



JALT2025 Plenary Speaker • Naoko Taguchi

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Plenary Session

Intercultural Competence in Language Learning: Challenges and Perspectives

As societies around the globe are becoming increasingly transcultural, there has been a keen interest in higher education to produce students who can function effectively in intercultural settings. Correspondingly, many universities situate intercultural learning as part of their strategic plans, promoting it through general education requirements, language courses, and study abroad programs. Hence, development of intercultural competence, broadly defined as “a complex of abilities needed to perform effectively and appropriately when interacting with others who are linguistically and culturally different from oneself” (Fantini, 2007, p. 1), has become an important mission of higher education today. Yet, many challenges and questions still remain when implementing this mission. For example, there is no uniformed agreement in definitions and constructs of intercultural competence. Methods and measures for assessing intercultural competence are diverse, making it difficult to choose one appropriate measure. Most importantly, the question on how intercultural competence develops has been under-addressed. In this presentation, I will first review these challenges with a survey of the current literature. Then, I will present my research, tracing students’ development of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) in an English-medium university in Japan. I will conclude my presentation with implications and future directions of ICC research.

Plenary Workshop

Teaching Pragmatics: A Case of Japanese Speech Style

Pragmatics is the study of linguistic forms, how they are used, and what meanings they create in social contexts. In this workshop, we will first look at the definition of pragmatic competence by studying three key dimensions involved in the competence: (1) knowledge of form-meaning-context mappings, (2) interaction abilities, and (3) agentic choice-making capacity. Specifically, we will discuss how these dimensions are reflected in Japanese speech style (i.e., *desu/masu* and plain forms). Then, we will examine interview excerpts coming from international students enrolled in a study-abroad program in a Japanese university. The excerpts present various confusions that the students experienced with the use of speech style in the local community. Workshop participants are invited to discuss the excerpts and think about what kind of advice they can provide to the confused students. The final part of the workshop involves materials development. Participants design an instructional activity for teaching Japanese speech style and present the activity for peer feedback.

Globalization and Intercultural Competence

In step with globalization, developing students’ intercultural competence has become an important mission in Japanese higher education. This mission is particularly evident in the context of English-medium instruction. This paper discusses three major challenges in promoting intercultural learning in universities: (1) defining intercultural competence and identifying key dimensions of the competence, (2) developing reliable and valid measures assessing intercultural competence, and (3) teaching intercultural competence and documenting instructional outcomes.



Globalization has brought considerable changes to the linguistic and cultural make-up of the world. National borders for languages and cultures are blurring as people around the world are more quickly and intensively connected than ever before. Amid these changes, there has been a collective effort to internationalize higher education so that we can produce graduates who can communicate effectively in the global society (Martel et al., 2021; Soler et al., 2022). Many universities have situated intercultural learning as part of their strategic plans, implementing it through general education requirements, foreign language courses, and study abroad programs. Correspondingly, developing students’ intercultural competence has become an important mission of higher education today.

Relevance to Japan

This internationalization trend is also evident in Japanese higher education (Yonezawa, 2009). Over the last two decades, the Japanese government has introduced various strategic plans and policies to develop Japanese citizens who can thrive in the international community. Notable policies include: the Action Plan to Cultivate Japanese with English Abilities, the International Students 300,000 Plan, the Global 30 Project, and the Top Global University Project. A common emphasis across these policies is English-medium instruction (EMI). Policymakers expect that EMI can help improve Japanese students’ functional English abilities so that they can commu-



nicate their expertise in the international society. They also expect that EMI can help expand the body of international students in Japanese universities, as they can earn credits toward their degrees while in Japan. Having both domestic and international students together on campus, EMI institutions are expected to promote intercultural development by providing a space for culturally diverse students to communicate using English as a *lingua franca*. The strategic role of EMI for globalizing Japanese higher education has been discussed elsewhere (e.g., Bradford & Brown, 2017; Hofmeyr, 2021).

Challenges in Defining, Assessing, and Teaching Intercultural Competence

Although the importance of intercultural competence has been recognized in both domestic and international contexts, challenges remain as how to nurture competence in higher education. One challenge is how to define and conceptualize intercultural competence. Intercultural competence has been studied in a variety of fields, including psychology, personality studies, international business and management, global leadership, intercultural communication, applied linguistics, and international education. Due to the interdisciplinary nature of this construct, there are more than 30 models of intercultural competence covering over 300 related constructs (Leung et al., 2014), making it difficult to come to a consensus on what constitutes this competence. A rare attempt to synthesize existing definitions was made by Deardorff (2006). Using the Delphi method, Deardorff documented a consensus among 23 leading intercultural experts, yielding the most agreed-upon definition of intercultural competence as the “ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one’s intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (p. 247). Almost two decades after Deardorff’s publication, more effort toward a unified definition is necessary.

Similar to the scope of definitions, measures for assessing intercultural competence are also diverse, making it challenging to choose one appropriate measure to use. In addition, the current assessment measures are primarily survey-based (e.g., Likert-scale items and multiple-choice questions), assessing participants’ perceived intercultural behaviors and attitudes rather than their actual intercultural performance (Griffith et al., 2016). Although surveys have a merit in practicality by helping researchers to gather a large amount of data in one setting and analyze it quickly, survey data may not reveal a

direct representation of participants’ intercultural competence because participants respond as they think they would do in imaginary situations. Performance-based assessments eliciting participants’ actual verbal and nonverbal behaviors can generate more direct information of what participants can do in a real-life intercultural situation. As a recent example, Taguchi (2023) used virtual reality simulations, where participants acted as mediators of intercultural conflicts on the spot and evaluated their performance based on key components of intercultural competence (e.g., empathy, perspective-taking, effective communication, etc.). Unique affordances of virtual reality—feeling of presence, multi-modal input, and embodied experience—added to the ecological validity of the assessment.

Finally, a challenge exists in the area of pedagogy. The current practice of teaching intercultural competence has been largely restricted to course design and materials development (Huber & Reynolds, 2014; Wagner et al., 2017). Drawing on the principles of experiential, cooperative, and project-based learning, teachers use a variety of activities, such as role-plays and simulations, analyses of cultural artifacts (e.g., films and images), and ethnographic observations and interviews. Although these activities are useful to develop students’ intercultural awareness and experience, it is important to adopt objective assessment measures to document learning outcomes so that teachers can communicate the value of those activities with various stakeholders. Several studies have used a pre-post design to document learning outcomes. For example, in Mu and Yu’s (2023) study, Chinese students studying business English were taught how to compare and reflect on cultural behaviors using role-plays and other activities. Pre-post survey data showed significant gains in knowledge of cultural distinctions and value systems. Students also demonstrated interests in cultural perspectives and products, understood the importance of effective intercultural communication, and developed intercultural awareness.

In conclusion, intercultural competence is an invaluable asset in today’s globalized society. Yet, various challenges remain in defining dimensions of the competence, developing valid measures assessing the competence, and teaching the competence with a goal of documenting learning outcomes. I hope that a collective effort among researchers and teachers across disciplines can address these challenges so that we can produce the next generation who can successfully navigate today’s intercultural demands.



Higher education in Japan, particularly EMI contexts, can serve as a venue to address such challenges.

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JALT2025 Plenary Speaker • Shoko Sasayama

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Plenary Session

Designing Tasks for Meaningful L2 Teaching and Assessment

The ability to communicate effectively in a new language is an essential goal for many second language (L2) learners. A key foundation for achieving this goal is the idea that learners acquire a language best by using it experientially to engage in and accomplish relevant communicative tasks (Dewey, 1938; Long, 2014). But, how should the tasks be selected, designed, and sequenced to support meaningful language learning? Drawing on research from instructed second language acquisition and task-based language teaching, I will explore key principles of syllabus and lesson design that optimize L2 acquisition, with a particular emphasis on the design of tasks. A critical first step towards effective language lessons is to establish clear learning outcomes in terms of target tasks—real-world tasks that students should learn how to perform. With these goals established, pedagogic tasks can be designed strategically to scaffold learners towards developing the language required for accomplishing the target tasks. We know from accumulated research evidence that by changing design

characteristics, we can alter the difficulty of a task and thereby encourage L2 learners to focus on different aspects of their production, comprehension, interaction, and learning (Sasayama et al., 2025). Effective lesson design also involves gauging students' learning through assessment tasks designed carefully to ensure meaningful progress. I will share actual classroom examples to demonstrate these key principles of syllabus, lesson, and task design in practice.

Plenary Workshop

Designing Meaningful L2 Vocabulary Instruction

This workshop focuses on the design of effective vocabulary instruction as a way of fostering learners' abilities to communicate in a second language (L2). We begin by reviewing the importance of vocabulary learning as a critical foundation for the improvement of L2 communication abilities as well as the different types of vocabulary knowledge, from receptive to productive, that are necessary for successful communication. We then consider approaches to teaching and learning vocabulary based on insights from instructed second language acquisition and task-based language teaching. Research findings indicate that effective L2 vocabulary learning relies on



repetition, active use, and contextual learning, with a focus on both word form and meaning (e.g., Nation, 2001; Schmitt & Schmitt, 2020). The question is: How best can these elements be integrated into an L2 classroom? Working with examples from the *Official TOEFL Vocabulary Guide*, we will explore learner-centered techniques for designing tasks, lessons, individual practice, and assessments that will support meaningful L2 vocabulary development. Given the growing role of technology in L2 instruction, we will also discuss how technology can assist L2 vocabulary learning, especially for self-study. Participants will be invited to engage in hands-on creation of their own teaching materials that emphasize the activation of vocabulary knowledge for communicative purposes.

Shaping Meaningful Language Education in the Digital Age

What does meaningful second language (L2) learning, teaching, and assessment look like in the age of technology? This article reviews some of the key principles of second language acquisition (SLA) and discusses how technology might enhance or augment opportunities for SLA in light of students' real-world, communicative needs and goals. It also explores potential challenges that technology presents and how we might overcome those challenges to make meaningful L2 education happen.



The landscape surrounding second language (L2) learning, teaching, and assessment has changed dramatically over the past 50 years. When JALT was first established in 1976, personal computers were just beginning to emerge, the internet and email were not yet publicly accessible, and computer-assisted language learning was still in its infancy (Warschauer & Healey, 1998). Now, half a century later, it is all-too-common to own a personal computer and mobile devices, and the COVID-19 pandemic has further accelerated society's shift to engaging in nearly every aspect of work, education, and leisure communication via online platforms. Social media has become prevalent in our daily lives, and the rise of generative AI has, with little doubt, completely changed the game. As this rapidly evolving state of affairs inevitably shapes how and where we communicate, it also raises the critical question: What does meaningful L2 learning, teaching, and assessment look like in the current era?

Before considering the role of technology in second language acquisition (SLA), we should first

review the most basic principles of SLA. The past 50 years has also witnessed tremendous progress in our understanding of SLA, with numerous theories proposed by various researchers and the accumulation of considerable evidence about language learning. To demonstrate how such core principles of SLA may be reinterpreted in the current context, here, I will focus in particular on three seminal ideas: the input hypothesis (Krashen, 1985), the output hypothesis (Swain, 1985), and the interaction hypothesis (Long, 1983). In short, accumulated research evidence suggests that input, output, and interaction are absolutely critical conditions for SLA. In other words, L2 learners require plenty of opportunities to actively and intentionally listen and read (input), speak and write (output), and interact with others for meaningful purpose in the target language, especially when communicative ability is the goal of language learning. In what follows, I will discuss how opportunities for these basic principles of input, output, and interaction can be effectively created in the context of today's technological advancements.

Input

With the spread of technology, it has become easier to gain access to authentic input in both oral and written modalities. Movies, YouTube videos, podcasts, news articles, and social media posts are now just a fingertip away. Even in foreign language contexts, learners can easily be exposed to real-world language use by a variety of speakers and writers. Although this availability of authentic input is certainly beneficial for SLA, it also introduces an important challenge: how to make input comprehensible to L2 learners. If choosing between audio-only input (e.g., podcast) and multimodal (i.e., audio plus visual) input (e.g., YouTube videos), opt for multimodal input to facilitate learners' comprehension of the content. Here, if the purpose is to push learners' language acquisition through comprehensible input, presentation of complementary information in multiple modalities (e.g., narration plus visual support that adds to information provided orally) lowers the overall cognitive load and thus promotes comprehension (Sweller et al., 1998). At the same time, care should be taken when using multimodal input. For example, providing on-screen texts, such as subtitles in the target language, is not always a good idea. Findings from multimedia learning suggest that concurrent presentation of redundant information in multiple formats (e.g., voice-over plus text that is identical to the narra-