

Production of Teaching Material for Communication Strategies (CS) : Requisites to Settle a Pedagogical CS Controversy

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One of the central issues in studies of communication strategies (CS) is whether teaching CS (CTS) is necessary for second or foreign language education, and this issue is usually referred to as a teachability issue of CS. Researchers' views are split into two extremes with respect to this issue. The major objective of the present study is twofold. It is to make theoretical and practical proposals for the teachability issue. From a theoretical point of view, we argue that past empirical studies on this issue have not provided CS researchers with persuasive empirical evidence for supporting or rejecting it. From a practical point of view, on the other hand, we emphasize, by presenting TCS material we produced for our empirical study, that it is by all means necessary to produce TCS materials for both pedagogical and empirical purposes to compensate for the serious lack of materials for teaching CS.

1. Introduction

In this study, we would like to make theoretical and practical proposals from a pedagogical perspective to promote studies on communication strategies (CS) in the use of English as a second or foreign language (L2). Theoretically, we emphasize that pedagogical arguments in past CS studies have not yet answered essential questions adequately in terms of second language acquisition (SLA). Practically, we introduce teaching material that we produced specifically for the purpose of

experimental CS training. The study itself does not introduce any new empirical evidence or data, and in this sense, it is preliminary in nature for our ongoing empirical study. Even so, we consider that a preparatory discussion is important to clarify central pedagogical issues of CS.

2. Literature Review—Main arguments over teaching CS

Whether CS should be taught formally in class or not has split CS researchers into two opposite ends of a continuum—those who admire CS instruction enthusiastically (the Pros: e.g., Yule and Tarone, 1997) and those who reject it straightforwardly (the Cons: e.g., Bialystok, 1990). Blatant theoretical conflicts are not uncommon in applied linguistics, e.g., the well-known learning versus acquisition controversy (Krashen, 1985, 1988); however, such an argument of ‘all or nothing’ in the issue of teaching CS (TCS) seems rather extreme. The Pros stress that performance through CS-based instruction contributes to the creation of competence since it triggers structural change in L2 learners’ interlanguage (IL) system over time (Yule & Tarone, 1997), while the Cons counter this claim with the argument that such strategic competence is already acquired through L1 and is thus unnecessary to teach (Bialystok, 1990; Kellerman & Bialystok, 1997).

Although both of these extreme claims sound credible, they do not reflect empirical investigations; thus, evidence for supporting or rejecting the teachability of CS, i.e., whether teaching CS brings about desirable effects, is missing. To verify these claims, some researchers have attempted to settle this controversy empirically. Among them, Dörnyei’s (1995) study must be the most systematic and exhaustive. Presenting several pieces of empirical evidence, he tries to convince us that highly desirable effects can be expected to emerge from CS training in terms of not only the quantity of CS used but also their quality. Several other researchers supported this promising perspective on the basis of either empirical

evidence they found (e. g., Iwa, 1998 ; Kitajima, 1997 ; Salomone & Marsal, 1997) or their experiential or theoretical conviction (e. g., Konishi & Tarone, forthcoming).

Against such optimistic views, Iwai (2000, 2001) and Iwai and Konishi (2003) argued that the elicited empirical evidence was still too weak to justify TCS from the perspective of SLA and pointed out three major problems. The first is a methodological problem. The empirical evidence used for the argument has been obtained only from a pre-post test condition so that we do not know whether the training effects are ephemeral or long-lasting. Furthermore, the analysis has not been adequately undertaken in terms of linguistic *accuracy*, *fluency*, and *complexity* (Skehan, 1996) or of bottom-up processing of CS use (Kadota, 2003 : pp.2-3), so we also cannot determine whether the effects involve linguistic competence or merely strategic manipulation. Kellerman (1998) is also critical in this respect (p. 98).

The second problem is theoretical. None of the past TCS studies revealed to what extent CS instruction contributed to the development of L2 learners' IL system, not to mention their declarative or procedural knowledge in L2 production. Nor have those studies tried to relate themselves to the recent SLA theories such as focus on form (Doughty & Williams, 1998), the output hypothesis (Swain, 1996), lexical processing (Henriksen, 1999 ; Nation, 2002) and frequency effects on language processing (Ellis, 2002 ; see also Iwai & Konishi, 2003, for more detailed discussion on these issues).

The third problem is practical. In contrast to sophisticated theoretical and methodological knowledge in CS, concrete TCS proposals including teaching materials have been scarce. This unbalance state between theory and practice has been shown by studies of textbook analyses. For example, Tatsukawa (2000) examined English textbooks of oral communication for Japanese high school

students. Likewise, Iwai (2001) investigated textbooks for Japanese junior high school students and Faucette (2001) general ESL/EFL textbooks. The conclusion of these studies are harmonious in that no serious attempt, except for a few ESL/EFL textbooks, has been made to integrate research outcomes of CS studies in these textbooks analyzed.

One implication from these textbook-based studies is that substantial teaching materials are needed to incorporate TCS into L2 classes. For this reason, we attempted to produce TCS material, considering that it should be produced systematically and the produced material should be subjected to experimental use to test the validity of teaching CS. This material is called *ENGEL* (from *EN*glish *GE*nerative *LE*arning)¹, and its production processes and features are described in the next section.

3. Production of the TCS material

What we did at the outset to produce the TCS material was to collect and analyze baseline data (for the necessity of such data, see Tarone & Yule, 1989; Kellerman, 1998). For this purpose, we referred to a series of Konishi's studies (Konishi, 1994, 1995 a, 1995 b, 2001). In his original study, Konishi (1994) relied on dictionary definitions of 2000 lexical entries (nouns) as baseline data. The method of his studies was unique in that he conducted an in-depth investigation into linguistic components of strategic expressions, while most other researchers described CS in macro-cover terms representing exhaustive features of surface linguistic forms (e. g., Paribakht, 1985) or in parsimonious psychological terms of conceptual and linguistic processing (Poulisse, 1990).

In other dictionary studies, Konishi (1995 a, 1995 b) examined syntactic, lexical, and semantic structures of *paraphrase* (or *circumlocution*) — a compensatory strategy that is considered to be the most demanding linguistically and thus worth

teaching (Russell & Loschky, 1998; Salomone & Marsal, 1997). The most important implication of these studies is that paraphrasing expressions are by and large predictable. Thus, it was found, for example, that nearly all dictionary definitions (93.3%) had a syntactic structure of (PrM) + ST + PoM², where PrM and ST consisted of mostly basic lexical items, e. g., “a deep hole which appears to have no bottom” (for ‘abyss’). In addition, the kinds of PoM components were not numerous, the majority of which were composed of such structures as relative clauses, postnominal participles, and infinitives. Semantically, it was also found that attributes of referred items were described dominantly in basic or *core* vocabulary (Tarone & Yule, 1989).

Acknowledging limitations of the dictionary-based studies, Konishi (2001) confirmed findings from these early studies by collecting oral data from 30 adult native speakers (NS) of English, who described 17 lexical items selected for this study. Although the numbers of respondents and tested items were not large, his confirmatory study verified the correspondence between the findings from the dictionary baseline data and those from the authentic NS data.

Iwai (2002) replicated Konishi’s (2001) study by making use of the Internet. He considered that a larger amount of baseline data was necessary not only to generalize Konishi’s findings but also to obtain a sizable number of linguistic resources that would be used for the intended CS teaching material. For these purposes, Iwai (*ibid.*) increased the number of target items up to 40, including 8 items consisting of abstract nouns, and the 40 items were divided into 4 sets (10 items for each). Then, an e-mail request message was sent to people all over the world to collect responses until more than 100 NS responses were gathered for each set. This goal was reached in about one month from the beginning of the data collection, and consequently responses were obtained from a total of 454 NS (all respondents from non-native speakers were excluded). The collected responses

were segmented into components of PrM, ST, and PoM to identify the syntactic and lexical resources necessary to produce the material (see Iwai, 2003, for detailed results).

In this way, the CS teaching material, ENGEL, was finally produced using the baseline data from Konishi's studies and Iwai's study. In short, this is a self-training computer package to facilitate L2 learners' use of lexical CS. Some of the unique features of ENGEL are that 1) this package is composed of 6 buildup steps (Appendix 1), and an explicit, deductive explanation is presented prior to practice sessions in each step (Appendix 2); 2) learners are guided to produce longer paraphrasing utterances, starting from utterances of fundamental superordinate terms (or headnouns in ENGEL: Appendix 3) and eventually to those of complex clausal and/or phrasal structures on the basis of linguistic resources from the baseline data (Appendix 4); 3) response time is controlled, and learners are directed to spend less processing time in each step as they advance in their practice sessions (Appendix 5); and 4) learners cannot move to the next step unless they pass a required level of achievement, which is tested by a quiz at the end of each step (Appendix 6). A learning log (Appendix 7) can also be recoded in a built-in file for later analyses.

4. Discussion and conclusion

Modeled after Dörnyei's (1995) prototypical TCS study, several other researchers conducted similar empirical studies (see Iwai & Konishi, 2003 for a discussion of these studies). Despite their lucid accounts of gains in strategic language use, none of them, including Dörnyei's study, seems to disclose how CS training can contribute to developing L2 learners' communicative competence, especially grammatical competence³. However, it is in this linguistic sense that the Cons (e. g., Kellerman, 1998) oppose the Pros.

We, the authors of this study, are by no means trying to dissuade the Pros from pursuing the validity of TCS. On the contrary, we are hoping to obtain affirmative evidence to persuade the Cons. For this purpose, we consider that at least the following three conditions need to be met.

The first condition is goal-orientation. Specifically, if our central aim of teaching L2 is to nurture practical communicative competence as has been emphasized in recent English education in Japan, we have to prove that TCS trainees can verbalize their intended concept better and easier than their counterparts, ideally in an authentic context. The second condition is motivation. That is, we have to determine whether the proposed CS training provokes learners' willingness to study or not. This condition is inevitable since theoretical superiority does not always guarantee learners' satisfaction as we often witness in applied linguistics.

The final requisite is linguistic acquisition, as stressed from place to place in this study. While the first two conditions are absolutely necessary for teaching L2, it is arguable whether teaching materials or methods that help L2 learners strategically but not linguistically can virtually meet L2 learners' needs in the long run. Suppose that, as a consequence of teaching CS, L2 learners are encouraged to use many idiosyncratic expressions or inaccurate broken utterances at the cost of efficient communication. At the risk of leading L2 learners to this consequence, could we still say that TCS is a necessary evil? It is in this sense that we claim in this study that more empirical evidence is necessary to argue the TCS issue.

The purpose of our production of ENGEL is to investigate these three conditions, with special attention being paid to the third. The first condition relates to the ultimate pedagogical purpose of L2 teaching, so we would like to leave this condition until we finish investigating the latter two conditions. Regarding the motivational condition, we have, in fact, already captured positive evidence from users of ENGEL through a questionnaire survey. The desirable results of this

survey are not, however, very surprising since they do not differ so much from the results of most empirical TCS studies in the past (e. g., Hirano, 1992 ; Iwa, 1998).

Finally, we are now investigating the third condition. In doing so, we consider that it is crucial to show to what extent CS training facilitates learners' use of lexical items and processing speeds, in addition to three linguistic factors (fluency, accuracy, and complexity) and strategic solutions. Past empirical TCS studies appear vague in terms of this third condition, which the Cons as well as language practitioners have thirsted for. Furthermore, teaching materials used for teaching CS should be made available to the public as we have done in this study, so that we can more accurately investigate the relationship between what is taught and what is learned and/or acquired. It is after taking these steps that we can prepare to argue the Pros and Cons of teaching CS in a more profound way.

Acknowledgements

This study was supported by the following two research grants : the 2001 Special Research Grant at Hiroshima City University (Research Code 1704) and the 2002-2003 Grant-in Aid for Scientific Research C (Research Code 14580306) offered by the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science. We would like to express our sincere gratitude to the anonymous committee members of these two grants. We also want to thank Carol Rinnert at Hiroshima City University for reviewing this paper carefully and giving us many productive suggestions.

Notes

1. We would like to state clearly that we have no intention of advertising the produced material commercially at all. In fact, we decided to release ENGEL as a free open resource to promote TCS studies. Its download information is available at : <http://chiaki.intl.hiroshima->

cu. ac. jp/

2. The abbreviations are *premodifying components* for PrM, *superordinate terms* for ST, and *postmodifying components* for PoM.
3. Readers may attempt to refute our claim here by pointing out that Dörnyei (1995) succeeded in showing evidence for gains in CS quality. However, if such proponents read his paper carefully, they will note that 'quality' in his usage is determined by message quality rather than linguistic quality of trainees' utterances and the quality was judged by non-native English speaking evaluators (college English majors).

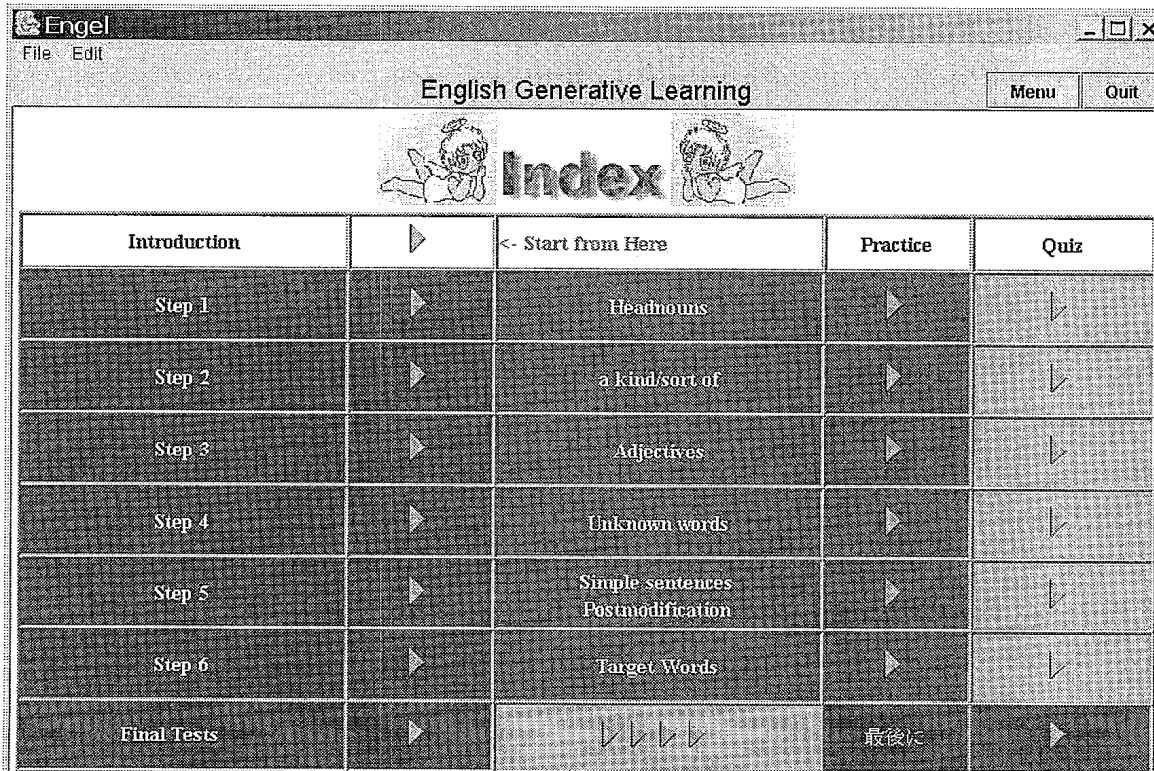
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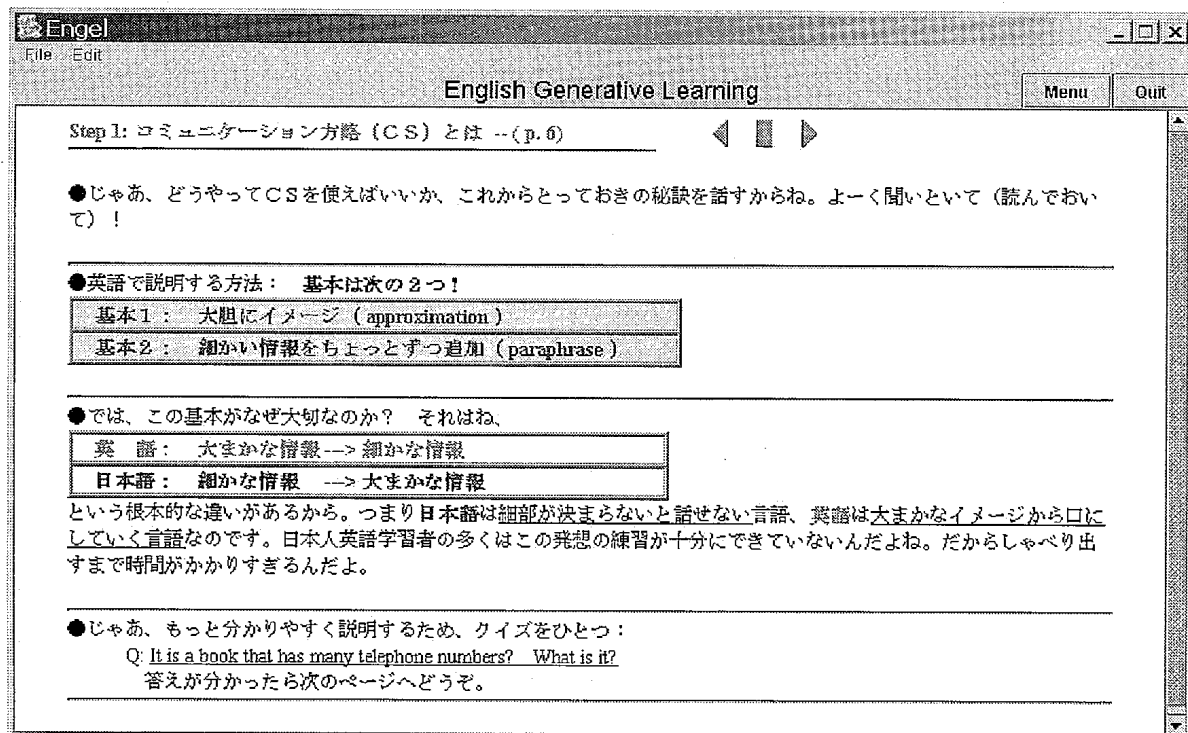
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Appendices



1 : Top menu page of ENGEL

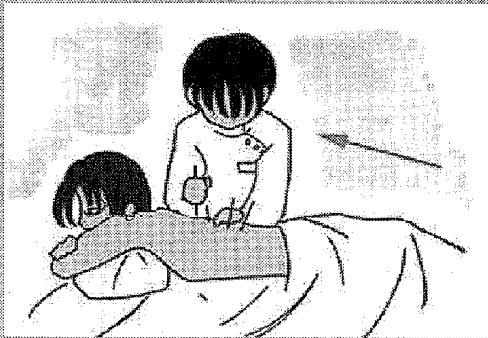


2 : Explicit explanation on CS

Engel
File Edit

English Generative Learning

Menu Quit




a doctor
a person
someone

3 : Practice of headnouns (superordinate terms)

Engel
File Edit

English Generative Learning

Menu Quit



Check your answers in 3 second/s.

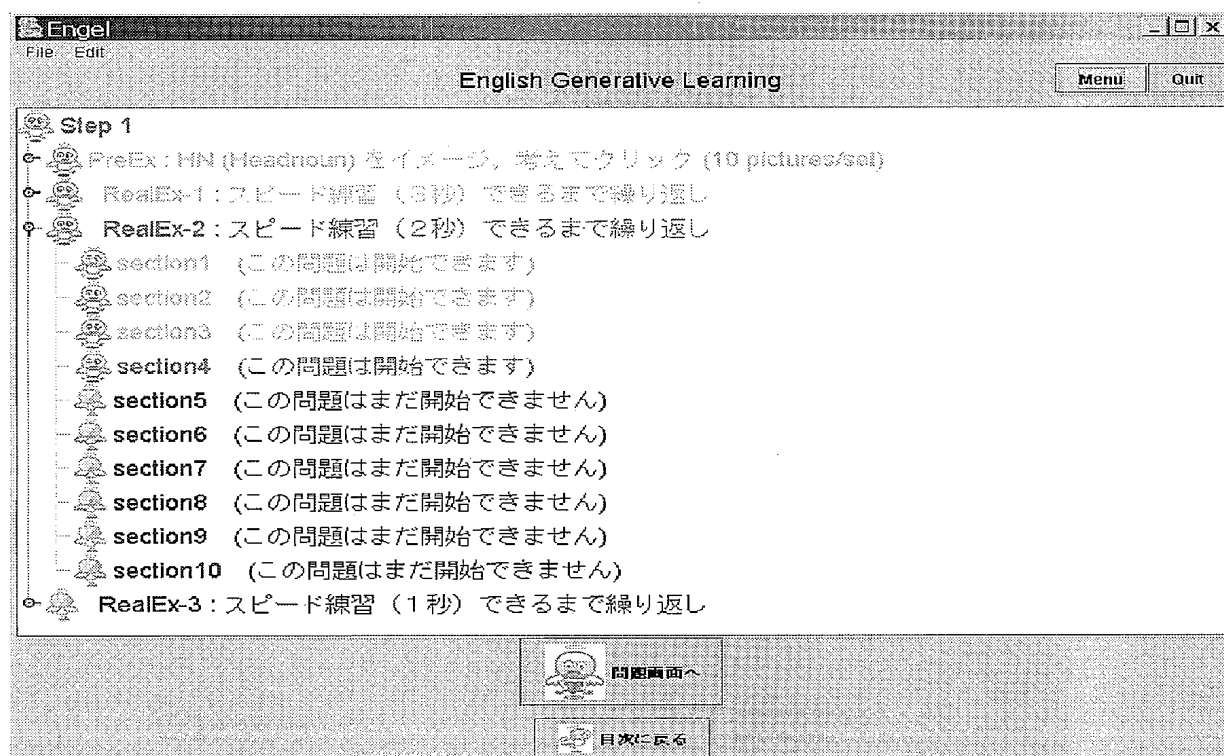
This is a traditional flat boat.
[which/that]

This is made of tree branches or bamboo sticks.

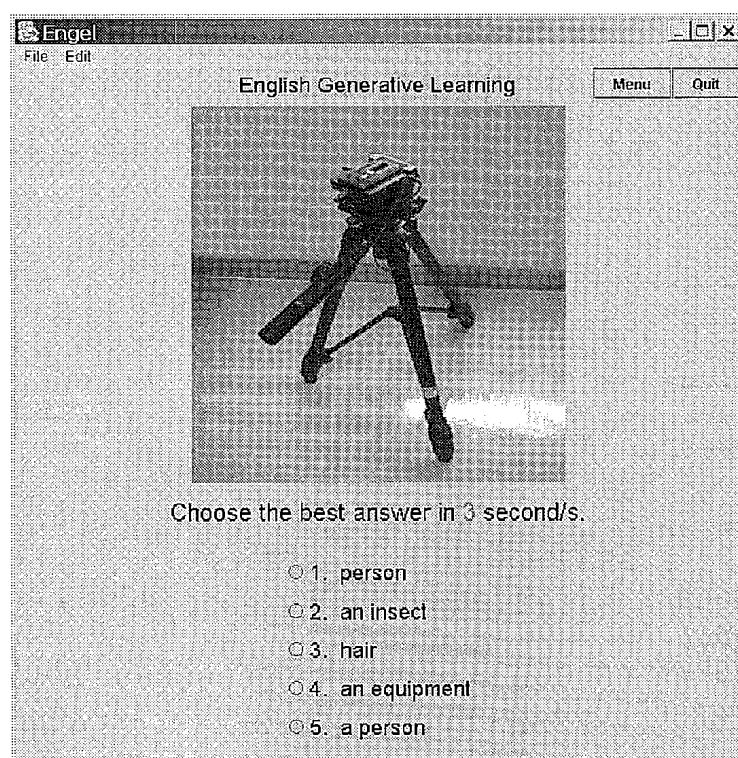
▼

This is a traditional flat boat which/that is made of tree branches.

4 : Practice of paraphrasing



5 : Practice menu with different time assignments



6 : Step end quiz (achievement test)

Microsoft Excel - \$B9%V9%CP% (J1.xls)						
ファイル(F) 編集(E) 表示(V) 挿入(I) 書式(O) ツール(T) データ(D) ウィンドウ(W) ヘルプ(H) 質問を入力してください						
	A	B	C	D	E	F
1		Log file for ENGEL				
2		Day	Time	Step	Exercise	
3		2002/8/8	16:19:21	Introduction		
4		2002/8/8	16:26:53	step1	Illustration	
5		2002/8/8	16:30:09	step1	PreEx-section1	
6		2002/8/8	16:31:44	step1	PreEx-section2	
7		2002/8/8	16:32:53	step1	PreEx-section3	
8		2002/8/8	16:34:48	step1	PreEx-section4	
9		2002/8/8	16:36:01	step1	PreEx-section5	
10		2002/8/8	16:38:03	step1	PreEx-section6	
11		2002/8/8	16:40:00	step1	PreEx-section7	
144		2002/8/12	22:27:55	step4	RealEx-2-section6	
145		2002/8/12	22:28:52	step4	RealEx-2-section6	
146		2002/8/12	22:29:17	step4	RealEx-2-section6	
147		2002/8/12	22:29:54	step4	RealEx-2-section7	
148		2002/8/12	22:30:32	step4	RealEx-2-section7	
149		2002/8/12	22:30:41	step4	RealEx-2-section8	
150		2002/8/12	22:32:43	Examination	Step 4	95
151		2002/8/12	22:44:46	step5	Illustration	
152		2002/8/12	22:57:07	step5 PreEx	1-section1	
153		2002/8/12	23:04:09	step5	RealEx-section1	
154		2002/8/13	23:03:56	step5 PreEx	2-section1	
155		2002/8/13	23:11:19	step5	RealEx-section1	
156		2002/8/13	23:28:37	step5 PreEx	3-section1	
157		2002/8/13	23:34:07	step5	RealEx-section1	
158		2002/8/14	20:31:52	step5 PreEx	4-section1	
159		2002/8/14	20:36:41	step5	RealEx-section1	

7 : Log file data transferred to Excel