CROSS CULTURAL DISCOURSE IN THE EDUCATIONAL SETTING

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Abstract
In numerous articles in the books related situation, which were introduced or mentioned there are some indications of the educational problems caused by the reason that the children are not culturally oriented to the ways in which the classroom learning is conducted. In the adult education field, I had many chances to see the difficulties in class for both the foreign teachers and the students created or caused by the cultural differences. The college had about 30 foreign teachers, Americans, British, Indian, Australian and Chinese, who were teaching English. Also, I had an opportunity to attend Cambria Adult School in downtown Los Angeles and Imperial Beach Adult School in San Diego and I experienced the entirely different English classes as a student and saw many Japanese students learning English in the U.S.A. Through these experiences, the writer firmly believes that the cultural differences between the Western countries and Japan play an important role in English teaching in Japan.

I. Teaching English in Japan
In this paper, I wish to discuss the methods and complications related to teaching English at the tertiary and adult education level in Japan. In addition, I will show how the learning process is being greatly affected by Japanese social conditions, cultural backgrounds, language and English education goals, and the kinds of discourse that are occurring. I would also like to compare the discourse patterns and behaviors of Japanese students learning English in Japan with those of Japanese students learning in America. In order to elaborate on my conclusions I am using Baldi., Philips’ article entitled ‘Participant Structures and Communicative Competence: Warm Springs Children in Community and Classroom’ as a means of comparison, especially “Participant Structures.”

In recent years, a lot of teachers have been teaching the language yet it has been said it is also desirable to teach about the language. An aspect of teaching the language in a broader sense, is teaching the cultural aspects of the language. Language reflects, in varying degrees, aspects of society. Such aspects include daily behavior, customs, ways of doing things, ways of thinking, and belief of the people of the society, besides the climates and other aspects of the natural environment of the society in which the language is spoken. Thus a foreign language reflects in varying degrees, aspects of the societies of the foreign country. Therefore, teaching a foreign language is not merely teaching linguistic expressions (forms and meanings) but includes teaching of related cultural aspects. Even the teaching of the meaning of a linguistic form often is not complete without referring to the cultural component of the meaning.” (Ogasawara, 1978)
II. Attitude in Classroom

As Japanese students easily accept their teacher as a director in classroom in most of the cases, they respect a foreign teacher, teaching in Japan, as much as they respect a Japanese teacher. So it is rather easy for a foreign teacher to take the lead in class as a teacher and an informant of his culture. Because of the emphasis on teaching about the language, many schools in Japan encourage their foreign teachers to teach their cultures too. And Japanese students, who are especially seated for English conversation class taught by foreign teachers, are expected to soak themselves into a different culture as much as possible in class.

English is one of the compulsory subjects in junior and senior high schools in Japan. Since more than 90% of junior high school students are said to go on to high school in which they learn English for 6 years in total. However, many people ask why Japanese are so poor at speaking English. I think there are many answers for this question. I have listed 3 main reasons below:
1. The cultural differences between Japan and Western countries.
2. The two languages. Japanese and English, have nothing in common concerning their origins and are very different from each other.
3. Japanese entrance examinations to universities and colleges put too much stress on the knowledge of English grammar and structure.

As for No.1, the cultural differences between Japan and Western countries, "The difficulties that Japanese have in speaking English may be strongly cultural in origin rather than linguistic." (Peterson, 1978)

To a foreign teacher of English, it often seems that the typical Japanese student shows a great deal of reluctance to speak in class. If a teacher pushes his students too strongly, there may be little response from them and the students seldom exchange their ideas freely in class. Even good students in class usually keep silence in a discussion and talk about the discussion topic after the class. When students are asked why they do not speak in class, they usually give a teacher no answer but a smile. Japanese often smile in a very serious situation, which is difficult for foreigners to understand. It is said that Japanese do this to make others feel at home. But a smile can be uncomfortable when foreigners do not understand its meaning. I have often seen foreign teachers puzzled about students' smiles in class and they ask Japanese fellow workers the reason.

If a teacher is lucky enough to have students who volunteer to answer his or her questions, other students may exclaim, "Why do you speak up in class?" The students may say that in school they concentrated mainly on reading, writing and grammar ... not speaking. In addition, most students are shy and fear making mistakes. They do not usually enjoy talking in a classroom situation. Unless these common tendencies of Japanese students are well informed to a new foreign teacher, who teaches an English conversation class, he is sure to feel that his students are not eager to learn English or he may think that his skills to control his class are inefficient.

Teachers must also understand the students' lack of confidence when stating opinions. To exchange one's ideas frankly with another would be considered self-assertive or impolite. "As I grew up, my parents taught me to keep my own thoughts to myself if I did not agree with other people. It is very important, they said, that my actions and thoughts be in harmony with the actions and thoughts of other people with whom I have a personal relationship, and to subordinate myself to our family and the school and my company." (Halloran, 1971)
III. Ideas Towards Class Interaction

In addition, Japanese students, through their school years, have not been encouraged to ask questions, give their opinions, and discuss problems frankly. "...I came to know that in school students are never taught to ask a teacher questions, a teacher talks and students take notes. That is all. Even in my class, they never asked questions. If I say "Do you understand?" everyone nods "Yes, yes, we understand." But I always found they did not understand. Their nodding usually means they are listening to what I am saying. One of the teachers I knew once, at the end of his class, said, "Next time, and please bring Fuitexic to class." Of course "Fujitexic" is not a word. Again he said "Do you understand what Fuitexic is?" And then everyone nodded "Yes, yes, we will." After a couple minutes some of them were trying to find it in a dictionary but nobody asked what it was. Finally the teacher said, "See what I mean? You have to ask a question." (Shooldt : Interview on March 7, 1983)

In Japan, a teacher used to be one of the symbols of authority not very long ago. Teaching was called "A holy profession." It was beyond students to give their own opinions to what a teacher was lecturing on in class. In recent years, Japanese do not take teaching as seriously as they used to do, however a teacher is a symbol of power in class and is supposed to know everything about his or her lecturing matter. Consequently, the most disgraceful thing for a teacher to do is to fail to answer questions asked by students. Being aware of this fact, students do not try to ask questions in class, so that a teacher would not lose face. Because a teacher is seldom allowed to say "Sorry I don’t know", the type of class, where opinions are freely exchanged between a teacher and students, never gets common in Japan. Also students are afraid of asking a question because his question may be out of point and lose face. If a student is really eager to seek for an answer for his question, s/he asks a teacher after class.

This form of respect is good for both teachers and students because it is terrible for Japanese to lose face in public. For a new Japanese teacher, the fear of losing face can often be more of a driving force to study deeply in his subject than seeking academic knowledge. In Edo period, about 300 years ago, if a samurai, a subordinate warrior of a feudal lord, lost face in public, he was expected to commit suicide by cutting open his belly with his sword. If he was put into shame by a citizen, it was a legal for him to chop off the citizen’s head on the spot. This kind of spirit may still exist in Japanese since the Japanese culture is often described "The Culture of Shame."

We can also see this in the Japanese seniority system, which works very much the same in school classrooms as well as in society. Japanese are, from our childhood, strictly being taught, by parents and in school, that we should follow and respect people who are senior to us. The system can be applied to the situation where someone is just one year older or younger than us. We do not regard him as a person on the same level as us. When this seniority system is brought into a classroom situation where a young teacher teaches a mixture group in ages, there will be complicated relationships and power maps in class. "When a class was pretty much one level, like a class is of all freshmen of a company, people were not afraid of talking in class very much, but when there was a mixture of people: a section manager, a department manager, freshmen, a receptionist, then a problem can occur getting people to talk, since the freshmen did not want their seniors to show them up and the superiors were afraid of being made a fool of before their subordinates. Everyone in the class had to be careful who they would talk to and how they would talk in class. I was 23 years old when I first got there. I had some problems in the first class I taught. The students were mostly men in their late thirties and early forties. They a kind of resented the fact they had a teacher who was so young. When a section manager among them found out how old I was, he got upset about it asking why the English school had sent such a young teacher to us." (Shooldt : Interview, March 1983)

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IV. Speech Levels

Generally speaking, Japanese do not have the habit of calling a person by his/her first name. First names are used chiefly between and among young children. Parents can call their children by their first names, but children can never call their parents by their first names.

If a new young foreign teacher dares to call his students, who are apparently older than him, by their first names, they usually feel uncomfortable and so do the rest of the classes. To make the matter worse, class atmosphere is mainly created by elder people in the Japanese vertical society and they usually take the lead in class. This young teacher will have much difficulty to control his class after that.

Although I reported on page 2 that "Japanese students easily accept a teacher as a director," I think this is true when students take it for granted that he or she satisfied some conditions to be a teacher for them; a teacher i.e. at least older than most of students in a mixed group and can observe the manner and customs of the society. On the other hand, I feel that Japanese people are getting less conscious of difference in age little by little because of the strong influence of Western cultures.

I would like to mention how the seniority system, described so far, works in the society so that a classroom situation would be explained more clearly. In the personal relations with people outside our families, we follow almost the same pattern as inside our families. When one has personal problems or financial difficulties, he or she often seeks his senior's advice. A senior is, in most cases, an "upper" person in the office. The senior is the person to tell your worries to. A senior is pretty much like a father to the subordinates. We feel very secure in this system. Our company itself is like a big home. My boss, for instance, knows practically everything about me and my family and I'm glad he does. It gives us a sense of belonging." (Akao, 1971)

So when seniors and juniors in a company are put on the same level in an English conversation classroom, they are merely classmates. The seniors try hard to maintain their dignity before their younger worker, and the younger workers try not to make themselves look as if they were better students, even if they were better than their seniors.

When I asked what their favorite color was, of course there is no wrong answer, they were afraid to answer it. To me, they apparently had a fear of offending someone in class. When I pointed to one of them, he started looking around, a little bit nervous, and finally said a certain color. Many times, the next person would agree with what the first person said. I wondered how they could offend anybody in the class answering such a simple question." (Shooltz : Interview March 1983)

As we always pay much attention to this relation, a senior and a junior, outside our families and companies, we do not like to be in a strange situation where it is difficult for us to judge who is senior to us and who is junior. In such a situation, we need to know some other factors in addition to the fact whether a person who we will talk to is older than us. We need to know "what he is" to have a sound communication with him, otherwise we do not know what speech level (discussed later) we use for him and how we talk to him. I think this explains the popularity of exchanging name cards in Japan as well.

Because a name card tells you what he or she is immediately, you know how you should talk to him in advance. "I feel uncomfortable sometimes when my foreign friends invite me out because I never know who's going to be there. I have a close Japanese friend who works for one of them, and I call him to ask about the party and the people who will be there. Then I know what their status is and how much respect to pay them. My foreign friends are funny. I have watched them walk right into a cocktail party, say hello to the host, and they start drifting around shaking hands and introducing themselves without even knowing who the other people are. I could never do that." (Halloran, 1971) When foreigners come to Japan, they are often puzzled with popularity of such cards. Some of my foreign colleagues soon felt the
necessity of having their own cards made.

As for No.2, the two languages, Japanese and English have nothing in common concerning their origins and are very different from each other.

The nature of the Japanese language effects on students’ attitude in class vary greatly, a mutual definition of the relationship depends on a system of speech type keys, each of which functions in a special set of social situations. These keys are functional varieties of language, and all normal speakers shift easily and automatically from consultative, to casual, to intimate, as appropriate deliberative key, oratorical key. (Clark, 1981)

V. Sample Keys of Speech Levels

If one applies these keys of the English language to Japanese language, one must feel that there should be more keys for it. It is said that there have been more than 110 ways to express the first person ‘I’ and more than 60 ways to express the second person ‘you’ in the Japanese language dating back to the early ‘samurai’ periods. In the present, Japanese are manipulating around 20 expressions for ‘I’ and ‘you’.

I have divided these expressions into five keys in the chart below. Japanese speech is categorized into 5 types referring to Gleason’s definition of a system of speech types. There might be a little discrepancy between the contents of the chart and the actual usage because of an idiosyncrasy, dialect or context in a situation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intimate</th>
<th>Casual</th>
<th>Consultative</th>
<th>Deliberative</th>
<th>Oratorical</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>you (singular)</td>
<td>omac</td>
<td>kimisottchi</td>
<td>anatasochira-sama</td>
<td>anata-sama</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>kisama-anta</td>
<td>sochira</td>
<td>otaku</td>
<td>otaku-sama</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>you (plural)</td>
<td>omac-tachi</td>
<td>kim-tachi</td>
<td>anata-gata-sochira-gata</td>
<td>anata-sama-gata</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>kisama-tachi</td>
<td></td>
<td>otaku</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>anta-tachi</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>org wai</td>
<td>boku kottchi</td>
<td>watashi jibun</td>
<td>watakushi temae</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>wate wachiki</td>
<td>kochira</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The under lined words are most frequently used nowadays.
(1) was used for a feudal lord
(2) is used only by a Japanese Emperor
(3) was used by a feudal lord

If the Japanese major dialects were included in the chart, the number of expressions would be 3 times as many as the expressions on the chart.

Because of the complexity of the rules and system, Japanese often try not to use a personal pronoun as a subject of sentences and expect the listener to understand who is being spoken of. The deletion of a personal pronoun as a subject occurs in almost 90% of sentences; declarative, tag question, interrogative and plain ..., whatever the sentence form is. But this deletion does not occur often in deliberative because the more a deletion occurs, the more a sentence sounds informal, and so it should be avoided in formal styles. In addition to this, “There are roughly three speech levels in Japanese, the plain style, the polite style and the honorific style.” (Halloran, 1971)

One should be able to manipulate and observe the complicated rules of the Japanese language in the hierarchic society; otherwise one will make social blunders in every communication. Even one’s maturity is
often judged by his or her capability of using the honorific style. "I use the humble form when I am referring to someone on my side and honorific form when I am speaking about someone related to the listener's side. That way I show sincerity on my side and respect for the other's side. ... We Japanese are particularly careful in the form of address." (Halloran, 1971)

Applying the seniority system to these rules and styles, Japanese really feel that we should know "what he or she is" when we speak to them. In an English class, especially when it is composed of different ages, it is difficult for students to address others only by "you" and to speak of oneself only by "I", moreover they hesitate or feel strange not to use appropriate forms to differentiate age or ranking people in their classroom just because they are learning a foreign language. In the college classroom, students are around 18 to 20 years old. They also often feel strange when they address their teacher, who is older and higher positioned, only by "you".

As for No.3 on page 3: Japanese entrance examinations to universities and colleges put too much stress on the knowledge of English grammar and structure. English is included as a subject of the entrance examinations of almost all universities. In the diploma oriented society, it is very important to receive higher education and to enter famous universities. In Japan, once students are accepted to a university, it is fairly easy for them to graduate. And if students are accepted into famous universities, their future will be promising; a somewhat peculiar aspect of the university system.

According to a recent survey, about 2.5 million people are enrolled in colleges and universities in Japan. This means that approximately one out of every four young men received higher education. This is an amazingly high ratio compared with that of other advanced countries. And the number of students who want to go to college is ever increasing. Several new colleges are set up each year to cope with this situation, but they are a drop in the bucket. Why do so many people want to graduate from college?

Mr. Yamada: To get a good job. It's as simple as that.
Mr. Underwood: Can't you get a job without being a college graduate?
Mr. Yamada: Yes, but it's difficult. You can't expect rapid promotion, either. Graduates of famous universities are assured of a good future in big firms.
Mr. Underwood: How do you figure that?
Mr. Yamada: Well, the executives are in a position to promote younger graduates of their own colleges, and they do. It's a natural feeling of human beings, isn't it?
Mr. Underwood: I understand. It's like university cliques. Such practices do exist in my country to some extent, but they don't go so far.
Mr. Yamada: There's another factor you must consider. It's the system of life employment. Once you're in a big firm, you'll have no worries for the rest of your life. Besides, by working for a big firm you enjoy social prestige. "(Akao, 1971)

In order to pass, high school students are obliged to study English regardless of their interests. The entrance examination is indeed a strong motivation for the Japanese students to study English. The main emphasis has been laid on reading skills and grammar, though a small portion of universities have started implementing a listening skills test about 10 years ago. Whenever it comes to reading and grammar, they are extremely good. My students probably know more about grammar than I do because of it being the main aspect of learning English in Japanese schools. "To me, it seems more like mathematics exercises."
(Shooltz: Interview 1983)

In spite of what was said Shooltz, some high school teachers are trying to focus on practical aspect of English in class in stead of what students need for preparation of entrance examination more. They may be discouraged by the fact that the raking and quality of high schools are being judged by the number of graduates admitted by famous universities or colleges.
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It is often said the best way to learn a foreign language is to go to a country where it being spoken. Many Japanese students travel to the U.S. to learn English. Some of them are in a class just to learn how to speak English and others learn the language so they can obtain enough linguistic competencies to enroll in a college or a university.

VI. Differences in Approach

Different approaches of foreign language teaching can be seen or experienced in different cultures, which may strike one in other cultures as odd or strange.

It can not be helped because of variation and differences in manners and customs that belong to an individual culture. Some examples are found in the American culture and the Japanese culture such as calling each other by their first name when people are friendly enough to do so. Also the seniority system works stronger compared with one’s own culture. And the seniority system plays an important role on the relationship of students in a language class where a mixed group of students are studying together in the same class.

In the American cultures, a leader may have chosen according to the most amount of experience and knowledge regardless age, however, this does not seem to work in the Japanese culture in which younger people are supposed to show respect to older people.

In my experience, it was a little surprising at first being called by my first name in class. Though I knew this system, I thought this would work only in a friendly situation. I did not get used to always being called by my first name in Japan; we address one another by our family names. I felt as if I had had my name cut off from my family registration and had lost my identity. At the same time, I felt a little uncomfortable when people, who were apparently younger than me, would call me by my first name. I do not think calling each other by first name means much to Americans but it means a lot to Japanese because it indicates that everyone is on the same level, like young children, forcing us to forget about the seniority system. To tell you the truth, I still feel strange when I call my seniors, even Americans, by their first names and wish I had some other ways to use them in a friendlier environment.

Consequently, in a classroom situation in the U.S., Japanese students do not have to be worried about talking to seniors, thinking how much respect they should express in choosing an appropriate way of calling them. This gives Japanese students much more freedom to speak up in class. Moreover, they can forget about the complicated honorific terms and speech levels of Japanese.

However, this situation can be spoiled when he or she is around other Japanese classmates. “But a good situation for Japanese students only applies if he or she is with other Americans or other foreign students. They seem to be more willing to talk. There is not so much concern about making mistakes or stepping rank. As soon as they are with other Japanese they both get very quiet all of a sudden. They start worrying about each other, “Who is he?” and “What rank is he?” (Shooltz : Interview, 1983)

Japanese students can be free from the concept of “losing face” only when he or she is alone among other foreigners. We can see this often in Japan. A lot of Japanese students are willing to talk to foreign teachers in English when there are no other Japanese around them. But if a Japanese English teacher or a person who is better at speaking English joins the conversation, immediately these students stop talking and become listeners. These may be defined as:

1. The teacher student relationship is different
2. Asking questions is important and encouraged
3. Classroom interaction is different
4. The culture of shame

"...the teacher controls all of the activity taking place in the classroom and the students accept and are obedient to her authority. She determines the socio-spatial arrangements of all interactions; she decrees when and where movement takes place within the classroom... she determines who will talk and when they will talk." (Philips, 1983)

This is exactly what happens in an English classroom in Japan. So it is fairly easy for Japanese students to accept this situation. But in a classroom in the U.S., Asian students especially Japanese students may often find that the relationship between a teacher and a student is a little too friend-like and may be surprised to see students from other cultures even call their teacher by the teacher's first name outside of class. In class, teachers encourage students to ask questions and do so without hesitation. Japanese students are more surprised with the fact that teachers often easily say "I don't know." or "I have never though about that." They do not seem to lose face at all. Because Japanese junior high and high school students never have a class where there is free exchanges of opinions between a teacher and students, it is extremely difficult for them to raise their hand and speak up with their own opinions in class. Giving a counter opinion to a teacher would be just out of question though it is allowed for students to do in the U.S. if it does not go too an extreme or their intention is not to offend their teacher's authority.

There is also a different concept about leadership within a group. When Japanese students, in a group, are asked to choose a leader for their group, they most often choose the oldest person whether or not he knows much about what a group is supposed to do; a discussion, a debate or a research project. While here in America, a person who has the most knowledge about something the group is supposed to do is most definitely chosen, regardless of age. When I assigned the leader, choosing the best one in a group, it never worked. When I had the group to decide who a leader would be, they always chose the oldest one in a group and the class went well." (Sholtz : Interview, 1983)

VII. Acceptable Behaviors

Lastly, I would like to consider the acceptability and behaviors of Japanese students using "participant structures" in Philips' article. "Within the basic framework of teacher controlled interaction, there are several possible variations in structural arrangements of interaction, which will be referred to from here on as "participant structures." (Philips, 1983)

The first type of participant structure is most frequently used in the Japanese schools. "In the first type of participant structure the teacher interacts with all of the students. She may address all of them, or a single student in the presence of the rest of the students. (Philips, 1983)

As Japanese students are most used to this type of interaction in the frequent, lecture type lessons, it is not difficult for them and can respond to a teacher's instruction well as a group or individually in the presence of their peers. But Japanese teachers seldom ask an individual student to perform or speak alone in front of the class, instead they very often have students read a material or answer a short question. So, to perform something aggressively, in a good sense, like a presentation in class is not a thing they are good at. Japanese 'shyness' has something to do with this, in my opinion. "In a second type of participant structure, the teacher interacts with only some of the students in the class at once, as in reading groups." (Philips, 1983)

This type does not often happen in Japanese schools because voluntary participation is not so encouraged. If Japanese students in class in the U.S. were given a chance to tell their teacher about the knowledge they acquired, I think they would keep silent since this kind of behavior is often taken as one's
presumptuousness by others. "A third participant structure consists of all students working independently at their desks, but with the teacher explicitly available for student initiated verbal interaction, in which the child indicates he wants to communicate with the teacher by raising his hand, or by approaching the teacher at her desk." (Philips, 1983)

I don’t think Japanese students are good at working independently. Group-mindedness is one of the characteristics of Japanese. This characteristic may prevent Japanese students from improving their creativity which I feel American education puts much emphasis on from early childhood. Foreign teachers teaching English in Japan usually find that pair and group work are effective when trying to have students practice what they have learned such as idiomatic expressions and patterns, but soon realize their students cannot perform individually as well as they perform in a pair or in a group.”

A fourth participant structure, and one that occurs infrequently in the upper primary grades, and rarely, if ever, in the lower grades, consists of the students’ being divided into small groups that are run themselves, though always with the more distant supervision of the teacher, and usually for the purpose of so called “group-projects.” (Philips, 1983)

Japanese group-mindedness helps “group-projects” go smoothly very often, if a group has a good group leader. I feel that sometimes “losing face” makes one's opinion in a group ambiguous and causes misunderstandings among the group members. But having a week aggressiveness and individualism, unnecessary confrontations are often avoided in deciding a direction of a group. When a Japanese student joins a group project with other foreigners, he or she may lack of initiative and leadership.

**CONCLUSION**

It is essential for foreign language teaching to pay an adequate attention to the cultural differences including manners, customs and all the related matters which may bring effect on the result of teaching. So, it is one of the most important factors for foreign language teachers to know about their own culture and also the culture of their students. Without this effort, those teachers may encounter unnecessary reluctance, unexpected response and dissatisfied result in class because nobody is able to disregard the background of his or her own culture in learning a foreign language.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**


