What Does Teaching Culture Mean to Japanese Learners？

Yukio Hirayanagi

日本人学習者にとって異文化コミュニケーションとは
平　　柳　　行　　雄

Abstract

　　Language and culture are inextricably interwoven. A language teacher teaches covert culture in class, whether he or she likes it or not. There are three viewpoints as to how culture should be perceived. The first one is ethnocentrism. People perceiving this idea regard Japanese as unique. They are loyal to their group and easily become hostile to other groups. The second is cultural relativism. This suggests that foreign people should not criticize Japanese culture, in exchange for the respect for their culture. The third is multiculturalism, which should be taken by language teachers. Their perception is to get rid of stereotypes, using new communication style and critical thinking. A multiculturalist is the one who expresses his opinions freely and objectively about a policy of his organization, even if he seems to conflict with members. Using new communication style and critical thinking does not mean that Japanese must give up their own Japanese identity. Therefore, culture and intercultural communication should be taught to Japanese learners to help them become multiculturalists.

妙　　　　　録

　　言語と文化は密接な関係がある。言語教師は、好むと好まざるに関わらず、covert culture を教えることになる。この文化をどうとらえるかによって、3つの立場がある。第1は、民族主義であり、日本人は独特な民族と考える。また、帰属意識が強く、同時に排他的になる。第2は、文化相対主義であり、日本人は他国の文化を尊重するので、外国人も日本文化を尊重し、批判してはいけないとする。そして、第3は、多文化主義である。言語教師はこの第3の立場をとらねばならない。固定観念から脱して、違ったコミュニケーション・スタイルを取り入れ、演繹推理と多値的考え方という批判的思考力を受け入れる必要がある。このことは、日本人としてのアイデンティテーを失うことにならない。従って、日本人に異文化コミュニケーションを教える意義は、彼等が多文化主義者になるように手助けすることである。

What does teaching culture mean? According to Brown, culture is defined as the ideas, customs, skills, arts, and tools which characterize a given group of people in a given period of time (1980). Archer used the terms, overt culture and covert culture. The former is the one that is traditionally thought of as culture, including art, literature, history, and political systems. The latter involves cultural differences in social ritual, nonverbal behavior, communication style, and value orientation and is defined as the intersubjective world which is composed of small subjective, implicit, tacit rules (1994). Hyme states that language is inextricably a part of culture and culture of language (1972). Consciously or unconsciously, a language teacher deals with covert culture and has an opportunity to make students aware of the importance of intercultural communication in class. Intercultural communication is defined as the process of communication taking place between people of different cultural backgrounds (Shibata 1998). She also mentions that intercultural communication is different from comparative culture. The latter is the study of similarities and differences of cultures, whereas the former focuses on how culture affects the communication processes between people from different cultural groups. In other words, the latter is characterized by cognitive training, but the former focuses on being transformative. According to Paign and Martin, transformative is defined as altering students' thoughts, feelings and behavior by transcending their cultural boundaries (1983).

One of requirements of Topic Studies II at Osaka Jogakuin Junior College is to write papers in English, and in my class an assignment was given to write on intercultural communication. Some students cited the famous proverb, "When in Rome, do as the Romans do," and used it to support their thesis statements in their papers. I doubt the credibility of the proverb, because the underlying message is to make learners realize the importance of adjustment only when they are in "Rome." In addition, this proverb only focuses on what should be done and should not be done in the target country. The proverb does not make them pay attention to covert culture and but leads them to just compare cultures.

Credibility of the proverb, "When in Rome, do as the Romans do."

A Japanese high school boy who was supposed to study in the U.S. for a year came back to Japan without completing his plan of studying abroad. He did not get along well with his host mother. He belonged to an athletic club in his high school in Japan and was active in it after school every day. In Japan, he did not talk at home because he was tired from the practice, and because he respected the value that Japanese men should not talk so much. He unconsciously followed this behavioral pattern in Japan.

However, in the U.S., the totally different value, eloquence is respected more than silence. He thought that in the U.S., he had only to speak in English for communication. However, the host mother wanted him to talk about his school life in the U.S., but he did not talk so much as he should have (Hirayanagi 1998). He tried to do what "Romans" do when he was in "Rome," just as the proverb says, but it did not work well. One of the reasons why he was not successful was that he was disciplined by only cognitive training and that he was not aware of the necessity of developing intercultural competence. One component of intercultural competence is to be accountable. According to Wolferen (1995), accountability is different from responsibility. The former is the duty of an organization to account for or explain its policy, whereas the latter is personal duty. He argues that Japanese politicians and bureaucrats are lacking in this accountability and that because of this lack, misunderstandings have happened. The boy is a typical example of the lack of accountability.

People generally interpret the proverb as follows: when a Japanese goes to the U.S., he has to behave and speak in English, just as Americans do. The problem is that he was trained to improve his linguistic competence, to speak in English, but not disciplined to develop intercultural competence, that is, to accommodate critical thinking, deductive reasoning and multi-valued orientation and to accept other communication styles.

According to Hayakawa, a two-valued orientation is to divide the world into two opposing forces — "right" versus "wrong" — and to ignore or deny the existence of any middle ground, whereas a multi-valued orientation is the ability to see things in terms of more than two values (1978). One example is to attack a political administration but to praise its positive achievement. The important thing is to avoid pure "good" and pure "evil." Multi-valued orientation presupposes doubting and verifying credibility of what "everyone" else is saying or what is taken for granted.

Kawasaki argues that a Japanese delegation to any conference is called the 3-S delegation characterized by Smile, Sleep, Silence (1985). Japanese sometimes smile when it is not funny to them. They smile to gloss over or hide their embarrassment. In international conferences, they often sleep and are silent, which makes diplomats from other countries misunderstand them. These non-verbal behaviors prevent Japanese diplomats from establishing and deepening interpersonal relationships. Not only the Japanese boy but also Japanese diplomats do not appreciate the importance of developing intercultural competence. The following two types of people, that is, cultural relativists and ethnocentric persons, tend to have difficulties in improving intercultural competence.

Cultural relativist and ethnocentric person

Althen (1994) compares the three viewpoints of cultural relativist, ethnocentric person and multiculturalist. He asserts that the first will give up responsibility to judge competing views. The second has little difficulty making judgments because values are accepted unquestioningly from previous existing cultural constructs. The third will face a challenge in considering multiple perspectives and will be able to make decisions based on an assessment of the divergent information and perspectives (1994). According to Wolferen, the term, cultural relativist was created by an American anthropologist in order to wipe out his own prejudice. This indicates that one should judge people only by the criteria that are inherent in their culture. However, this was later interpreted as a neutral stance to be taken (1998). Some college students say that understanding and respecting a target culture are important and that, in return, their culture should be understood and respected by people in the target culture. To be concrete, Japanese students should respect American culture and Japanese culture should be valued by Americans. In other words, another culture should not be imposed as the only valid one. This is the idea that is reflected in the proverb I mentioned above. This comes from a false idea that accepting another communication style leads to disrespecting one's own identity. Sumner argues that ethnocentrism is defined as a syndrome involving three factors: loyalty among in-group members; hostile relations between in-group and out-group members; and positive self-regard among in-group members in contrast to derogatory stereotyping of out-group characteristics (1906). Ethnocentric persons are influenced by the idea that Japanese are unique by reading books on *Nihonjinron*. Sugimoto argues that they have been hypnotized by such books (1995). College students in my writing class say that Japanese have their own communication styles just like Westerners have their own, and that the Western way should not be imposed on Japanese. Neither a cultural relativist nor an ethnocentric person tries to see from more than one point of view. Neither of them tries to transcend cultural boundaries.

Communication style and Critical thinking: reasoning and multi-valued orientation

Communication style in this paper indicates ①whether one's message is explicit ②whether one is accountable ③how much one is dependent on language and on non-verbal behavior. Acceptance of and adaptation to those communication styles can not be done overnight. Students should be trained to accept them before they are

in "Rome." What they should understand is that using new communication styles does not mean that they must give up their own Japanese identity. Norris and Ennis refer to critical thinking as reasonable and reflective thinking that is focused on deciding what to believe and do (1989). In this paper, critical thinking is characterized by Westerners' deductive reasoning and their multi-valued orientation. According to Condon, reasoning is composed of three basic parts: evidence, warrant and conclusion. Hirayanagi states that evidence is particular statement and warrant is universal statement or prerequisite that one's analysis is true all the time (1998). Condon mentions that in other words, reasoning is a process which illustrates how these three basic parts are chosen and arranged in order to persuade an audience (1980). The way to develop a paragraph in English is very different from the way to do it in Japanese. The former follows the deductive reasoning while the latter is inductive. Japanese tend to explain things implicitly, without using concrete illustrations. Therefore, in my writing class, two things were pointed out. The first is that deductive reasoning should be used. The second is that the perception of problem-solving is important. What is meant by problem-solving is identifying problems, analyzing where they come from and giving possible solutions. In addition, evidence and warrant are not consciously used in order to persuade a Japanese audience. These two points were emphasized in my writing class. Some of my students, who were ethnocentric, seemed confused, because they thought that their identity as Japanese was being denied. One's identity can not and should not be denied by accepting another way of reasoning. Accepting another form of reasoning indicates the importance of seeing things from more than one point of view.

Condon contends that it is common and possibly dangerous to divide the world into only two categories. Among the most common of these "either-or" terms are good/bad and old/new (1990). Keizo Obuchi, the current Prime Minister of Japan, may be lacking in economic expertise, but he is said to be very considerate of others. He should not be judged as an incompetent Prime Minister by only one criterion. Another example is as follows: in Japan, the opposite of the term, "guilty" is *muzai*, meaning "innocent," whereas the opposite of "guilty" in the U.S. is often "not guilty." Do two words, "innocent" and "not-guilty" imply the same meaning? To be exact, the answer would be "No." Where does the difference between *muzai* and "not-guilty" come from? This comes from the fact that Japanese use two-valued orientation and that Americans multi-valued one. The multi-valued orientation tells us that "guilty" and "innocent" are placed at both ends of the whole spectrum and "not guilty" is in the middle.

Acculturation

Foreign language learning should involve the acquisition of the target culture. Schumann introduces a term, acculturation, which means the process of becoming adapted or assimilated to a new culture (1976). Brown states that culture shock is regarded as one of four successive stages of acculturation. He also defines culture shock as the phenomena ranging from mild irritability to deep psychological panic and crisis (1980). It is used, for example, when Japanese go abroad and find so many deep-rooted differences between their culture and the target culture. According to Brown, the first stage is the period of excitement over the surroundings being new. The second stage is the one of cultural shock. Culture shock is experienced by people who go abroad and are shocked by the differences from their own culture. In a sense, however, Japanese who have learned English have this experience, even if they do not have the experience of going to a foreign country. This is because they are shocked by the great difference in covert culture. Through language study, they notice that deductive reasoning, multi-valued orientation and explicit communication style are used among people who use English as mother tongue. The third stage is the one when one begins to accept the differences in thinking. Durkheim claims that concept of *anomie* or feelings of homelessness is the first symptom of the third stage, where the learner moves away from his native culture but is not completely assimilated in the target culture (1897). Lambert contends that a foreign language can be mastered with feelings of *anomie* (1967). In order to make decisions based on an assessment of divergent information and perspectives or to become a multi-culturalist, the learner has to go through the third stage of acculturation. This *anomie* is important, because this stage provides him with an opportunity to become a "marginal man." According to Sugimoto, this term was first used by an American sociologist. It means a person who belongs to more than one cultural and social group and also who has more than one cultural value, finding himself at identical distance from each cultural group (1995). This is something that multiculturalism education aims at.

On and *nemawashi*

According to Whiting, *wa* is a Japanese term meaning group harmony or team spirit (1990). Whiting defines *wa* as putting the team's interests and its principle or policy before one's own interests and principles. If someone breaks this golden rule, he will be excluded from the group, socially ostracized and become a "nail." The proverb, "The nail that sticks up shall be hammered down" can best illustrate *wa*. In

exchange, *wa* makes Japanese identify themselves with an organization and gives a sense of security to them. This is the relationship of interdependence.

According to Honna and Hoffer, *on* is the social and psychological indebtedness incurred on receiving a favor from those in superior positions (1992). People in lower positions are obliged to return the favor to their superiors. Superiors give their subordinates special treatments in exchange for loyalty given by them. *On* denotes obligation operating between a superior and a subordinate in a hierarchical structure. It is an example of interdependence, not independence. Decision making is another example of *wa* or interdependence. A person who is expected to propose a plan meets other people informally and then revises it, based on their advice. Behind the scenes, he gets the approval of everyone before the official meeting is held. Therefore, the meeting is just a ritual. This is called *nemawashi* or *ringi-seido*. This is based on the idea that confrontation should be avoided by all means and was originally designed to make everyone feel a member of a group. However, this also functions as something that discourages you from holding and expressing your own opinion because of the pressure from the group. This idea comes from unanimity rule, not majority rule. Democracy should be based on majority rule and respect ideas of minority groups. In this sense, unanimity or *nemawashi* ignores the principle of democracy. Miyamoto uses strong language and refers to this as "totalitarian," because open expression of critical thoughts is not tolerated without approval by the entire group (1995). This is another example of Japanese lacking the independence, needed to hold and express their own ideas. *On* and *nemawashi* are the examples of the overt culture of Japan.

Negative aspects of cultural stereotypes of Japanese and Americans

The following diagram shows cultural stereotypes held by Japanese and Americans. Decision-making and basis of employment are overt cultures and the others indicate covert ones.

Characteristics	Japanese	Americans
Fundamental Principle	*Wa*	Individualism
Interpersonal Relationship	Interdependence	Independence
Decision-making	Unanimity Rule (Bottom-up)	Majority Rule (Top-down)
Context	High-context	Low-context

Communication Style	1. Implicit (Indirect) 2. Reticent 3. Frequent use of non-verbal behavior 4. Almost no accountability	1. Explicit (Direct) 2. Assertive 3. Not frequent use of non-verbal behavior 4. Accountability
Critical Thinking	1. Inductive reasoning 2. Two-valued orientation	1. Deductive reasoning 2. Multi-valued orientation
Sense of Belonging	High	Low
Basis of employment	Lifetime employment	On merit

The risks of cultural stereotypes

According to Brown, cultural stereotypes are not necessarily bad. However, negative connotations of stereotypes can be found. One bad aspect is to make people not value other cultures (1980). Another negative aspect is that oversimplified concepts lead people to have a false idea of another culture and prevents them from expanding their perspectives or developing intercultural competence. Some Japanese are individualistic; they are explicit and assertive; they tend to think critically and be accountable. One example of an individualistic Japanese is Iwao Nakatani. He teaches economics and used to be a professor of Hitotsubashi University, one of the most prestigious national universities in Japan. Recently he was asked to become an executive of Sony Corporation. There is a provision that a state civil servant should not hold a position other than that of a public servant. He asked the Ministry of Education to permit him to have two jobs, because he believed that two jobs would exert good influence on each other and because he thought that the provision, which is behind the times, should be changed. However, it was not the Ministry of Education but the National Personnel Authority that objected to it, because there was no precedent and allowing him to do so would be against the spirit of the law. He quit the job of being a professor to prove that he is a man of principle. This resignation caused a great repercussion among Japanese people. Those around him may not have understood why he made such a decision, because his position as a professor was secure. Even if Japanese meet a company's unreasonable decision and policy, they tend to sacrifice their own values to those of their company. He did just the opposite. He said in a magazine article, "If no one dares to rebel against structures, a healthy society can not be nurtured." He is surely an example of an individualistic person, not an egoistic person. He is a model of a multiculturalist or a marginal person. People sometimes take individualists to be egoistic. An individualist is one who holds his opinion and expresses it freely. Even if the opinion conflicts with the policy of the

company that he belongs to, he will express it, if necessary. This may be seen as rebellious and disobedient. This is the reason why expressing one's idea is considered egoistic. However, expressing one's opinion in public is one thing and making a contribution to a company is another. In other words, it is possible to express one's opinion and at the same time, to work for a company. This is an application of the multi-valued orientation. Nakatani thinks that being unprecedented alone should not be the reason for making certain decisions. He is a man of critical thinking. He explains why he has made that decision, by writing an article in a magazine or newspaper or appearing on TV. He is a man of accountability. Needless to say, he also respects interpersonal relationships with people around him. He did not deny *wa*. Depending on the situations, he has used different values.

Conclusion

The purpose of teaching culture is to make learners multiculturists. It is not to make them ethnocentric persons, nor cultural relativists. An ethnocentric person does not value other cultures. On the other hand, a cultural relativist hesitates to criticize them. He just compares his culture with the target one and understands the differences. A multiculturalist values them and criticizes them, if necessary. In other words, he is able to see them objectively. How can Japanese become multiculturists? They can be so by accepting other communication styles and accommodating critical thinking. This is what happens at the third stage of acculturation. They can develop intercultural competence by becoming more assertive, explicit, and accountable, depending on context less than before. It may be difficult to accept and adjust to new communication styles, but it is worth trying. However, this does not mean giving up their own identity as Japanese. It means obtaining a second identity. Butler argues that one's identity, made up of many component parts, does not require that one aspect of identity be relinquished when another is learned (1998). In order to facilitate intercultural communication, it is meaningful to accept necessary communication styles and critical thinking. If the high school boy whom I mentioned in this paper had adjusted to another communication style and critical thinking before going to the U.S., he would have been able to enjoy his study in the U.S. What learners of foreign language need most is to develop the capacity to see from more than one point of view and to be able to accept that others may think differently from them. By learning a foreign language and a target culture, they should become involved in multiculturalism where more than one culture should be acquired. Therefore, teaching culture should be done to help them become multiculturalists or marginal persons.

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