

# Cross-cultural Studies in Team Teaching as a Motivational Impetus for Japanese EFL Learners

*Kyoko Miyazato  
Hakuoh University*

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This study will investigate Japanese learners' motivation in team teaching (TT) classes where a Japanese teacher of English (JTE) and a native speaker teacher of English (NSTE) team-teach cross-cultural issues at a small Japanese university.

Keller's (1983) education-oriented theory of motivation proposes four determinants of motivation: intrinsic interest; relevance of the instruction to the learner's personal "instrumental needs"; expectancy of success derived from expectancy-value theories in motivational psychology; and satisfaction in the outcome of an activity as extrinsic rewards.

In this study, two major hypotheses are assumed for the effectiveness of TT based on determinants of Keller's education-oriented theory: (1) the TT approach reduces learners' stress and anxiety for foreign language (FL) classes by an NSTE and supplements their lack of linguistic abilities with the help of a JTE, which increases learners' expectancy of success; (2) cross-cultural issues for the theme in the TT course induce learners' intrinsic motivation and are also relevant to their instrumental needs for accommodating themselves to Japan's internationalization.

Individual semi-open interviews were done with five to six students each at three different levels (advanced,

intermediate and low) in TT courses in the university (N=17) in order to investigate the validity of the hypotheses. The result indicates that TT with use of cross-cultural studies is an effective teaching approach to increase students' motivation at all proficiency levels, especially, for students of lower levels.

本研究は、ある小規模大学において日本人英語教師とネイティブスピーカーの英語教師が異文化論についてチームティーチング (TT) を行った際の学生の動機要因について調査したものである。

Keller (1983) の education-oriented theory は、学習意欲について次の 4 つの決定要因を挙げている。内的興味、授業内容と学習者の個人的なニーズとの妥当性、心理学の expectancy-value theories から派生した成功見込み度、外的報酬としての行動の結果における満足などである。

本論では、Keller の education-oriented theory における決定要因を基に、TT の効果について二つの主な仮説が立てられた。(1) TT は、ネイティブスピーカーによる外国語の授業における学習者のストレスや不安を減少させ、日本人英語教師の助けにより学習者の言語能力不足を補う。その結果、学習者の成功見込み度が增加する。(2) TT の授業で異文化をテーマとして取り上げることで、学習者の内的動機を誘発させ、同時に日本社会の国際化へのニーズに対応する。

上記の仮説の妥当性を調査する目的で、当大学の異なる 3 つの英語カレベル (上級、中級、初級) からそれぞれ 5~6 人、計 17 人の学生に個別のインタビューが実施された。その結果、異文化問題を取り扱った TT は、全ての学カレベルの学生、とりわけ、初級レベルの学生の学習意欲を高めるのに効果的なアプローチであることが判明した。

## TT and Japanese learners' psychology *Japanese students' anxiety in NSTEs' classes*

Anxiety in language learning has been regarded as a crucial affective factor for learners and many SLA researchers have constructed the concept of foreign language anxiety over the past few decades. Clement, Dörnyei and Noels (1994) claim that anxiety or self-confidence is one of the major decisive factors for attitude and motivation of L2 learners.

As for Japanese students' anxiety, they presumably have linguistic anxiety toward NSTEs' classes which are conducted only in English. Ellis (1993) points out that Japanese learners lack in exposure to spoken English because English classes are mostly done in Japanese. Anxiety toward NSTEs' different teaching styles is also reported to have a great influence on learners' psychology. Browne and Evans (1994, p. 22) conclude that years of grammar-translation study and strong emphasis on accuracy have left most learners nervous about trying to use English.

Not only learners' linguistic limitations, but also their psychological distance toward NSTEs themselves is assumed to be another component of FL anxiety of Japanese learners. NSTEs are still rare for many Japanese students especially in less urban areas, despite the present-day trend of Japan's 'internationalization.' Therefore, it is assumed that Japanese learners might have anxiety toward NSTE themselves. Medgyes (1992,

p. 340) argues that non-native-speaking EFL teachers have advantages in anticipating language difficulties by being empathetic to the learners' problems and sharing the learners' mother tongue. In summary, JTEs in TT are assumed to serve two roles: as a linguistic assistant for students' better understanding of English and as a pressure relief valve for language learning.

### *Students' perceptions of native and non-native teachers*

Despite the learners' anxiety toward NSTEs stated above, a contradictory perception of NSTEs as 'charismatic' is reported by Japanese EFL learners. In recent years TT in the JET (Japan Exchange and Teaching) Program has been AET (Assistant English Teacher)-centered and JTEs have tended to take more passive role as an 'interpreter.' This is not only due to reflection on the AETs' dissatisfaction over being used as living tape recorders, but also from students' strong expectations of AETs as the main teacher in TT settings.

Tajino and Walker (1998, p. 124) point out that nearly two-thirds of the students in their study did not see the JTE as anything other than an interpreter. Iwamoto (1999, p. 34) also proposes a more active role for AETs and a JTEs' inconspicuous role assisting AETs on stage in TT, commenting that students' definite expectations are to listen to AETs' authentic English and to present their English to AETs. Although many AETs in the JET Program are young

college graduates with little or no teaching experience, admiration toward AETs—especially the Anglo-Saxon speakers of English—is exhibited by students in Japan. Sturman (1992, p. 159) also states that the presence of foreign teachers in the Japanese school is appreciated as a living 'proof' of the 'internationalization' of Japan.

### **Japanese students' motivation and cross-cultural studies**

#### *Japanese university students' motivation in EFL learning*

McCornick (1993) points out general lack of motivation to study English among Japanese university students. Berwick and Ross (1989) state that an instrumental motivation vacuum was left by years of competition and studying English for entrance exams. In addition, many students have studied English for six years only out of the instrumental motivation despite their fear and almost 'hatred' toward studying English. Koizumi and Matsuo (1993) report that a decrease in motivation of Japanese junior high school students is actually found after the initial stage of the learning process.

Furthermore, many university students in less urban districts perceive little necessity for English and intend to spend their future lives in local areas, where English is not really useful for their daily lives yet. Consequently, increasing their intrinsic motivation becomes the essential issue in those environments.

### *Cross-cultural studies and learners' motivation*

Prodromou (1992, p. 47) states that discovering more about a culture so different from students' own is an intrinsic delight in language learning. It can be also assumed that acquiring knowledge on cross-cultural issues would fit their hidden desire to communicate with foreign people and societal expectations for accommodating themselves to Japan's internationalization. As Yamashiro and McLaughlin (2000) indicate, some researchers have noted high level of motivation among Japanese students without a corresponding high level of proficiency.

Hence, it is hypothesized that TT would be appreciated by Japanese learners because it lessens their anxiety and eventually gives an impetus to their intrinsic and instrumental motivation in English learning through cross-cultural studies.

## **Method**

### *Participants*

The participants were 10 male and seven female students from two freshman TT English courses (N= 92) which were taught by the same team teachers of the university. Five to six students from each of three different English proficiency levels (advanced, intermediate and low) were chosen based on the results of an English proficiency test.

### *Procedure*

Team-taught classes are given to all the freshmen in the

university and they take two 90-minute required English classes weekly. As part of the three weekly hours of class, a JTE and an NSTE team-teach half of one 90-minute class and the rest is taught by the JTE alone. TOEIC scores average about 280 and the class size is large (45-50 students).

For this study, two TT courses on cross-cultural studies were conducted in the spring semester. It dealt with cross-cultural differences in values, ways of thinking and customs of Japanese culture and the culture of NSTEs, discussing original passages written by the JTE and the NSTE about the cultural shocks they have experienced in their real lives and developing the discussion to deeper levels of analysis of cross-cultural awareness and understanding. In the Fall semester, general conversation practice based on the given dialogs with pronunciation exercises directed by the NSTE was done in order to provide students opportunities to perceive cross-cultural studies in TT in comparison with another style in TT. The TOEIC test, short version, was given in September as an English proficiency test.

After the academic year in April 2001, individual semi-open interviews were conducted with the 17 participants for an average of 15 minutes. The interview dates were set after giving grades for the course, so that participants can state their opinions honestly without worries and reservation that their comments would affect their grades of the courses. The interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed for data analysis.

## Results: Learners' anxiety and TT JTEs' roles as a linguistic assistant and a psychological supporter

As Table 1.1 shows, 15 out of 17 students reported that they prefer TT to individual instruction (II) by an NSTE only. The numbers in the parentheses indicate students who want to try II after gaining a certain level of English proficiency. Interestingly, most students of low level hope to have II, while advanced and intermediate learners still prefer TT.

The biggest reason for the popularity of TT is that JTEs can clarify linguistic uncertainty as shown in Table 1.2. One student of intermediate level commented that he/she tries hard to listen to NSTEs but loses interests when ambiguity of uncertainty increases. The second biggest reason was learners' anxiety toward NSTEs themselves. Interestingly, this anxiety was claimed more by advanced learners than by learners at intermediate and low levels.

With regard to the demerits of TT, too much dependency on JTEs' translation was indicated by learners at advanced and low levels. This can be regarded as the other side of the merit of linguistic clarification by JTEs' translation.

Table 1.1: *Students' preferences on TT and II*

	Advanced	Intermediate	Low	Total
TT	5	5	5	15
II by an NSTE	1 (2)*	0 (2)	1 (4)	2 (8)

\* The numbers in the parentheses indicate students who want to try II after gaining a certain level of English proficiency in the future.

Table 1.2: *Reasons for TT preference (multiple answers)*

	Advanced	Intermediate	Low	Total
Language assistance	4	4	3	11
Psychological help	4	2	1	7
Dual Perspectives	1	3	3	7
Model conversation	2	2	0	4
Fun to see interaction	3	0	0	3

Table 1.3: *Reasons for II preference (multiple answers)*

	Advanced	Intermediate	Low	Total
Too much dependency on JTE	2	0	3	5
More motivation with NSTEs	1	0	1	2

### *NSTEs' roles as a 'charismatic' power and a motivational impetus*

As is shown in Table 1.4, seven out of 17 participants, especially the advanced learners mentioned NSTEs' 'charismatic' power or impact for being 'genuine' foreigners and recognize JTEs' main role as an interpreter. Four students explained that interactions with foreigners are so rare in their daily lives and become real only in English classes that they regard the experiences with NSTEs as valuable. Six students said that they find an enormous pleasure in encountering 'authentic' English spoken by an NSTE and a motivational impact of NSTEs' 'foreign' appearances. One student confessed his/her preference for typical white NSTEs who understand some Japanese ideally.

Although quite a few participants longed for foreign appearances to NSTEs, in fact, the NSTE in the study is a Japanese American from Hawaii, who looks exactly

like a Japanese. Two students clarified that they still regard him as an authentic NSTE since he does not speak Japanese.

As for JTEs, four students showed the negative image that JTEs might have near-native English proficiency but could never reach a native level in a perfect sense. Two students state that JTEs' Japanese appearance disappoints them with the association that JTEs are not different from themselves after all.

In addition to 'authenticity' or 'exoticness' of a foreign appearance and language, different perspectives and teaching focuses were also valued by several students. Two students admitted that they feel like trying their best to communicate with foreigners but feel embarrassed in making mistakes in the presence of JTEs and other peers because NSTEs' main focus is communication or content, not grammatical accuracy or form of English.

Table 1.4: *Students' perceptions of JTEs and NSTEs in TT*

	Advanced	Intermediate	Low	Total
JTE is necessary but NSTE is not	0	1	1	2
JTE is not necessary, but NSTE is	4	2	1	7
Both JTE and NSTE are necessary	2	1	4	7
Either one of them is adequate	0	1	0	1

## Learners' motivation and cross-cultural studies

### *Cross-cultural studies as new knowledge*

Table 2.1 indicates that among 17 participants, ten chose cross-cultural studies and seven chose conversation practice. As for conversation practice, four students emphasized the desire of using their English for communicating with foreigners. They explained that they are eager to try and present their English to NSTEs after learning grammatical knowledge mainly for high

school and university entrance examinations.

As for cross-cultural studies, seven students commented that learning cross-cultural differences was totally new knowledge, a fresh discovery and rather a big surprise, which increased their motivation dramatically. Quite a few students also found it interesting to see two teachers having different opinions and interpretations for cultural differences as well. To illustrate changes in learners' attitudes toward English learning, one beginning level student commented as follows:

English was a passport to a university or just something foreign to me until now, but I can see English and its culture as one and it is not one of the school subjects any more. .... I got motivated to study English through learning culture, because I can see something real in that.

Table 2.1: *Students preferences on contents of TT*

	Advanced	Intermediate	Low	Total
Cross-cultural studies	4	3	3	10
Conversation practice	2	2	3	7

### *TT as a motivational impetus?*

Nearly a half of the participants declared that their motivation and attitude improved after taking the TT courses. It is notable that all of the beginners reported that their motivation increased whether or not their attitude improved after the course. Concerning concrete changes in attitude reported by the students, a strong desire to make foreign friends was shown by several students.

However, six students reported that their motivation increased but their attitude to English learning did not change in reality. Four students confessed that the course interested them to some extent but not as much as to change their six years of hatred toward English and their self-perception as being poor at English learning. One of the intermediate students admitted that six years of hardships are overwhelming and cannot be compensated for easily, which makes him/her feel far behind and left out from other peers in learning English.

Table 2.2: *Changes in motivation in TT*

	Advanced	Intermediate	Low	Total
MOT increased and attitude improved	3	1	4	8
MOT increased but attitude did not improve	2	2	2	6
MOT did not change	1	2	0	3
MOT decreased	0	0	0	0

### **Discussion / Conclusion**

Among the 15 students who prefer TT to II, seven acknowledged the advantages of TT offering dual perspectives and cross-cultural interactions as their model. However, other eight students claimed that they would take II if their English proficiency reached a certain level, which implies that they see TT as a footstep toward II by an NSTE. Therefore, it is predicted that a main cause of Japanese learners' anxiety in FL classes is low tolerance of linguistic ambiguity or uncertainty and that anxiety toward NSTE themselves will be mostly solved if the anxiety of their linguistic

uncertainty decreases. Actually, the ambivalent attitude of students' admiration and anxiety toward NSTEs can be also explained by the notion of Japanese students' low tolerance of linguistic uncertainty. Since students' linguistic anxiety exceeds admiration toward NSTEs, they choose TT, not II. As a result, Japanese students prefer TT where they can enjoy the linguistic and psychological security offered by a JTE and the 'fresh' presence of an NSTE at the same time.

Interestingly, however, the anxiety of linguistic uncertainty was reported least by learners with low proficiency. Having a JTE who helps the students out of the helpless situations and anxiety in FL learning, they are successful in paying attention to what they receive, not what they lack. Thus, the merit of two teachers' different perspectives in TT (content) was reported mostly by learners of intermediate and low levels, while the merit of two teachers' interaction as a model (form of language) was pointed out by advanced and intermediate learners.

Another possible reason for the advanced learners' high anxiety is that they are more critical about their own English abilities. It is also predicted that students have a fear of making mistakes and giving wrong answers in the presence of many classmates, which would result in losing face and eventually a greater reluctance to participate in class. These findings of Japanese learners' low tolerance of linguistic ambiguity

in their psychological mechanism should be explored further with the socio-cultural theme of 'face' and also be researched whether there are regional differences in more urban settings.

As for TT as a motivational inducement, it should be concluded that a TT approach, which focuses on cross-cultural studies, motivates learners, especially those of low English proficiency. Although the self-report system in the interviews has limitations, the data of 10 students who prefer cross-cultural studies and eight students who reported increase of their motivation with improved attitude give some validation to the conclusion. However, we should consider that many Japanese university students of low English proficiency are suffering from the loss of self-confidence due to the six years of English education where knowledge acquisition is heavily emphasized. In order to solve these problems, I would like to make several suggestions. First, EFL teachers in Japan should recognize the learner's psychology and pay more attention to their problems. Secondly, we should adopt a variety of teaching staff, teaching approaches and contents of class. TT is appreciated ultimately because it is different from the traditional single teacher's grammar-translation approach. Thus, trying out new teaching approaches in classrooms may be able to recover students' attention and trust. In order to support those challenges by classroom teachers, educators' focus on entrance exams

should be also changed fundamentally. It is expected that the continued dependency on the grammar-translation method will remain unchanged until those educators make entrance exams consistent with this changed educational philosophy.

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