

Teaching Intercultural Competence: More Than Just Culture

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Effective communication in today's global society necessitates more than simple mastery of linguistic forms. With the growing diversity of language users, purposes, and domains comes a new complexity of ideas, assumptions, and cultural differences. This demands a more comprehensive approach to language education. In addition to linguistic competence, intercultural competence has become essential in order for individuals to effectively negotiate meaning with a range of interlocutors, and there are pedagogical implications for language teaching practice. The researcher looks at what global communicative competence entails and why intercultural competence is important. She proposes an "inside-out" approach to English education, encouraging students to recognise their own cultural filters in order to better understand those of others and be able to accommodate accordingly to facilitate effective communication. The paper describes a Japanese university course based on the inside-out approach and specific tasks and methods employed in the classroom to foster intercultural competence.

グローバル化の進展した社会において、効果的なコミュニケーションに必要なのは単なる言語能力以上のものである。言語の使用者や使用目的、そして使用領域の多様化が、言語使用者の思考や想定、文化的相違の新たな複雑化した状況を生み出しているからである。このことは言語の教育に、より包括的なアプローチを要請する。言語能力に加えて、多様な言語使用者を想定した異文化理解能力の育成が不可欠なのである。本稿は、まずグローバルコミュニケーション能力の特性を考察し、異文化理解能力の育成の重要性を提示する。次に、個々人に自己の文化的フィルターを意識させる「inside-out」アプローチを紹介する。文化的フィルターの意識化が他者の態度や立場、言語使用の相違の可能性の認識につながり、有意義なコミュニケーションを促進することを提案する。最後に、筆者が実際に日本の大学で行っているinside-out アプローチに基づくコースの教授法及び利用可能なタスクを紹介する。

ENGLISH EDUCATION policy in Japan has seen significant change in the past 20 years. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) has become a strong advocate of communicative language teaching practices and has recently implemented numerous "global" projects (e.g., Global 30 Project, Project for Promotion of Global Human Resource Development, Super Global High School Project, Top Global University Project) with the goal of cultivating students with global communicative competence. Government policies have progressed; however, there is some debate as to how far these changes have actually penetrated into classroom teaching practices (Seargeant, 2009). Teaching towards the goal of global communicative competence requires an examination of just what is needed to become a proficient global communicator and how English teachers can best cultivate those skills in language learners.

JALT2014 CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS



Global Communicative Competence

The concept of communicative competence is not new. Canale and Swain (1980) were among the first to define communicative competence in the context of L2 teaching. They identified three components: grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, and strategic competence. More recently, the Council of Europe (2001) has suggested that communicative competence comprises linguistic, sociolinguistic, and pragmatic competences. Both approaches recognise that linguistic and nonlinguistic skills are necessary for communicative competence. In the English language classroom context, linguistic skill clearly refers to English language ability. The nonlanguage components of communicative competence involve navigating differences between the cultures of the interlocutors and will be referred to here collectively as *intercultural competence*.

Previously English language ability and intercultural competence could largely be approached with a specific interlocutor or situation in mind, but the global nature of society today makes identification of a target interlocutor or culture virtually impossible. No longer is English use limited to encounters with or between native speakers; the majority of the world's English speakers now speak it as a second language (Jenkins, 2005) and a significant percentage of all English-language interactions in the world today take place between nonnative speakers (Seargeant, 2009). The number and variety of people using English yield a potentially endless list of possible interlocutors and domains for language use. This changing English demographic and loss of a clear target culture or interlocutor has necessitated a re-examination of what kind of English to teach and how to prepare students for the range of cultures they may encounter.

Approaches to Global English

One of the earliest voices in the global English movement was that of Kachru (1985), whose three-circle model of World Englishes recognised the changing face of English and its growing use beyond

traditional native-speaker countries and sought to legitimise and characterise emerging varieties of English. Kachru's model treats native-speaker English as the origin of other world English manifestations and the norm provider for communities that have adopted English as a second or foreign language. The model is inherently hierarchical and attempts to anchor each English variety to a specific community.

The EIL (English as an international language) and ELF (English as a lingua franca) approaches move away from a focus on specific community-linked English varieties to examine the language as it occurs in communication between different speech communities. Scholars in these fields largely endeavour to characterise some kind of universal English. Some seek to identify core linguistic features to use as a base model for teaching "global" English (e.g., Crystal, 1997; Jenkins, 2002; Modiano, 1999), and others attempt to create a common pool of linguistic tools from which learners can choose according to the situation and speaker with whom they are interacting (e.g., Firth, 1996; House, 2002). Both approaches rely to some degree on a basis of shared assumptions that the learner can refer to in choosing the most appropriate linguistic forms or tools to use and a certain amount of language stasis. In the global English arena, though, there can be no assumptions about common values or cultural backgrounds, and language is inherently dynamic, changing in order to meet the communicative needs of each specific instance of language use.

In another approach, scholars have moved away from the search for commonality, instead advocating the creation and teaching of entirely new models of English (e.g., Model of Japanese English [Hino, 2012] and Standard Nigerian English [Okunrinmeta, 2014]). These endonormative English varieties adapt the language in order to best allow expression of speakers' indigenous community values. Proponents of endonormative models suggest that nonnative speakers of English are often forced to tailor their ideas to fit the constrictions of the language, leading to a unification of ideas and

loss of perspectives. They support the characterisation of new local Englishes to suit the needs of particular language learner groups (e.g., Hino, 2012; Morizumi, 2009).

There has been much discussion about which specific varieties of English make the best teaching models, but regardless of which base is chosen, the same necessity for accommodation to suit each unique interaction will remain. Global communication is a dynamic process, shaping the language and being shaped by it in turn. Language learners cannot hope to control or predict the language of global communication; rather, they need to be taught to expect linguistic and cultural differences and be able to negotiate meaning in spite of them. Intercultural competence, then, may be a better predictor of communicative success than the level or type of language acquired.

Teaching Intercultural Competence: The Inside-Out Approach

Intercultural competence was defined by Fantini and Tirmizi (2006) as the “abilities needed to perform effectively and appropriately when interacting with others who are linguistically and culturally different from oneself” (p. 11). In today’s global society, intercultural competence is clearly important, yet the pedagogical implications remain relatively unexplored, resulting in a gap between current theory and classroom practice. In today’s global context, teaching cultural understanding in the traditional way is no longer viable. In the past, students could gain an appreciation of the culture of interlocutors by learning about specific native-speaker cultures, but we find ourselves now without a specific target culture that students can investigate or be taught about. Any attempt to account for the multitude of possible interlocutor cultural backgrounds is obviously impractical, and, considering the present interaction and fluidity between cultures, is perhaps not even relevant.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO; 2013) has taken a more personal approach, stating that “intercultural competences aim at freeing people from their own logic and cultural idioms in order to engage with others and listen to their ideas” (p. 5). This definition suggests that more effective interaction with others stems from a better understanding of ourselves. In order to be able to distance ourselves from our own cultural filters, we first need to recognise what those filters look like. Friedrich (2012) took a similar position, stating that “it is the more deeply rooted beliefs and values, the ones we are not even aware that we hold, that really make lingua franca interactions complex” (p. 46). In attempting to cultivate intercultural competence in the language classroom, then, I propose an “inside-out” approach, in which students are challenged to identify their own internal beliefs and values and consider how those beliefs affect their perspectives on the world. This approach holds that an enhanced awareness of their own cultural filters and those of their classmates will facilitate a greater cognizance of other approaches to communication, enabling students to better predict and prepare for potential communicative challenges.

The J-Ambassador Course

In 2013, Aichi Prefectural University started a new academic program under the auspices of MEXT’s Project for Promotion of Global Human Resource Development, with the primary goal of fostering global communicative ability in students. The J-Ambassador course was developed as part of this program, using the inside-out approach to encourage students to reflect on their own values and norms as well as those of others around them. The aim in this course is not to teach the students about Japanese culture, but rather to challenge them to decide what their own culture looks like and how it shapes their communication styles and worldviews. As students critically analyse their own culture, they are encouraged to identify stereotypes and possible external ideas about Japanese culture. The medium of instruction is English, and there is some

learning of terms to help students express their ideas, but the focus is on individual experience and opinions rather than on the acquisition of predetermined information or linguistic features. Students are encouraged to find ways to apply their existing language skills to explain their ideas and to lessen their dependence on dictionaries, focusing on the communicative process rather than on the “correct” way to answer a question or express an opinion.

The J-Ambassador Course has been implemented both as a semester-long course and as an intensive summer course, with between 12 and 15 ninety-minute lessons in one course. Students are encouraged to provide input in the first class in order to determine the topics to be focused on throughout the course. To date these have included food, communication styles, family, education, religion, subculture, folk culture, etiquette, geography, and natural disasters. Using these topics as a jumping-off point, students complete a range of tasks to encourage them to discover, express, and consider their own and others’ perspectives. Some task categories used in the course are outlined below.

Group Discussion

Emphasis here is on the students as experts on Japanese culture. Students are encouraged to share their personal experiences and ideas without reliance on a teacher figure to provide answers. The teacher takes the role of facilitator (and sometimes devil’s advocate), initiating discussion and asking questions as necessary to encourage students to consider reasons behind traditions or norms and other possible perspectives. Through extensive group discussions, students become more aware of different ways of thinking and more aware of their own opinions. In a class focusing on subculture, for example, student groups were provided with a list of social groups (e.g., *yanki*, *hikikomori*, *lolita*, *uyokudantai*) and asked to discuss what they thought or knew about each. Students considered characteristics of each group and whether or not they could be classed as

subcultures, with emphasis on sharing knowledge and ideas rather than searching for a definitive answer.

For the group discussion task, in addition to informal conversations, written opinion exchanges are also included to support students who struggle to move away from a focus on language and need extra time to formulate their ideas carefully in English. Students compose their texts in-class or at home and then spend class time reading and commenting on each other’s ideas.

Examination of Data and External Opinions

Whilst the importance and validity of student opinions is stressed throughout the course, concrete data is also useful to support students in discussions of topics with which they are less familiar. For example, in a discussion about religion, students were provided with government data detailing the number and type of religious organisations in Japan over the past 50 years. They were then required to identify trends in the data and consider reasons for what they saw. Using hard facts provides students with a way into the topic, stimulating discussion but still requiring students to come up with their own ideas about reasons behind the numbers they see.

Students are also encouraged to investigate a range of formal (e.g., international newspaper) and informal (e.g., YouTube video) sources to find out what other people think about Japan and Japanese culture. Students are challenged to consider what they read, see, or hear about Japan and to decide for themselves how they feel about the validity of ideas and information encountered as well as how to respond to them. For example, in a class discussing Japanese etiquette, students watched a YouTube video on the topic put together by an American high school student. Students identified the main points in the video, then worked in groups to decide which points they agreed with and which they did not. They were able to solidify their own ideas about Japanese etiquette; at the same time they gained some understanding of how outsiders may view it.

Posters

Excessive reliance on dictionary translations or Internet information can be a serious impediment to effective natural communication. For example, in a conversation activity about Japanese food, being asked to explain what *konnyaku* is caused many students to look to technology for assistance. Some looked in dictionaries and answered the question with “devil’s tongue jelly,” while others referred to the Internet and produced lengthy explanations describing the process of making *konnyaku* from konjac flour. Both responses required students to halt the conversation, and neither type of response was particularly conducive to a clear understanding of *konnyaku*’s taste, texture, or makeup. Posters are one way to address this reliance on external sources. Students are required to create posters to illustrate and briefly describe Japanese items or ideas (in this case, the main components of *oden*) without using full sentences and without recourse to their dictionaries. This encourages students to think for themselves about the nature of the thing they are trying to describe and how it may appear to someone encountering it for the first time. They must then tap into their available language skills to create a concise explanation. Students often appear surprised to discover that they already possess sufficient linguistic facility to complete the task and can do so effectively without their dictionaries. In the food class, *oden* posters yielded descriptions of *konnyaku* as “a hard jelly made from a kind of potato” and “potato jelly that feels like rubber and doesn’t have much taste,” both of which effectively communicate the essence of the food in a manner accessible to a range of interlocutors.

Role-Play and Conversation Games

Role-play tasks are useful in encouraging students to consider both sides of an interaction and create interlocutor-appropriate responses. A simple yet effective role-play has one student take the role of a non-Japanese host sister or brother and ask another student to ex-

plain various items represented pictorially on a page. In a food unit, for example, students may be provided with illustrations of *shiso*, *uni*, *chawan-mushi*, and *natto*, and required to use these as the starting point for their role-play. Students must consider the situation and converse about each item as naturally as possible. Rather than executing a strict question-and-answer routine, they are encouraged to provide brief answers and ask follow-up questions as appropriate to convey the desired information in a communicative and natural manner.

Casual conversation practice is also encouraged through communicative games, requiring students to deliver unrehearsed responses to questions about Japanese culture. Small group board and card games allow questions to be prepared by either the teacher or the students and reduce the focus on the individual and the perceived need to deliver “correct” answers to the teacher. The focus in these kinds of games is on the process of answering a question or responding to a challenge rather than on the answer itself. Employing a game format is useful in helping students to feel more relaxed and less inhibited when using English to communicate.

Communicative Projects

Project work is a powerful learning tool in the language classroom. The J-Ambassador Course aims wherever possible to include communicative tasks that reach beyond the classroom and allow students to interact with a genuine non-Japanese-speaking audience to meet a specific communicative goal. The nature of each project is necessarily different, depending as it must on opportunities beyond the classroom. In the 2014-2015 academic year, students engaged in projects in cooperation with the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), the UK University of East Anglia (UEA), and UNESCO. Each of these projects will be discussed in turn below, and photographs of the JICA project can be found in the Appendix.

For the JICA project, students planned and implemented a workshop with a group of Mexican trainees in which they discussed Japanese (and Mexican) subcultures. Students worked in groups to prepare information, questions, and visuals related to a topic of their choice; they also planned ice-breaking and closing activities for the session. During the workshop, Mexican trainees spent time with each student group, and many lively discussions related to such topics as *gokon*, *cosplay*, and idol groups took place. The authentic nature of the task proved an effective motivator, and many students expressed enjoyment of and satisfaction with the session afterwards, finding it a valuable linguistic and cultural exchange experience.

The UEA project involved students who were taking the J-Ambassador Course as part of their preparations for a summer university exchange program. Coordination with the UEA course supervisor allowed the incorporation of a series of cultural exchange sessions into the summer program schedule. Student groups were each given responsibility for one session and worked to prepare activities and resources related to a theme of their own choice. The four themes chosen were Japanese trivia (a basic introduction to Japan), architecture, eating etiquette, and festivals. The sessions were ultimately carried out with local students onsite at the UEA, and each involved very different activities. For example, the eating etiquette group began by introducing some key etiquette for eating out in Japan and asking for input from British students about UK similarities or differences. They then moved on to a chopstick challenge involving students in a battle to see who was the most effective chopstick wielder and finished off with a *temaki-zushi* party, where students prepared and ate food together. Upon returning to Japan, many students reported that leading a session had been challenging but rewarding, and some commented that they better understood the importance of flexibility and cooperation for effective communication as a result of the task.

The UNESCO World Conference on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) was held in Nagoya in November 2014, providing a unique opportunity for another group of J-Ambassador students to put their communicative skills to real use. Students composed a booklet for conference participants, including recommendations about places to see, things to do, and food to try, as well as useful Japanese phrases and advice on etiquette (in public baths, at shrines, and in restaurants). The emphasis was on simple and real representations of daily life in Japan that would be interesting and easily accessible to conference participants from a wide range of cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Conference organisers approved the students' booklet, and 500 copies were published and distributed to conference participants. The project even made it into national newspapers, where one student was quoted as saying that through the task she had come to realise that for effective communication it was more important to consider the audience and explain things in relative terms than to use long words or exact translations.

Conclusion

Intercultural competence is imperative if English is to be used for genuinely effective communication between members of different speech communities. In Japan, where a focus on linguistic form persists despite government policy supporting more communicative approaches, classroom-level change is necessary if global communicative competence is to be realised. Students need to be equipped with a greater awareness of their own culture in order to better recognise other, potentially conflicting attitudes and awarenesses. An inside-out approach to language education allows students to practice and augment their language skills through activities that facilitate a greater understanding of their own cultural filters, resulting in a heightened ability to appreciate, understand, and respond to a range of approaches to communication. By deeply reflecting first on their own culture, students are able to consider reasons behind their

own assumptions and to imagine possible differences caused by divergent individual or community histories and experiences.

The J-Ambassador Course outlined here is still young and is in a state of constant flux as new ideas are implemented and different project opportunities arise. Student reactions to the course have been positive, but provide little real information as to the validity of an inside-out pedagogical method in language education. There is a need to investigate the effectiveness of this approach in developing intercultural competence and to consider other pedagogical implications of the global English movement if language educators are to meet the needs of learners seeking to use language for global communication.

Bio Data

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Appendix

JICA Workshop

