

A Study on the Development of the Japanese EFL Learner's Intercultural Competence:

With Reference to the Aims of Intercultural
Education within Foreign Language Education

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1. Introduction

Several years have passed since terms such as 'intercultural communication' and 'intercultural understanding' became buzzwords, and since such terms came to describe one of the aims of foreign language education. However, when a program of foreign language education uses these terms, it is, in most cases, not clear what the aims of that program really are. Various scholars have used the terms quite subjectively with different meanings. The present study explores and discusses what the aims of intercultural education should be within the framework of foreign language education. First, in Section 2, after defining the basic terms, the aims¹ of intercultural education will be discussed by dividing them into three subordinate domains based on previous studies. Then, in Section 3, the aims of foreign language education will be examined by referring to three subordinate domains based on *the Course of Studies* of Japan and previous studies. In Section 4, these two aims will be compared and areas of overlap described. Finally, Section 5 will describe the aims of intercultural education within the framework of foreign language education, and look into remaining issues.

2. The Aims of Intercultural Education

First of all, 'intercultural education' has to be defined. According to Watanabe (1992:2), it is "the education program or methodology which aims at the development of the learner's competence to interact properly with the people, organization and society whose cultural background is different from that of the learner", and it includes such similar concepts as 'culture learning', 'cross-cultural training' and 'intercultural training'². The learner's competence which is developed in intercultural education is called 'intercultural competence'³ (e.g. Yamagishi et al. 1992). That is to say, the main aim of intercultural education is the development of the learner's intercultural competence.

In discussions on the aims of intercultural education, three domains, namely, 'knowledge', 'affect' and 'skill', are often mentioned (e.g. Jarvis 1977; Ruben 1989). However, it is not easy to make a clear-cut differentiation between the 'knowledge' and 'skill' domains when studying the aims of intercultural education, because the 'skill' domain – 'what the learner should be able to do' is often based on the 'knowledge' domain – 'what the learner should know'. In other words, these two domains are not distinctive ones; rather, they are complementary to each other. That is why, in this paper, 'knowledge' and 'skill' domains are

combined. The formula of the definition of these two domains in this paper is [knowledge + skill] = [the knowledge about the target culture] + [the knowledge about how to behave appropriately in the target culture] + [the skill to take advantage of those two bodies of knowledge]. In addition to knowledge + skill and affective domains, the acquisition of learning strategies also plays an important role in the aims of intercultural education (e.g. Seelye 1984; Byram et al. 1991). Thus, in the following sections, the aims of intercultural education are divided into three domains: the domain of knowledge and skill, the affective domain and the domain of learning strategies.

(1) The Domain of Knowledge and Skill

As mentioned above, this domain consists of knowledge about the target culture, knowledge about how to behave appropriately in the target culture and the skill to take advantage of those two bodies of knowledge.

Chastain (1988) gives an examples of the factors of 'knowledge of the target culture'. In his study, he presents two concepts which are still useful today when discussing intercultural education. These are 'small c culture' and 'large C Culture'. The former is "the way people live"; the latter is "the economic, social, and political history and the great politicians, heroes, writers, and artists of the country" (Chastain 1988:302-303). Adaskou et al. (1990) expand the concept suggested by Chastain and propose 'semantic sense' and 'pragmatic (sociolinguistic) sense'. The first is defined as "the conceptual system embodied in the language and, according to the Whorf-Sapir Hypothesis, conditioning all our perceptions and our thought process"; the second is defined as "the background knowledge, social skills and paralinguistic skills that, in addition to mastery of the language code, make possible successful communication" (Adaskou et al. 1990:3-4).

Examples of factors of 'knowledge about how to behave appropriately in the target culture' and 'the skill to take advantage of those two bodies of knowledge' are found in Nakanishi (1991). Six desirable and effective behavioral characteristics which Japanese people should develop in intercultural situations are extracted in his survey: the abilities to express oneself verbally, to get rid of stress, to solve problems effectively through communication, to behave autonomously, to deal with interpersonal conflicts and to get involved actively in unknown and different circumstances.

(2) The Affective Domain

An example of the factors in the affective domain of the aims in the intercultural education are found in Cui & Berg (1991). They present four components of this domain: tolerance, empathy for culture, empathy for working style and awareness of cultural difference.

(3) The Domain of Learning Strategies

The importance for the learners in intercultural education to acquire learning strategies has been argued recently. Byram et al. (1991), for example, insist that the learners should go through two stages: 'cultural experience' and 'cultural awareness'. Through these processes, the learners are expected to study the methods of carrying out ethnographic studies as one of the culture learning strategies. After that, what the learners acquire from their ethnographic

research becomes part of the resources which also include other information such as the comments of anthropologists. Using these resources, the learners compare the target culture with their own culture.

3. The Aims of Foreign Language Education

This paper regards *the Course of Studies* of Japan as an example of the aims of foreign language education. According to Monbusho (1989:6), the basic principle of the improvement of *the Course of Studies* for foreign language education in senior high school is as follows:

The development of communicative competence_a and basis of international understanding_d should be especially emphasized throughout the curriculum of junior and senior high school in order to cope with the advance of internationalization and to develop the ability which is necessary to live in the international community_d. For this purpose, the contents of teaching should be improved to regard listening and speaking activities as more important without neglecting reading and writing activities. While the contents of teaching should be selective and clear enough for teaching to become more appropriate according to the stages of learners' development, various ways of teaching should be available depending on the actual circumstances of the students_c. Furthermore, a positive attitude toward foreign language studying should be cultivated_b; the practical ability to use the foreign language should be acquired_a; the interest in and understanding of foreign countries should be enhanced_{b, d} (Emphasis added).

The letters at the side of each underline correspond to four domains in the aims of foreign language education. These four domains are (a) the domain of communicative competence, (b) the affective domain, (c) the domain of learning strategies⁴ and (d) the domain of international understanding. In the following sections, the domains (a)(b) and (c) will be considered so that our vague understanding of the nature of domain (d) can be improved.

(1) The Domain of Communicative Competence

According to Hymes (1972), [communicative competence] = [the knowledge of the grammatical rules] + [the knowledge of the rules to use the language] + [the ability to take advantage of those two bodies of knowledge]. Canale (1983) based on Canale & Swain (1980) states that communicative competence consists of four dimensions, which are grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse and strategic competence. The present study follows the definitions of the above three studies. The four subordinate categories in Canale (1983) are reviewed below.

(a) Grammatical Competence

This is the competence concerning grammar, and includes phonology, orthography, vocabulary, morphology and syntax. Among these aspects, it has often been said that vocabulary and culture teaching can be united (e.g. Halverson 1985; Spinelli & Siskin 1992).

(b) Sociolinguistic Competence

This is the competence to express and understand “appropriate social meanings (that is, communicative functions, attitudes and topics) in different sociolinguistic contexts” and “appropriate grammatical forms for different communicative functions in different sociolinguistic contexts” (Canale 1983:23). This definition means that knowledge of target culture is indispensable for sociolinguistic competence.

(c) Discourse Competence

This is the competence concerning cohesion and coherence. According to the ‘contrastive rhetoric’ supported by figures like Kaplan (1987), cohesion is defined by the cultural background of the user of the language. Coherence “may be based on the speakers’ shared knowledge” (Richards et al. 1992: 61). In other words, if the cultural background of the participants in a conversation is different and if their knowledge is not shared among them, there can be a communication breakdown.

(d) Strategic Competence

This is the competence to compensate for the lack of other kinds of competence. Gestures and rephrasing are included as examples of this. The means of non-verbal communication can be different depending on the speakers’ cultural background.

(2) The Affective Domain

Gardner & MacIntyre (1993) extract three learners’ affective factors which influence foreign language study: attitudes, motivation and anxiety. These affective factors are classified in this study according to two objectives. One is the target language and target language learning; the other is the target culture and target culture learning. Both of these two objectives are included in the affective domain. The affective factors concerning the target culture and target culture learning are mentioned here because of what Gardner & Lambert (1959) say. They conclude that the learners who have integrative motivation, that is, those who wish to communicate with foreigners and to understand foreign culture, study the target language more than those who have instrumental motivation⁵. Thus the affective factors concerning the target culture and target culture learning cannot be excluded from this domain.

(3) The Domain of Learning Strategies

O’Malley et al. (1985) present three learning strategies which are further divided into twenty-six subordinate strategies. The three strategies are metacognitive strategies, cognitive strategies and social mediation. Metacognitive strategies include self-management, advance preparation, self-monitoring and so on. Examples of the more specific cognitive strategies are repetition, translation and note-taking. Social mediation includes the strategies required to cooperate with other learners. Metacognitive strategies, social mediation and most of the cognitive strategies can be common to both foreign language and intercultural education, but some of the cognitive strategies are peculiar to foreign language education.

4. A Comparison of the Aims of Foreign Language and Intercultural Education

As discussed in the previous section, communicative competence is the knowledge of the grammatical rules, the knowledge of the rules to use the language and the ability to take advantage of these two bodies of knowledge. These components correspond to the contents of the domain of knowledge/skill domain in intercultural education which was considered in Section 2, that is, the knowledge about the target culture, the knowledge about how to behave appropriately in the target culture and the skill to take advantage of these two bodies of knowledge. The affective domain of foreign language education is equivalent to the affective domain of intercultural education. In addition, the importance of acquiring learning strategies is insisted upon in both foreign and intercultural education. The correspondence of the domains of the aims in foreign and intercultural education is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. The correspondence of the domains of the aims in foreign and intercultural education

Foreign language education	Intercultural education
The domain of communicative competence	The domain of knowledge and skill
The affective domain	The affective domain
The domain of learning strategies	The domain of learning strategies

Because of the equivalence, it is possible to see an overlap of the aims of foreign language education with those of intercultural education. Figure 1 shows that correspondence. In Figure 1, the further to the right the factor is situated, the more culture-bound that factor is.

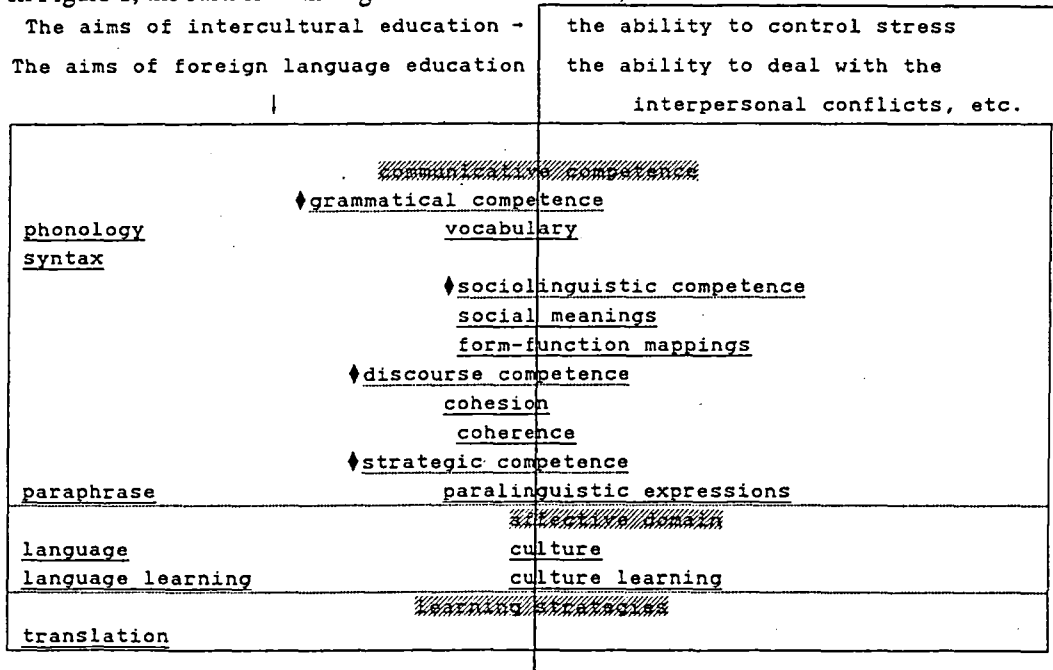


Figure 1. A comparison of the aims of foreign language and intercultural education

5. Conclusion

In order to develop the learner's intercultural competence, foreign language education has to pay more attention to the area where the two rectangles overlap in Figure 1. Summing up Figure 1, Table 2 presents what foreign language education should focus on in order to develop the learner's intercultural competence.

Table 2. The points which foreign language education should focus on in order to develop the learner's intercultural competence

1) The domain of communicative competence
Vocabulary
Social meanings and form-function mappings
Cohesion and coherence
Paralinguistic expressions
2) The affective domain
The affective factors concerning the target culture and target culture learning
3) The domain of learning strategies

This study is still at an early stage; it is of course necessary to verify its premises through empirical research. In addition, syllabus design, methodology, material development and testing of intercultural education within the framework of foreign language education have to be discussed.

Notes

1. In this paper, the term 'aims' means 'general objectives' which are longer-term objectives than 'specific objectives' or simply 'objectives'. This definition follows Richards et al. (1992).
2. 'Multi-cultural education', which is often confused with intercultural education, is "the education which respects the ethnicity, that is, ethnic and cultural feeling of identification and cultural characteristics of the children who belong to socially weak groups like minorities and immigrants, and provides them with the equal opportunities to receive their education (Ebuchi 1993:6)". Thus those two concepts have to be differentiated.
3. There are concepts similar to intercultural competence like 'cultural and intercultural competence' (Collier 1989) and 'cross-cultural competence' (Ruben 1989), but the differences between the concepts are not clear and the terms are generally used interchangeably.
4. The reason why the availability of various ways of teaching leads to the importance of acquiring learning strategies is explained, for example, in Takatsuka (1993). He writes that the education which is appropriate to the individuality of each learner is difficult through a teacher-centered approach, and that the autonomy of the learners, that is, self-education, is necessary. That is why the acquisition of learning strategies by each learner is important.
5. Gardner & Lambert (1972) remark that the learners who have strong instrumental motivation study the target language better than those who have weak integrative motivation. This means that care should be taken when generalizing the findings of Gardner & Lambert (1959).

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