

**Intercultural Communication and
the Teaching of English in Japan**

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要約

異文化理解と日本における英語教育

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この論文では、異文化との交流に際して、ある文化が見せる様々な側面を検討して、大学レベルでの英語教育のカリキュラムにそうした知識を取り入れる必要性を訴えたい。まず、ベネット (Bennett) の立てた異文化に対する感受性 (intercultural sensitivity) というモデルを説明し、それを日本における英語教育の問題点——学生、カリキュラム、教育者などに応用したい。英語教育者にも有益な材料が提供できるだろう。

Language, culture and personality are all important to communication. People who speak the same language and share the same culture presumably have fewer problems when communicating. Their problems may arise more from differing personalities or social classes. But when a person tries to communicate with someone from a different culture, the problems multiply. Given the enormous differences between Japanese culture and American culture, it is a wonder that communication takes place at all. Yet it does. And we keep trying.

One of the tasks of the English teacher in Japan, especially at the university level, is to facilitate communication in English. Many Japanese are poor communicators when speaking English, even if they have adequate English language skills. Why is this? How can college English teachers help their students to become better at communicating in English?

There are two aspects of culture: one may be called high culture or civilization—the history, political system, economic system, art, architecture, geography, holidays, festivals, traditional dress and foods of a country; the other aspect consists of language, verbal and nonverbal behavior, values, beliefs and assumptions which lie deep within a person. It is this second internal, often unconscious, aspect of culture which is most relevant to successful communication between cultures.

Language is more external and easily recognizable as different. Many Japanese say they can't speak English well—they can actually speak English well enough—but communication is difficult due to their being unaware of the fact that their use of language also reveals the values, beliefs, and assumptions of Japanese culture, as well as the meaning their culture attaches to words. They may not realize how Japanese their nonverbal behavior is or how it may impede communication. They may have studied English mainly through translation, as a language to be tested, or as a mathematical problem. How much do they know of their own cultural values, of American cultural values, of what would be regarded as an insult in the target culture—these things are more important than language when communicating interculturally. How much sensitivity do they have to cultural differences?

Even a knowledge and understanding of cultural differences does not prepare one to deal with all the seemingly small manifestations of cultural values, beliefs and assumptions displayed in verbal and nonverbal behavior encountered in daily life.

Some Americans living in Japan know of Japan's vertical society, of the importance of group affiliation, of the role of company affiliation, of the dominant role of the male, of the yearning for dependence and the need for empathy and belongingness (Doi, 1973; Nakane, 1970; Lebra, 1976). Yet to experience it is different. The following examples from Japanese culture will, I hope, illustrate these points.

Example A

In the television news broadcasts regarding Japanese women and children who were hostages in Iraq, lists of company names and the numbers of women and children whose

husbands “belonged” to those companies were aired. (NHK, Sept. 1, 1990)

Example B

Aboard the airplane sent to Amman, Jordan to bring the women and children back to Japan were the flight crew, officials of the Japanese government and members of the women’s husbands’ companies with bags of sweets for their colleagues’ children. (*The Daily Yomiuri*, Sept. 2, 1990)

Example C

Photographs in the English newspapers in Japan on August 3, 1990 show the Japanese women and children, ex-hostages, alone, arriving in Japan. Juxtaposed are photos of foreign women at airports in the United States and Europe in the arms of their mothers and relatives.

Example D

At a teacher’s meeting, a Japanese male teacher introduces Mrs. Smith, a professional teacher: “I’d like to introduce Mrs. Smith. Her husband, Mr. Smith, of Y. University, has done the following. . . .” No further mention of Mrs. Smith is made.

Example E

Mr. Smith encounters a male colleague of Mrs. Smith and says in Japanese, “Thank you for taking care of my wife.”

Example F

Adult non-Japanese are often asked these questions by complete strangers in public places: What’s your name? Where are you from? What’s your job? How old are you? Are you married? Do you have any children?

Example G

Some Japanese will also direct questions to children as young as six or seven, if something doesn’t fit their preconceived pattern of how things should be. An international family consisting of American mother, British father, and their two adopted Korean-Japanese children who were born in Japan does not fit the Japanese concept of family. Within a timespan of one hour, two different women in different places pose these questions to the seven-year-old girl in the presence of the mother: Can you speak both English and Japanese? Is this your mother? Is your father Japanese? Does your father have dark hair? Why do you look so Japanese? Are you sure this is your mother? What? Oh, you are Korean-Japanese, are you? Adopted? You are adopted? What—adopted? But you look Japanese. Oh . . . now I understand.

Contrast this to what happens to the same family in the Midwest in the United States. In some public place as a shop, a woman will come up to the mother, when the children are in another part of the shop, out of earshot of the child, and say, “Oh, you have beautiful children. Where are they from? My daughter (sister, cousin, neighbor) has also adopted (is waiting to adopt) a child from Korea (Taiwan, India). Well, bye, I just wanted to say how lovely your children are.”

Example H

Non-Japanese are outside the group, Japanese, and as such may be treated in various ways. White Americans and Europeans in public situations will often be an object of

interest, with Japanese being friendly, kind and helpful. Foreign couples trying to get a bank loan may be treated as true outsiders with huge obstacles set in their path. Unskilled Asian workers in Japan are often treated as sub-humans in terms of living and working conditions. All non-Japanese may be treated as criminals by being required to give a fingerprint at the alien registration office, or to cash a check in a store, or to receive cash payment for work done.

Many Japanese would see nothing unusual in the above examples because they feel these occurrences are "natural." And they are, within Japanese society. However, there is nothing "natural" about them. They are the result of only one way of structuring reality and the behavior derived from this structure.

Many Americans would be astounded by these same examples. In Examples A and B, they would be surprised by the extent to which the wife is subsumed in the role of wife and at the extension of her husband's company affiliation to her. Americans separate work and family. In Example C, Americans would feel sorry for the wife being alone. They would wonder where her family was. Example D would be highly insulting to a professional American woman whereas Example E would be demeaning. In Example F, Americans would feel the two women were utterly tactless, stupid and very cruel to the child. Americans would call Example H racism.

These American reactions are the result of structuring reality in a different way. Neither way is inherently right or wrong. The foundations of the two cultures are very different. The languages used in these encounters don't matter. So when Japanese say they don't speak English well, it doesn't matter. Language is just one manifestation, albeit a powerful one, of culture.

What is to be done? How does one build an awareness of and sensitivity to other cultures? What are the stumbling blocks which prevent awareness and sensitivity?

I would like to examine the stages in Bennett's (1986) developmental model of intercultural sensitivity. His model predicts how people are likely to change along a continuum of increasing sensitivity to difference. The key organizing concept is difference. Barna (1988) also supports this emphasis on difference in stating her first stumbling block, assuming similarity instead of difference.

Bennett's first three stages are called ethnocentric states. The first, denial, proceeds from isolation to separation. Westerners in Japan encounter this when children giggle or point at them or when a Japanese assumes all Caucasians are Americans. Separation is the erection of physical or social barriers, possibly economic barriers, to create distance from cultural differences.

The second stage, defense, occurs when the cultural differences are perceived as threatening to one's own sense of reality. These defenses include negative stereotyping and superiority (Bennett, pp. 37-41). Both may utilize firmly established myths to rationalize prejudices. Reversal, the denigration of one's own culture, may possibly occur in this stage. Sometimes the attraction of the new culture may cause someone to "go native" and devalue his own culture, as the young Tanizaki Junichiro did. The third

stage is minimalization, in which one buries the differences under the weight of cultural similarities.

Dividing the first three and last three stages on this continuum is what Bennett calls "a paradigmatic barrier" in which there is a "major conceptual shift from reliance on absolute principles to acknowledgment of non-absolute relativity". (p. 45)

Stage four is acceptance in which cultural difference is acknowledged and there is respect for behavioral and value differences. Behavioral differences include language, communicative style, phatic communication and nonverbal behavior which is largely unconscious. The realization that 97% of the world is non-Japanese and that only Japanese give out Japanese signals can be frightening. It is also very difficult to achieve respect for value differences if one is judgemental. Awareness of one's values and those of others must be non-evaluative. The goal for this level might be seen as knowledge and understanding of cultural differences. Another of Barna's stumbling blocks includes the assumption by some that language is their only barrier to understanding (p. 326). She further includes nonverbal misinterpretations and the tendency to evaluate as causing communication difficulties.

Bennett's fifth stage is adaptation, the ability to use acceptance in relating and communicating with people of other cultures (p. 51). Empathy and pluralism occur within this stage. The goal is the ability to shift behavior to get into the system. Empathy is followed by pluralism, having two or more internalized frames of reference. Bennett states that pluralism is the hardest to achieve and that it usually involves at least two years, depending on the intensity, of SOLE, "significant overseas living experience." (p. 55)

The final stage, integration, deals with contextual evaluation, the ability to shift cultural context and the self-awareness to exercise choice, to choose the best treatment of a particular situation (pp. 59-61). I had recently asked a Japanese psychology professor if he wrote scholarly papers in both English and in Japanese and, if he did, what the differences were. He replied that when he wrote in English, he tried to write clearly, logically and to give numerous examples. When he wrote in Japanese, he said he wrote pedantically and gave few examples because the onus was on the reader to decipher his meaning. Here is a man who understands the differences and exercises choice.

Which of these stages would be a reasonable goal for an English major at a Japanese university? I suggest a minimum of stage four, acceptance; pluralism in adaptation may be possible for the few who have lived overseas for a number of years.

Acceptance is gained through knowledge and understanding, cognitive abilities. What would one ask students to study? How might one structure the curriculum and what could be taught in English language classes at the university level? What methods might be used?

First, students need an awareness of their own culture. Stewart (1972) suggests people study and understand the assumptions and values on which their own behavior rests. Then students need to know the different customs, goals, thought patterns, values, attitudes and feelings of the target culture, along with the civilization aspects of

culture such as history, political structure, economic structure, art, architecture, and literature. Barna suggests students should also be trained to develop insight, language, nonverbal behavior and to pay more attention to investigative details using an investigative approach. Throughout this, students need to expose themselves to differences so that difference will be less threatening to them (p. 329).

How much of this knowledge and experience does the average college student majoring in English have when entering university or even when finishing university? Universities offer a choice of courses during the first two years of general education. Pertinent courses would be a course in Japanese sociology, American civilization, American culture and its values, communication, cultural anthropology, psychology, intercultural communication and English language courses.

Even if the college student has taken the above courses, there is still no assurance that he will be able to integrate the knowledge and abilities learned separately into some sort of whole. This may be due to the content and the way the courses were taught and also the language in which they were taught. The students may only half-understand the concepts in their own language, the teacher of a large lecture course may have been pedantic using terminology unfamiliar to the student and the teacher may have given few concrete examples in the lecture. Within a semester, class meeting time is relatively short in Japanese colleges so the teacher may have had little time to adequately develop his course.

Students also have trouble discussing Japanese culture in English and don't have sociological vocabulary in English. They often give up when asked to discuss concepts such as *giri*, *ninjo*, *ba*, *on*, *iki* in English because there is no simple, one-to-one translation for these words. They are equally poor at contextualizing these concepts, giving examples which might clarify the meaning. Perhaps they have been brainwashed into believing that Japanese culture is unique and that non-Japanese can never understand Japan. Well, American culture is equally unique. All cultures are unique, different.

It is unlikely that there will be sweeping changes in curriculum or in requirements for college students, so the onus of teaching culture falls on the English language teacher, especially on the non-Japanese language teacher. American teachers of the spoken language are very aware of cultural differences and usually try to teach some culture-based lessons, if they are not inhibited by teaching methods which require all class time to be used according to very strict principles. This teaching of culture may be haphazard, following the teacher's own inclinations and possible hang-ups. The teacher needs to have access to information on culture, both his own and Japanese, and to present it to the students systematically.

Information resources in English on Japanese culture and behavior include books by Nakane (1970), Doi (1973), Lebra and Lebra (1974), Lebra (1976), Seales (1983) and Condon (1986). Books on American cultural values include Stewart (1972) and Althen (1988). Specific studies in English contrasting Japanese and Americans have been done by Barnlund (1975,1989). Some good books on nonverbal behavior are those by Birdwhistell (1970), Morris (1977), Morain (1976), Weitz (1979) and Hall (1961, 1966, 1974,

1976). Readings in intercultural communication include Condon and Yousif (1975), Samovar and Porter (1988) and Brislin (1981). Training manuals and books about teaching culture include Brislin and Landis (1981), Weeks, Pederson and Brislin (1987), Seelye (1988), and Valdes (1986). Works in sociolinguistics, discourse analysis, and pragmatics can give information on language used in specific contexts.

As to the actual teaching of culture in the foreign language classroom, various activities and simulations may be used. Seelye (1988) reminds the teacher to always keep in mind the cultural purpose of an activity. He suggests the following goals of cultural instruction in the foreign language classroom: 1. the sense or functionality of culturally conditioned behavior 2. interaction of language and social variables 3. conventional behavior in common situations 4. cultural connotations of words and phrases 5. evaluating statements about a society 6. researching another culture 7. attitudes towards other cultures (pp. 48–58).

The first goal identifies the needs in a culture. What does one need to do to retain the respect of a peer group in the target culture? Nonverbal behavior is included in this. One can show photos and ask for ideas on why or how they differ in meaning from Japanese culture. Previously mentioned Example C could be used.

The second goal includes the social variables of age, sex, social class, place of residence. At an advanced level, students should get accustomed to and to expect dialect differences. One could use tapes in pronunciation class demonstrating different countries (Britain, the United States, Australia), urban or rural, working or upper class, old and young, native and non-native speech in English.

Greetings and simple introductions are examples of teaching conventional behavior in common situations which are usually taught to beginners. Intermediate students might expand their repertoire to include introductions to various people, male-female, older-younger, higher-lower status. Conventional language in crisis situations such as what to say at funerals, at weddings, to someone recently divorced may be taught at more advanced levels. Seelye characterizes conventional expressions as being cued by common social situations within a culture, of having a limited range of verbal and nonverbal responses and, most important, the absence of an expected response produces considerable anxiety in native speakers (p. 53). I feel Japanese language has more conventionalized expressions than English so more varieties need to be taught in English depending on the context. Japanese are also more ritualistic and need beginnings and endings to many encounters for which there are often conventional expressions in Japanese. Americans, being more informal, would use a greater variety of less conventional expressions for the same situation.

Culturally different images are associated with even the most common words and phrases. Part of fluency is the conditioned ability to visualize the culturally appropriate image which the language evokes. Shared meanings go beyond dictionary definitions. Visual materials lend themselves to achieving this goal. One can ask students to bring in pictures of a beautiful woman, from both cultures. The teacher could bring pictures of different men and ask students to choose which one depicts an honest man, a kind

man, a rich man.

Goals five and six deserve special attention for Japanese college students as I strongly feel the ability to evaluate statements about a society and the abilities needed to research another culture are not taught. Students seem to believe everything they read. Perhaps since the spoken word is distrusted, the written word gains credibility. Perhaps students were taught not to challenge authority. There is so much ethnocentric literature available. So many articles in magazines, newspapers and books written from the defensive stage point of view — negative stereotyping and superiority of one culture over another — are in abundance. One wonders who buys them and who believes them. Japanese students need to learn how to differentiate judgments which are ethnocentric from those which have substantiating evidence. This can be done by balancing evidence with generalities and by separating speculation from objective observation. If students find something suspicious, they can be taught to use the library, mass media, to interview people, and to refine their skills of personal observation. They must learn how to learn. These skills will stay with them throughout their lives while the facts memorized for exams will soon be forgotten.

Attitudes towards other cultures include curiosity about and empathy towards the target culture. Students should be encouraged to interact in some way with people from the other culture.

Many techniques are used in intercultural communication training. Some of the simulations can be used in role play situations between a Japanese and an imaginary American. Value orientation games and questionnaires are useful. The American teacher can also construct some of his own examples showing cross-cultural conflict. Using Examples A and B, the teacher could ask what an American would find strange and why. For Examples D and E, one could ask how the American woman felt in the situation and why. Example F could be used to show differences in what constitutes privacy between cultures. Example G can be used to show differences in behavior, the rights accorded age and sex, differences in social class, and the reasons the questions were asked.

Teachers can construct ethical problems which students must discuss in terms of behavior choices, the consequences of such behavior in their culture and in the target culture. Students who have been overseas could easily be asked to write problems they faced, discuss what they did and why and its effect on others.

All of these activities would lead Japanese students to a deeper knowledge and understanding of the culture whose language they all must study and of their own culture. They would hopefully learn not to be afraid of cultural differences, either within their own country or between countries.

I would like to discuss two more points which are connected to effective intercultural communication. The first is teachers. Who are the teachers? Referring back to Bennett's model, at what stage of intercultural sensitivity should the teacher be if he is to teach culture? Bennett feels one should be two stages along the continuum from the students and to teach students to the step behind oneself, whereas Barnlund states that

one stage back is enough, that one could teach up to one's own level (Intercultural Communication Summer Institute, morning session, Aug. 3, 1990). These statements have serious implications for the training and the hiring of English language teachers, both Japanese and non-Japanese. I have met some Japanese junior and senior high school teachers who were deep in the stage of separation in denial. They would not greet me in the teachers' room and pretended I did not exist. They seemed afraid of me in some way. What could this type of person teach Japanese students about cultural sensitivity? Would he recognize the need to be sensitive to other cultures? Or would he teach English in a cultural vacuum? Or as a mathematical game in which Japanese A = English B?

Non-Japanese teachers usually use English as a medium of instruction. Are the teachers aware of their own cultural mind-set? Are they innocently asking students to jump stages on the continuum from denial to adaptation, for example? Bennett's model is a developmental one, describing the stages through which one must pass, step by step. One cannot jump. One can go back and forth between adjacent stages, but one cannot jump. It is up to the teacher to identify the stage the student is in.

This also brings into question the short-term hiring of non-Japanese teachers. With the JET and AET programs, the teachers themselves might possibly be in the early stages of cultural sensitivity, but at least they are teaching the beginning levels of language in junior and senior high schools. Students might not be expected to learn much about American culture on a deeper level. But what about university teachers? Some universities only hire foreign teachers to teach conversation courses on two year contracts. If these teachers have had no teaching experience in another culture either in their own country or overseas, how can they be expected to teach much about culture when they themselves are going along the continuum towards adaptation? How can they teach and help students to a stage of knowledge and understanding when they themselves are unaware of much of their own cultural values and beliefs? Bennett says that at least two years are needed, depending on the intensity of involvement with the culture, to get to a stage of empathy or pluralism within adaptation. Would these teachers, then, be able to teach students much about cultural self-awareness or sensitivity to the target culture?

The final point I wish to make is that this process of developing intercultural sensitivity is not an easy one and that it produces very much stress. When first faced with a foreign culture, there is often no tension because one is in denial, denying the differences. Later one feels and realizes that this culture is operating on different principles and one finds it harder to cope as one becomes more vulnerable in the defense stage. Extreme fatigue may result as one is bombarded with new sounds, sights, a new system. There is little tension in the stage of minimalization because similarities are in focus. The stage of adaptation is the hardest and has the most stress associated with it. The more acculturated one becomes, the larger the possibility of psychomatic and mental complaints if one is in the mainstream of society and faces the challenges of dealing with different attitudes and beliefs. I went to a practitioner of Japanese *shiatsu* massage. He

worked for a long time on my very stiff shoulders (due to stress) and asked how long I had been in Japan and then he wondered aloud why the Westerners who came to him showing physical signs of stress had all been in Japan for ten years or longer.

The literature repeatedly talks about the people who have a high tolerance for ambiguity (Kim, 1988) as having less stress in an intercultural situation. Yet the Japanese are more ambiguous in speech patterns. So why is it that Japanese are often extremely nervous while speaking English with Americans? Can it be low contact with different cultures? Are they operating on their own rules of expected empathy and find they can't empathize with the stranger because they don't know his cultural system and expectations? Or do they simply lack training in language and culture? Whatever the reason, the stress is palpable. At least, the Japanese are trying to communicate and perhaps they realize most of all the difficulty of achieving intercultural communication. If so, college students need more help, better teaching and possibly different teaching in order to become more sensitive to cultural differences and better at communicating with others.

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(Received September 7, 1990)