# Culture and identity: a lecture skills class

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In modern cultures, each person, to varying degrees, establishes her or his own identities—identity being both what or who the person claims to be and what groups claim her or him as a member. This paper reviews a university course on culture and identities in which students attend mini-lectures on cultural structures of identity (such as age, sex, race, and class) and social institutions shaping identities (such as families, schools, and peers). In the lectures students have a chance to develop English their lecture note-taking skills while at the same time talking about and discovering their own identities.

現代の文化において、人間はそれぞれ自分がどのような人間であるか主張し、またはどのようなグループのメンバーであると主張することによって、様々なレベルでアイデンティティを確立する。この論文は大学の文化・アイデンティティについてのコースに注目する。このコースの中で学生はアイデンティティの文化的構造（時代、性別、人種、階級）とアイデンティティを形成する社会的制度（家族、学校、同級生）についてのミニ講義に出席する。講義で学生はノートをとる技術を磨くことにより英語を上達することができるのと同時に、自分自身のアイデンティティについて語り、発見する機会が与えられる。

In modern developed cultures, each person, to varying degrees, establishes her or his own identities. Based on readings regarding identity extending from Martin and Nakayama (2000) to classic reflections by Eirkson (1968), identity, in the course under discussion, is defined as a story claimed by the individual and conferred by the group answering the questions, “Who am I?” and “What makes me, me?” The presentation reported on a lecture and lecture-skills course taught at a Japanese university dealing with the concept and practice of identities. In the course, students learn lecture skills while thinking about the ways that individuals and cultures create stories to answer the questions noted above.

In the course, students attend short, structured lectures. The first four lectures are on some of the cultural structures of identities (such as age, sex, social class, and ethnicity) which frame many of the stories answering the question, “Who am I?” The second four are on some of the social forces and institutions

shaping identities (such as family, schools, and peers) which frame many of the stories we tell and are told in response to the question, "What makes me, me?"

## Review of the Literature

Lectures are a central ritual of university learning and require special skills of the listeners, particularly when done in a second or foreign language. Significant work has been done on English lectures in foreign-language and second-language contexts by a number of researchers. Flowerdew (1994) and Flowerdew and Peacock (2001) draw together a number of perspectives on the issue. Of particular importance for the matters under consideration here, are the following articles. Dunkel and Davis (1994) point out the importance of rhetorical markers in lectures for EFL learners, Tauroza (2001) addresses the role of controlled authenticity for learners, Young (1994) draws attention to the importance of teaching macro- and micro- levels of structure and feature for EFL learners, while Waters and Waters (2001) emphasize the importance of integrating tasks into the lecture format. Also of interest is the work of Mclean and Ransom (2005) on culture and intercultural competencies for developing lecture-listening skills and that of James (2006) more generally on the ways students can learn to transfer skills learned in an EAP class to other academic contexts.

At the level of practice, works by Salehzade (2005), Nunn and Lingley (2004), and Jordan (1997, especially pp.179-192) provide examples of ways to use these insights to develop the lecture skills of ESL and EFL students. These materials helped me develop the course described below.

## Course Description

The lectures are seldom more than ten minutes in length. They are punctuated with short group tasks and discussions, as suggested by Nunn and Lingley (2004). Some of these tasks precede the lecture and are designed to focus students' attention on the materials to be covered to activate their existing knowledge of the basic topic. For example, the lecture dealing with sex-based identities starts with students answering the questions, "What do you think of when you hear the word *male*?" and "What do you think of when you hear the word *female*?" (See Appendix 1.) Other tasks are designed to elicit their responses to materials noted in the lecture and help them articulate their own stories regarding the topic. For example, the first part of the lecture dealing with sex-based identities closes with students doing the following task: "With your partner(s), briefly discuss the ways gender shapes personality and identity in Japanese society. What are the advantages and disadvantages of being male or female? How does being male or female shape your personality? How do sex and gender shape your position and chances in Japanese society?" (See Appendix 1.)

Such exercises, first, help students explore the ideas in the lectures. They also help students discover in what ways these ideas may apply to their own lives, experiences, and stories.

There are also short asides on specific listening and lecture skills as appropriate to the material at hand. It can be useful to regard these skills as either bottom-up or top down, following the metaphor suggested by Richards (1990), among others.

Some of these bottom-up asides focus on listening and lecture note-taking skills. These include bottom-up attention

to vocabulary peculiar to the topic (sex, gender, sexuality), particularly the top-down skills. Other bottom-up asides, following the observations of Chaudron and Richards (1986), focus on the language peculiar to lecture skills such as transitional words and phrases, linguistic clues for moving from topic to topic, and signals that the lecturer is about to develop a point with an extended example.

The top-down asides can include reference to content schema, including general information that students already possess about the topic at hand, for example sex. Alternatively, some top-down asides draw explicit attention to textual schema, as suggested by Long (1989), such as the structure of the lecture, the formal balance of information in a lecture comparing two items (for example, gender and personality traits in the US, feminine personality traits and their advantages and disadvantages; masculine personality and their advantages and disadvantages). (See the layout for the note-taking sheet in Appendix 1.)

These asides, though taught independently, are used interactively in processing the information in the lectures (Peterson, 2001). Doing this helps students improve their English listening comprehension and note-talking skills, and experience and recognize a variety of the English rhetorical forms and devices used in expository lectures.

To see more explicitly what and how the materials work, please see the following sample note-taking guide to the first half of the lecture on identities relating to sex, gender, and sexuality. Students receive the outline and use it to guide them in listening, taking notes, and discussing related matters. At the end of the lecture, students receive the script (Appendix 2, Lecture text), which the lecturer followed loosely. This gives students a chance, if they choose to take it, to check their notes with those of the lecturer and discover, for themselves, what to look for in future lecture classes.

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## Appendix 1

### *Lecture note-taking sheet*

IDENTITY Lecture 3 Sex, gender, and sexuality

Discussion

1. What do you think of when you hear the word "male?"

   What do you think of when you hear the word "female?"

Lecture notes

1. For the purposes of this class, identity is

Sex, gender, and sexuality strongly shape our identities. These labels provide powerful stories telling us who we are (and are not) and what we can (and cannot) do. But first, we need to be clear about what the terms mean.

2. The distinction between sex and gender.

   sex

   gender

3. Gender and personality in the United States

a. traditional feminine personality traits

i. advantages of these traits

ii. disadvantages of these traits

b. traditional masculine personality traits

i. advantages of these traits

ii. disadvantages of these traits

Discussion

2. With your partner(s), briefly discuss the ways gender shapes personality and identity in Japanese society. What are the advantages and disadvantages of being male or female? How does being male or female shape your personality? How do sex and gender shape your position and chances in Japanese society?

Lecture notes

4. Sexuality also strongly shapes our identities. Sexuality is a classic case of identity based on stories that we claim and stories that groups give us which tell us who we are (and are not).

a. sexual and erotic practices can attach to

i.

ii.

iii.

b. example:

i. stories an individual can claim to explain this

| | story | identity |
|---|---|---|
| a. | | |
| b. | | |
| c. | | |

ii. stories which society can give a person to explain this

| | story | identity |
|---|---|---|
| a. | | |
| b. | | |
| c. | | |

Discussion

3. Disuss the following situation with your partner(s). Imagine that a good friend told you that she or he was a lesbian or gay man? How would you respond? How would it change the way you treated her or him? What would your recommend she or he do? In what ways might this information affect your thinking about your own sexuality?

Use this space to take notes about your and your groups' thinking.

In short, sex, gender-based personality traits, and sexual practices give individuals basic identities to claim and society basic categories to answer the question, "Who am I?" The answers, however, are anything but stable. Recently millions of people have challenged the traditional relationship of the sexes and forms of sexuality. A result of this shift has been important changes in the status and identity of women—an increase in the range of possible gender roles, personality characteristics, and sexual practices; changes that open up new risks as well as new possibilities.

## Appendix 2

*Lecture text*

IDENTITY 3 Sex, gender, and sexuality

Lecture text

Sex, gender, and sexuality strongly shape our identities by providing a story we claim and that others give us telling us who we are (and are not) and what we can (and cannot) do. The links between sex and personality, and sexuality show this clearly. But first we must be clear of what the terms mean.

At the birth of a child, parents around the world ask the same question: "Is it a boy or a girl?" This shows the importance attached to sex—the differences between men and women.

Sex divides humans into two main biologically based groups—males and females. Almost all societies develop this biological fact into ideas of men or "masculinity" and women or "femininity." These concepts refer not to a person's sex but to gender—the culturally learned differences between males and females. In other words, male or female is what, by birth, you are. But you become a man or woman; you learn to be masculine or feminine. Gender thus refers to cultural characteristics such as differences in hairstyles, clothing patterns, social roles, personality, sexual practices, and other learned activities and traits.

Every society acts as if its particular version of masculine and feminine identities and sexuality are as natural as the biological distinctions between males and females. And each society expects males and females to identify with the "natural" gender and to take on the "natural" personality and sexual practices.

The United States allows great variety in the way people express their identities and personalities as men and women. But there are still general ideas about natural masculinity and femininity.

The traditional American woman is expected to be feminine. Positively, this means she is sensitive, caring, and affectionate, and, more negatively, relatively passive, conformist, and dependent. She knows little about sports, mechanics, electronics, and similar masculine topics. She lets men take the initiative and is careful not to threaten his fragile ego. She emphasizes romantic involvement in a relationship. She cares about how she looks, and her diet, makeup, and clothing. Although she may pursue a career, she is more likely than a man to have primarily interests in her home and family. Her self-image comes not from her outside achievements but from her success in nurturing her husband and children.

The stereotypic American man, on the other hand, should be masculine. He is self-reliant, competent, independent, and in some circumstances, competitive and aggressive. He keeps emotions under strict control and hides signs of weakness. He knows little about baby care, clothing, flowers, and similar feminine topics. He takes the initiative with women, and is interested in sexual gratification. He may share some authority in the home with his wife, but he makes decisions on major such as relocating to a different region. His self-image comes mainly from his outside achievements, and work is a major focus of his life.

These gender-linked personality traits each have advantages and disadvantages.

Women can develop a warm, intimate, and sympathetic personality without worrying about constant competition in the rat race. Their role also allows them not to earn a living if they should marry a man who is willing and able to support them. However, women face many disadvantages. They are cut off from the political, economic, and cultural opportunities that exist outside the home. Also a dependent person is not socially valued: those who rely on others for support—such as children, the handicapped, and housewives—are expected to submit to those their providers.

To a man, the main advantage is access to wealth, power, and prestige. He can earn more money, control more of his life, and experience a range of opportunities that are beyond the reach of most women. The main disadvantage is the tremendous stress that comes with a life of competition, repressed feelings, and fear of failure. The statistics tell the story. Compared to American women, American men have three times the suicide rate, three times the rate for severe mental disorders, and six times the alcoholism rate. There is a real cost to being in control.

Sexuality also strongly shapes our identities. Sexuality is a classic case of identity based on a stories that we claim and that others give us which tell us who we are (and are not) and what we can (and cannot) do.

Like gender roles, sexual practices vary greatly from society to society. Society can encourage us to attach our erotic desires to almost anyone—the opposite sex (heterosexuality), the same sex (homosexuality as in ancient Athens); any part of the body—such as large breasts (for Americans), small feet (an erotic feature for classical Chinese), or black teeth (consider Edo beauties); and any

personality trait. This provides a lot of room for identities to form.

To see this at work, let's take the common case of an adolescent boy interested in another male. He can tell himself various stories about this. If he says, "This is just a phase," he is identifying himself as heterosexual. If he says, "This means that I like boys as well as girls," he is labeling himself bisexual. And if he says, "I'm attracted to another male. I must be gay," then he is claiming a gay identity.

At the same time, the society is telling him who is. A culture (ancient Greece) may approve of same-sex relations between men while still expecting them to marry and have families. Or a culture (Islamic revival states and certain Christian religions, for example) may define same-sex relations as evil and violently punish them. Or a culture (American society, until recently) may define same-sex sex as sick and try to "cure" the people.

In short, sex, gender-based personality traits, and sexual practices give individuals basic identities to claim and society basic categories to answer the question, "Who am I?" The answers, however, are anything but stable. Recently millions of people have challenged the traditional relationship of the sexes and forms of sexuality. A result of this shift has been important changes in the status and identity of women—an increase in the range of possible gender roles, personality characteristics, and sexual practices; changes that open up new risks as well as new possibilities.