approach. The university "resets" the students and starts to teach the language in a totally different way from how they learned in prior schooling.

Freshmen are given a compact disc containing speeches by native English speakers. The students are required to listen to the assigned part of the recording a week before the class that studies that particular segment, and write down what parts they can understand, which naturally requires that they listen to the CD again and again. In class, the students engage in activities such as reading, writing and discussion.

The method is the brainchild of President Gregory Clark, who believes intensive listening is indispensable for improving English comprehension.

"At first, I just had to listen to the same part (of the CD) again and again and again, and I was painfully aware of how difficult it was for me to tell 'I' from 'it,'" a male Tama student said. "But the good thing is, I can tell that I am beginning to get used to this subtle difference."

Like Aizu, Tama concentrates on a single academic area—management information. And Tama's English education is specifically targeted at business communication.

"I want our students to be able to, for example, talk about stocks in casual conversations in English," said Noriko Nakamura, a Tama assistant professor who teaches English.

Motivation and needs a key

We have looked at two universities that specialize in specific areas, where it is relatively easy to set specific aims for teaching English. For universities with a variety of academic areas to deal with, however, it is not as easy to set a uniform goal. The key, therefore, is maintaining students' motivation.

Thus, Tokyo's Waseda University takes a different approach to English education from Aizu or Tama. Once every week, students of Waseda's nonscientific departments meet for a "comprehensive English" class, where a teleconference system allows Waseda students to communicate with their counterparts at universities abroad. In one such class they communicated with students at South Korea's Kangwon National University.

In this class, students on both sides were speaking English. They were not fluent, but they were showing a spontaneous attitude toward communicating, while discussing anything from soccer's World Cup, to be cohosted by Japan and South Korea, to the challenge of global communication.