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Teaching and Learning Culture with AETs

– What Cross-Cultural Pragmatics can Tell Us –

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This article aims to discuss the feasibility of applying the findings from cross-cultural pragmatic studies to the teaching of culture in team teaching. Referring to some studies on cross-cultural speech act realizations such as refusals and apologies, first, the present study examines whether the English textbooks used in junior/senior high schools in Japan appropriately illustrate examples of authentic pragmatic interactions. Secondly, it shows two excerpts of classroom discourse between a JTE and an AET in a team-taught lesson as a sample way of introducing sociocultural aspects of communication. Finally, this paper suggests how JTEs/AETs can cooperate to demonstrate and explain some possible causes of miscommunication in cross-cultural settings, to break down cross-cultural stereotypes, and to facilitate the development of cross-cultural communicative competence in English.

Key words : team teaching, culture, pragmatics

1. Introduction

Team teaching has been incorporated into the English classes in Japan for the past 10 years. Part of the reason for having AETs come into the classroom is to expose the students *and* the teachers to a different culture; that is, to expose them to different ways of thinking and customs. Team teaching can provide the students with excellent opportunities not only to communicate in more realistic situations than before but also to encounter different viewpoints.

However, team teaching has been mostly talked about in terms of its effectiveness in creating communicative activities in the classroom, and consequently there have been few systematic attempts to teach culture with AETs. In other words, the contributions of the AETs have been limited to controlled activities in the classroom, such as acting as models for pronunciation practice, as linguistic informants, and as partners for conversations based on dialogs in the textbook. AETs, however, can play a much wider role as cultural informants, describing and explaining the similarities and differences in cross-cultural interactions between the Japanese and speakers of English. In this sense, cross-cultural understanding is very relevant to team teaching. Therefore, this paper attempts to demonstrate how culture teaching can be incorporated into team teaching and how cross-cultural pragmatic studies can help us in achieving this goal.

2. What culture do we teach?

The concept of 'culture' in foreign language teaching is not new. In fact, raising cross-cultural

awareness or sensitivity has always been one of the goals of English language education, and with growing opportunities for cross-cultural communication, it has become an integral part of the English language classroom. As Tomalin and Stempleski (1993) point out, the study of culturally influenced behaviors should arise out of the language of the materials being studied, but should nevertheless be clearly identified and systematically treated as a regular feature of the language lesson. In order to introduce culture in a systematic way, we need to define what culture we intend to teach.

Many definitions of culture exist and they seem to have mainly been divided into two categories: small c culture, the anthropological sense as the way people live, and large C culture, defined in the humanistic sense as the major products and contributions of a society or outstanding individuals (Chastain 1988). Based upon language teachers' responses to the question, "What does culture mean to you?," Robinson (1985) divides the answers into the following three types: product (literature, folklore, art, music, artefacts), ideas (beliefs, values, institutions), and behaviors (customs, habits, dress, foods, leisure), and ultimately stresses the importance of broadening behavior culture, or small c culture. With the communicative trend in second/foreign language teaching, it was only natural that cultural goals should shift from a focus on the formal aspects of a civilization to an emphasis on the anthropological or sociological aspects. And later, the meaning of culture has been was expanded by Adaskou et al. (1990) into four senses: an aesthetic sense (Culture with a capital C), a sociological sense (culture with a small c), a semantic sense, and a pragmatic (or sociolinguistic) sense. Of these, the pragmatic, or interactive sense of culture seems to be most relevant to cross-cultural communication.

Here we can notice a shift in focus from the static to dynamic sense of culture. As long as we continue to see culture in the traditional sense of products and customs as static information, culture will remain as cultural background and its role in language teaching will diminish as the information exchange increases. However, if we focus on culture in the dynamic sense as knowledge and skills for successful face-to-face interactions between people from different cultures, culture will become a truly integral part of the language classroom as cultural 'foreground' rather than 'background'.

3. Findings from cross-cultural pragmatics

Cross-cultural pragmatics refers to the study of cross-cultural differences in the realization of speech acts (Blum-Kulka et al. 1989). It has been claimed that speech acts operate by universal pragmatic principles of cooperation and politeness (Brown and Levinson 1978); yet it has been claimed by others to vary greatly in interactional styles across cultures and languages. According to comparative studies of pragmatics between different cultures, each culture seems to have different preferences for modes of speech act behavior, and this leads to different, culturally determined expectations and interpretative strategies. Many cases of breakdowns in intercultural communication observed in 'Face Threatening Acts' can be attributed to such different expectations. Quite often, such errors have been considered to be due to a lack of grammatical competence; however, pragmatics, the study of socioculturally influenced behavior, has begun to shed a new light on other causes of miscommunication.

(1) Grammatical error vs. Pragmatic failure

The sense of 'politeness' differs from culture to culture, and this difference in politeness strategies sometimes causes miscommunication in cross-cultural settings; sometimes, typical Japanese polite language behavior, for example, in refusing, might not sound polite when translated literally into a foreign language. Or worse still, it might sound rude to people from other cultures, even though we use perfectly grammatical expressions. This means, therefore, that we need to consider the causes of miscommunication from two separate points of view: the grammatical and the pragmatic. According to Thomas (1983),

> While grammatical error may reveal a speaker to be less than proficient language-user, pragmatic failure reflects badly on him/her as a person.. Misunderstandings of this nature are almost certainly at the root of unhelpful and offensive national stereotyping:... Pragmatic failure, then, is an important source of cross-cultural communication breakdown, but in spite of this, teacher and textbook writers alike have almost completely ignored it. (Thomas 1983: 97)

Thomas says that grammatical errors may be simply forgiven whereas pragmatic errors (or 'failure' in her term) may increase national stereotypes, and might be even condemned. If the pragmatic aspects of language influence interpersonal communication in such a negative way, this suggests that the development of pragmatic competence is essential for effective cross-cultural communication.

(2) Sociolinguistic transfer of L1 refusal forms by Japanese ESL speakers

A considerable number of studies have been conducted to examine cross-cultural differences in realizing speech acts in native/non-native interactions. The most commonly used data collection procedure is called a discourse completion test (DCT). In this test, you are given a situation in which one target speech act, for example, refusing, is elicited. Below is a sample DCT to elicit expressions that refuse invitations politely.

Situation: A friend invites you to dinner, but you really can't stand this friend's husband/wife.
Friend: How about coming over for dinner Sunday night? We are having a small party.
You: _____.

This procedure has highlighted many interesting features of communication styles by Japanese ESL learners. Among these is the research into sociolinguistic transfer in refusing in English by Japanese ESL learners. Beebe, Takahashi, and Uliss-Welts (1990) summarize these features as follows:

(i) When refusing invitations, English speakers tend to give positive evaluation and a specific excuse, whereas Japanese speakers tend to apologize and give less specific reasons.
(ii) Japanese speakers tend to offer an apology far more frequently than Americans.
(iii) Japanese make different responses to high-and low-status interlocutors, whereas

Americans seem to react similarly.

Their study, together with other studies, implies that high/low social status difference between interlocutors plays an extremely significant role when Japanese ESL learners speak in English. Without being aware of this difference, they very often transfer the Japanese style when they communicate in English. This might cause serious cross-cultural misunderstandings.

Another study has focused on directness/indirectness features in communication patterns by Japanese ESL learners. Despite a general belief that the Japanese do not state their opinions directly, some research reports that Japanese do not always sound indirect or reserved. For example, Beebe and Takahashi's (1989) study concludes that: 1) Americans are not always more direct than Japanese, and 2) Americans are not always more explicit than Japanese.

In the previous section, sociolinguistic/pragmatic transfer was pointed out as a cause of miscommunication by Japanese ESL learners. However, pragmatic failures by Japanese learners may also be attributed to inadequate explanations from their teachers because teacher talk is the single most important source of input in formal classroom settings. Beebe and Takahashi cite evidence in support of this claim:

> Many Japanese ESL learners have reported to us that they were, in fact, taught by their Japanese teachers of English to 'be direct when using English'. And since this stereotype is probably wrong for certain situations, these students, may, at times, be shooting for a false goal. (Beebe and Takahashi 1989: 119)

Here we can say that pragmatic failures are at times 'teacher-induced' errors, caused by teachers' inappropriate explanations in the classroom. Before we seek a way of avoiding this type of error, we need to investigate textbooks to see whether they present adequate communication styles because textbooks play a significant role in introducing sociocultural aspects in the English language classroom.

4. What language have teachers and textbooks presented to students?

Differences in cultures are most noticeable when cross-cultural miscommunication takes place. Current English textbooks include a lot of factual cultural information; however, they do not include many situations where there are possibilities of pragmatic miscommunication. Textbooks and teachers are primary sources of cultural information for students. This section is concerned with the analysis of the sociocultural/pragmatic aspects of language that English teachers and English textbooks can present in the classroom. Here the analysis and discussion are limited to the functions of inviting/accepting/refusing.

(1) Analysis of English textbooks

To investigate the availability of pragmatic functions in English textbooks, the three most popular English textbooks currently used in junior high schools in Japan were examined. Since very few sample sentences were found in the main texts of those textbooks, the model sentences listed in the column sections are also included for analysis. Below are some sample expressions found in the textbooks:

Materials: Columns of function lists (invitations, requesting, accepting, refusing) found in junior high English textbooks (A, B, C)

(e. g.)

[Invitation + Accepting] —Let's go to the park.
—All right.

[Invitation + Refusal] —Would you like to play tennis with us?
—I'm sorry, but I can't. I have a lot of work to do.

(2) Results and discussion

Limiting our scope of analysis and discussion to the accepting/refusing of invitation, we have found 13 chunks of dialogues. The breakdown of 'accepting' and 'refusing' sentences/dialogs are as follows:

Accepting	Refusing	No Response
8	2	3

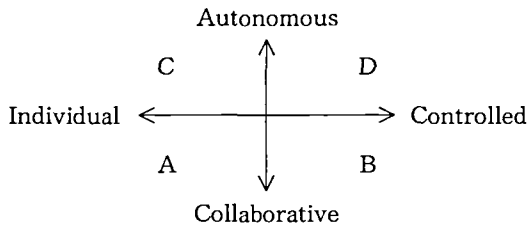
The above result shows that students learn far more examples of accepting than of refusing. Considering that cultural differences are most noticeable when cross—cultural miscommunication takes place, it would seem that a lack of cross—cultural conflict situations or critical incidents is one of the serious shortcomings of the textbooks. Due to this lack, there are fewer chances for teachers to touch upon the differences in communication styles between English and Japanese. As a result, students become programmed to accept invitations against their wills. Although accepting an offer/invitation is an easy way to keep a conversation going, students must be able to deal with negative face situations as well.

5. How can we introduce cross—cultural pragmatic aspects into team teaching?

Considering that the textbook cannot be an adequate provider of culture in the sense of communication styles, we need to bring authentic samples of cross—cultural interactions into the classroom. For this purpose, team teaching is ideal, as it provides excellent cross—cultural learning and communication opportunities for the students. However, how can we revise the present way of team teaching to introduce cross—cultural aspects of language into the English classroom.

(1) The JTE/AET role distribution in team teaching

Native speaker teachers are expected to play different roles in the different phases of a teaching procedure. Whether they work alone or together with JTEs also determines the degree of their independence and efficiency. There seem to be four primary types of roles that AETs can play in the classroom, as shown in the figure below:



The role distribution of AETs in team teaching

Types A and B are more or less in traditional roles in that the AETs are expected to take part in controlled classroom activities and to work individually or together with a JTE as a model or a conversation partner. On the other hand, types C and D refer to more or less autonomous roles that they are expected or encouraged to play. In other words, they can play more autonomous roles, expressing their true feelings and impressions, or they can collaborate with a JTE without being tied to any previously planned procedure. In teaching the function of 'refusing an offer,' they can not only show the suitable structures and vocabulary for this function but they can also tell when and in what order those structures and vocabulary are presented in an authentic discourse. As Kaneda and Fukazawa (1990) advocate, we should enlarge their capacities as linguistic/cultural informants.

> What is needed in team teaching in the future is to consider where and how the AET's nativeness is made best use of. If we regard AETs simply as a replacement of a tape recorder, or treat them as if they were, we would be wasting their talents. In addition to keeping AETs under the control of a JTE in terms of class management, we must find ways of giving them much more autonomous roles as participants or informants for a communicative classroom even when we are dealing with the limited amount of linguistic items available. (Kaneda and Fukazawa 1990: 146)

(2) A sample procedure to develop cross-cultural awareness

In this section, I would like to analyze short excerpts from a team-taught lesson as a way of introducing pragmatic functions in team teaching, controlled collaborative interaction and a more autonomous individual role for the AET:

> Source: A team-taught lesson at Mihara Junior High School attached to Hiroshima University by Ms. Yoko Yamasaki (JTE) and Mr. Ian Nakamura (AET) on June 25, 1995.

Excerpt 1: Controlled collaborative interaction between JTE and AET

AET : Let's practice saying these sentences. Please repeat Part A after me.
JTE : And please repeat Part B after me.
AET : I want to go to Hiroshima this Saturday.
STs : I want to go to Hiroshima this Saturday.
AET : Do you want to go with me?
STs : Do you want to go with me?
JTE : Oh, I can't.

STs : Oh, I can't.
JTE : I'm going to visit Ken's house on Saturday.
STs : I'm going to visit Ken's house on Saturday.
AET : Well, how about on Sunday?
STs : Well, how about on Sunday?
AET : Are you free?
STs : Are you free?
JTE : Yes, I'm free on Sunday.
STs : Yes, I'm free on Sunday.
AET : O.K. See you on Sunday.
STs : O.K. See you on Sunday.

In the above interaction, the AET plays the role of a linguistic model exactly as he was told and the students repeat exactly what they listen to. In this context, there is almost no autonomy for the AET. Although this practice is an important step prior to more meaningful practice, it can be frustrating for AETs to contribute only this in one hour of class time.

Excerpt 2: Autonomous individual role of the AET (A strategy in ESL refusals)

AET : Let me tell you two things about this story. It's very important, I think, in English. If you ask your friend, "do you want to go with me?", if your answer is "No," "No, I can't, I'm busy", please say why and explain to your friends, "Oh, I can't. I'm going to study today." or "I'm going to Tokyo." Explain why you can't go. It's very important.
JTE : "Why" means *'naze'* 「なぜ」, *'doushite'* 「どうして」

Here we can notice the different role that the AET plays. He is playing more of a leading role in talking about the pragmatic rules in refusals and also explaining these roles by referring to concrete examples in a more relaxed way. In contrast, the JTE plays a supportive role by giving a minimum of explanation in Japanese.

Furthermore, the AETs explanation is in line with a number of research findings. Among these is the following summary of research findings by Beebe et al. (1990).

[Refusing invitations]
English speakers:
tend to give positive evaluation and a specific excuse.
Japanese speakers
tend to apologize and give less specific reasons
[Refusing requests]
English speakers:
tend to give specific reasons why they cannot fulfill the request
Japanese speakers:
have a well-known reputation as tending to avoid saying "No" and using many indirect expressions.

Another point mentioned by Rinnert (1995) is that Japanese ESL learners may be misunderstood and considered rude without realizing it.

> As a result of these cultural differences, English speakers may think Japanese refusers do not really want to accept the invitation, and consequently the English speaker may feel rejected. In contrast, Japanese speakers may feel English speakers are egotistical, self-centered, or inappropriately personal. Finally, English speakers may not understand that their request has been refused—and may thus see the indirect refuser as devious, untrustworthy, or uncooperative. (Rinnert 1995: 10-11)

Excerpt 3: Autonomous individual role by AET (A way of filling pauses)

AET : And the number two point is many times in English, we use words like, "well," "uhm...," "err...," "let me see," "just a moment". So when we are thinking, we say some words. We don't have a long silence. So being quiet a long time, the other person feels nervous or bad or worries much. So if you have a long silence, try to say "well," "let me see," any words would do, just to fill up the silence.

JTE : この間、面接の時でも言ったように、黙ったままでじっと考えるのはね、相手の人に「どうしたんだろう」と思わせるので、"Well," "let me see"「えーと」とか、そういうね、なにか声を出して考えることも大事ですね。

This third excerpt refers to the importance of immediate verbal response when spoken to in English. By using simple words and phrases, the AET mentions the influence of silence on conversation and suggests effective ways to avoid a long silence with some set phrases. Later, the JTE reminds her students of the previous interview activity to enhance their learning.

The significance of filling pauses in conversation is also reported in many research findings. Loveday (1982) points out that Japanese learners take little cognizance of the effect of silence in interpersonal communication.

> Japanese performing in English often do not realize how much distress is caused by remaining silent for long periods. A hesitancy to speak out and verbalize one's thoughts and feelings may be interpreted in the L2 setting as coldness, hostility, unconcern and even wiliness. (Loveday 1982a: 8)

Also, Rinnert (1995) suggests:

> Japanese EFL students may find it advantageous to learn ways to fill pauses and respond more quickly to questions, and they may wish to become aware of strategies for getting the floor and preventing interruptions. (Rinnert 1995: 7)

The last two excerpts illustrate that native-speakers have a lot more to offer to us in the English classroom than is currently demanded of them. We cannot afford to waste their cultural intuitions if we are to make the most of their presence. Therefore, we need to create a supportive environment in the classroom where AETs can express their true feelings even though these may conflict with Japanese ways of feeling and thinking. Furthermore, JTEs also must have a wide of range of cultural competence to trigger native speaker competence. In the present article, the target speech acts chosen for analysis have been limited. In order

to increase our understanding of cross-cultural speech acts realization, we need to pay closer attention to what is available in cross-cultural pragmatic research and to see what is applicable in English language education.

6. What is available as resources?

I have already stressed the importance of eliciting native speakers' cultural competence and making use of it in team teaching. To collect the intuitive data, there are at least two sources of cultural information available to Japanese teachers of English.

1) Native speakers as cross-cultural informants

The native speaker teachers can play an indispensable role as cross-cultural informants. They can help Japanese teachers realize some covert aspects of culture which non-native speaker teachers are not aware of or tend to overlook. It is true that there exists a widespread belief that cultural knowledge is best transmitted by a native of the L2 culture.

But this is not necessarily so. As Loveday (1982: 56) correctly points out, non-native teachers may in some cases be more aware of deficiencies in their students' grasp of the target culture because of their intimate knowledge of the L1 cultural sphere. Native teachers often tend to take their group's culture for granted and, as a result, they find it very difficult to verbalize and present such essential background information. In fact, there is no native or non-native teacher who is a priori better equipped to do the job of presenting the L2 culture. The only teacher who can is one who is truly bicultural; in other words, one who is familiar enough with the contrasts between the world of the learner and the target community to not presume that these contrasts can be ignored. Non-native teachers are only in a better position in so far as they are better aware of the differences between the target culture and the students' home culture.

2) Cross-cultural (interlanguage) pragmatic studies

Pragmatic description has not yet reached the level of precision which grammar has attained in describing linguistic competence; however, a growing number of pragmatic studies provide us with rich sources of information. For example, Beebe and Takahashi (1989) and Kasper (1992) summarize the pragmatic research findings concerning over 10 speech acts as follows:

Beebe and Takahashi (1989)	Kasper (1992)
apologies	requests
requests	suggestions
refusals	invitations
complaints	refusals
disagreement	expressions of disagreement
expressing thanks	corrections
compliments	apologies
expressions of gratitude	expressions of gratitude
	compliments
	indirect answers

Cross-cultural pragmatic studies have proliferated over the past 10 years and are disclosing some interesting similarities and differences between native speakers and non-native speakers of English. To apply these research findings to the teaching of English in Japan, we will need more data focusing specifically on Japanese ESL learners. Without realizing it, we may be becoming cross-cultural stereotype makers by imposing our own stereotypes on our students. For us to be better informed, more and more teaching materials based upon real cross-cultural encounters need to be developed.

7. Conclusion

To sum up, we need to keep the following three points in mind when we focus on the cultural or pragmatic aspects of language in the English classroom.

1) Introducing pragmatic aspects into English language teaching should not entail students' behavioral changes. In other words, they are not something that we want our learners to imitate, but something that can help them to communicate more effectively, and as a result, to expand their chances of successful communication
2) AETs should be given more autonomous roles so that they can give cross-cultural explanations when necessary
3) Finally, and most importantly, the need for interaction and cooperation between the JTE and the AET cannot be overemphasized. Usually, the communication between them is one way; for example, the JTE asks questions about English and the AET answers them; the JTE asks the AET to give a model reading and the AET gives the model. In teaching culture, however, both the JTE and the AET represent their own cultures. Cross-cultural communication, then, whether successful or unsuccessful, should take place between the JTE and the AET. Their communication and miscommunication can be good sources of cultural information.

Ultimately, we are all seeking smooth social interaction and harmonious relations in oral and written communication. Through the application of research findings into culturally influenced communication patterns and pragmatic miscommunication, team teaching can play a wider role in achieving these closely intertwined aims: raising cultural awareness and promoting language learning.

Notes

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