

A Study for the Development of Oral Communication Skills with Cross-Cultural Awareness

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1. Rationale

Long before Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology started to put the emphasis on the development of the oral communication skills in English, many learners themselves have always wished to have a good command of English. Their learning motivation varies ranging from making a friend with foreigners to thinking/acting or even working globally. Therefore, one of the important tasks for English teachers as an educator is to help students both to learn the linguistic/cultural rules of the English-speaking societies and to reconsider their identities so that they will be a successful communicator in English in this global age.

In an attempt to help students to be such a good communicator in English, the definition of a successful communicator with the cross-cultural awareness that suits my students will be addressed. Then, the study of the influential factors to language teaching/learning will be consulted to promote their communication skills and cross-cultural awareness.

2. A definition of a successful communicator

A definition of a successful communicator in English depends on the understanding and philosophy of the teachers; however, many of us believe that helping our students to be able to express themselves in English is good enough especially for those at the beginners' level. In pursuit of helping students to have such a skill, some of the teachers surmise that teaching the use of English, as Japanese-English, in opposition to English of the native speakers, is more important to enable students to gain confidence and maintain their Japanese identities when they act and live globally. Sometimes they tend to even warn us not to clone pseudo-native speakers in Japan often based on their political philosophy against the Western chauvinism. Others believe we should help students to get used to the linguistic/cultural rules of English-speaking countries to avoid miscommunication in English. They could go so far as to believe

that it is essential for the Japanese teachers of English to be almost as competent as native speakers in terms of the ability to communicate in English and to provide students with the appropriate input and socio-cultural information. My emphasis is on somewhere in the middle; students should be able to learn about the rich variety of people in our multicultural world and express themselves by establishing their own identities, while they are also entitled to know that one of the effective ways to avoid misunderstanding in communication in English is to have the knowledge of both linguistic and socio-cultural norms and rules of the English speaking societies.

Successful communicators should be able to not only express their opinions without causing unnecessary misunderstanding, but also make the most of linguistic/cultural rules of English to understand others with different cultural background. In understanding paralinguistic meaning of English, these rules also play an important role. If we choose (or are supposed) to use English as a communication tool, we should also make the most of employing its socio-linguistic rules as well, for the use of language cannot be learnt properly without its culture. Since many non-native speakers of English in the world share such rules and norms, it is of use for the students to acquire them and avert intercultural misunderstanding.

With regard to understanding non-English speaking societies and their cultures, students should be at least provided with even stereotypical cultural norms, for it is unrealistic for anyone to fully master every cultural aspect. The process of gaining the knowledge of such norms will also serve the students who need to find and reconsider their own identities from the global perspective.

In short, the important tasks for the teachers who attempt to enable students to be a good global communicator must be two-fold; assisting students to learn linguistic/socio-cultural rules of English as a communication tool and providing some opportunities to perform English often by encouraging them to express their opinions from the global or international standpoints.

3. Factors affecting language teaching/learning

Language teaching is often viewed as merely a teaching act. This narrow perspective often blinds us to see the actual complexity of the interrelated factors that affect teaching. For the development of the oral communication skills and cross-cultural awareness, I would like to review some basic factors that should be consulted before and while teaching; 1) learners' needs and goals, 2) constraints for the classroom teaching, 3) individual learner differences

and foreign (second) language acquisition, 4) cognitive accounts of second (foreign) language acquisition, 5) formal/informal instructions and foreign (second) language acquisition, and 6) acculturation and cross-cultural awareness.

3.1. Learners' needs and goals

In language teaching, the impact of needs analysis has been greatest in the area of special-purposes program design, but it is also fundamental to the planning of general language courses. It may focus on either the general parameters of a language program or on the specific needs of language learners. Situation analysis (Richards 1992 : 2) focuses on the following questions:

- 1) Who are the learners ?
- 2) What are the learners' goals and expectations ?
- 3) What learning styles do the learners prefer ?
- 4) How proficient are the instructors in the target language ?
- 5) Who are the instructors ?
- 6) What training and experiences do the instructors have ?
- 7) What teaching approach do they favor ?
- 8) What do instructors expect of the program ?
- 9) What is the administrative context of the program ?
- 10) What constraints are present ?
- 11) What kind of tests and assessment measures are needed ?

About 350 students I teach at two colleges are mostly either economics or business administration major. Their English proficiency level is somewhere between beginners and lower intermediate with a few exception of intermediate or higher. Their goals and expectations based on the questionnaire and some interviews are that more than 90% of them hope to have the ability to communicate orally, (or when put it in their words, they hope to have the skills of listening/speaking English) and/or to enjoy movies and music as well as news programs in English. When my students are asked what their favorable learning styles are, the majority prefer the teacher-centered instruction. Contrary to my assumption, most of them hesitate to try out the learner-centered language learning. In addition, about 95% of them claim that they are not sure what learning strategies they should employ. As for teachers, many have the teaching experience for more than ten years. Also, many have earned degrees overseas. Types of favorite teaching approach appear to be varied depending on the individual teaching philosophy and learning/teaching experience, while the newly established curriculum starting

from 2006 requires us to mainly focus on developing students' oral communication skills. Testing and assessment measures have been discussed for some time now, and we are still working on it. I will consider the 10th question in the following section.

In this way, the questionnaire of this kind has helped me to understand the needs and expectations of the majority of my target students as well as the environment where I work.

Another approach, communicative needs analysis, is concerned with gathering information about learners' communicative needs in target language, involving questions such as follows:

In what settings will learners use the target language ?

What role relationships are involved ?

Which language modalities are involved (e.g. reading, writing, listening, speaking) ?

What types of communicative events and speech acts are involved ?

What level of proficiency is required ?

Answers to these questions help determine the type of language skills and level of language proficiency the program aims to deliver. Where students are to improve their listening comprehension skills mainly, answers to the fifth question in my students' case is to the extent of acquiring some strategies to understand English in the movies and other T. V. programs. As for the speaking course, learners need to be able to describe their daily activities in English and increase the topic items they can control and keep talking about for a while. Also, they should be able to communicate with people from different cultures in English successfully and to express their opinions on the various issues.

Curriculum goals are general statements of the intended outcomes of a language program, and learners' goals can be used as a basis for developing more specific descriptions of the intended outcomes of the program. A number of different ways of stating program objectives are commonly employed. In addition to assessing students' needs and goals, teachers should also pay attention to some other factors addressed in a series of following sections before deciding concrete objectives.

3.2. Constraints of the classroom teaching

Every school has time constraints more or less, while improving communication skills in English is very demanding and requires lots of time and energy on the part of the students. One semester usually offers twelve class hours and we will regularly meet twice a week starting from 2006. Consequently, our curriculum would not be good enough to make it as an effective immersion program. Teachers must be skillful in time management, and need to decide the content of learning be as useful as possible.

Another constraint is also very common in the classroom teaching. We are supposed to teach students who have individual differences in many ways. The factors of such differences will be studied in the next section.

3.3. Individual learner differences

Ellis (1992) made an initial distinction between personal and general factors, while it is somewhat problematic for the scholars to make a direct observation of the abstract qualities of the learner factors. According to him, personal factors are highly idiosyncratic features of each individual's approach to learning a second language. They are by definition heterogeneous. The following classifications are cited from his three headings; group dynamics, attitudes to the teacher, and individual learning techniques.

3.3.1. Group dynamics

It has been easily observed that some students in the classroom make overt comparison of themselves with other learners. A sense of competition manifests itself often when I announce the names of the students who performed fairly well on the tests, which is basically for the purpose of encouraging others to keep up with the good students. Without getting our students discouraged by the thought of their progress being short of their expectations, we should design and practice our teaching that would not betray them.

3.3.2. Attitudes to the teacher

It is inevitable that learners have different views about what kind of teacher they think is best for them. Some favor a teacher who structures the learning tasks tightly, and others prefer those who give space for them to pursue their own learning style. As mentioned in the former section, the questionnaire revealed that most of my students are used to the teacher-centered style. While just a few of them are rather fed up with the teacher-dominating procedure, most of them hesitate to make it learner-centered. This derives from their past learning experiences coupled with their passive attitude and low expectation for the classroom learning. In this case, it is important to let them know that teachers are ready to play various roles to facilitate their learning, and above all, that learning can be fun and more informative.

3.3.3. Individual learning techniques

There are some techniques employed by different learners. For example, some of them make a list for the vocabulary learning. Many have the experience to use audio and/or visual

aids to enhance their listening skills, but usually only a few have the opportunity to interact with native speakers outside the classroom. Many of them have neither learnt English utterances in context, nor had practice for predicting the unknown words. When they translate English into Japanese, many students are accustomed to relying on the bottom-up processing solely, without using the strategy of top-down processing. They are not well trained to find the meaningful chunks to process the English structure and its contents. Therefore, I found it inevitable to show them varieties of learning techniques to facilitate their learning.

3.3.4. General factors affecting learner differences

General factors such as motivation, aptitude and age are to be reviewed in order. Motivation is likely to change during the course of language acquisition while the aptitude and age usually do not change in strength or nature. I will briefly refer to personality and learners' cognitive style in the following.

3.3.4.1. Motivation

Motivation and attitudes are important factors, for they help to determine the level of proficiency achieved by different learners. The integrative motivation occurs when the learner wishes to identify with the culture of target language. Integration is not a realistic option for most of my Japanese students. Instrumental motivation occurs when the learners' goals for learning target language are functional. As for my students, their learning is directed at passing an examination, extending career opportunities, and mostly, broadening their views by communicating with foreigners: they have the instrumental orientation overall. A few of my students have a great interest in the countries and cultures where people speak English as their first language. It is possible that they may have the integrative motivation in the future. This notion of motivation reminds us to encourage our students to have more suitable and advantageous motivation for the successful language learning.

3.3.4.2. Aptitude

Two sets of intellectual abilities are involved in language learning; intelligence and aptitude. The former can be explained as a general academic or reasoning ability, and the latter consists of specific cognitive qualities needed for language acquisition. Any clear-cut distinction of this kind cannot be made, and the degree of co-relations between intelligence/aptitude and learners' proficiency is hard to be specified. Ellis (1992) suggests that intelligence may influence the acquisition of some skills associated with SL acquisition, such as those useful for

the formal study of a L 2, but it is much less likely to influence the acquisition of oral fluency skills. According to his study, there is no evidence to suggest that aptitude has any effect on the route of language acquisition. Just as all children acquire their first language according to a universal pattern, so too L 2 learners operate the same basic cognitive process in SL acquisition. Aptitude, however, can be expected to influence the rate of development, particularly where formal classroom learning is concerned. Those learners with a gift for formal study are likely to learn more rapidly. Aptitude is also likely to affect ultimate success in SL acquisition, particularly if this is measured by formal tests of linguistic competence. Ellis also warns us that the nature of these effects on the rate and success of SL acquisition will remain uncertain until we know more about the abilities that are assumed to constitute aptitude.

3.3.4.3. Age

Students of the SL acquisition literature dealing with age and SLA can be found in the works of many, such as Hatch (1983), Snow and Hoefnagel-Höhle (1978), and Oyama (1976). According to their studies, starting age of learning English does not affect the route of SLA, while it does the rate of learning. Where grammar and vocabulary are concerned, adolescent learners do better than either children or adults, when the length of exposure is held constant. Where pronunciation is concerned, any particular difference is not observed. As we can assume, both the number of years of exposure and the starting age affect the level of success. It can be summarized that the number of years' exposure contributes greatly to the overall communicative fluency of the learners, but the starting age determines the levels of accuracy achieved, particularly in pronunciation.

When I apply those studies to my classroom teaching, their age can be classified as that of the adolescent, so that I would like to encourage them to enjoy their prime especially in the field of grammar and vocabulary learning. Although the starting age may be believed to affect the success of their pronunciation when compared with that of the early starters (i.e., little children before their puberty), there are some studies that this belief does not hold. While many of the students including mine feel there is no need to pronounce English perfectly like native speakers', I would like to demonstrate the advantage of mimicking the proper prosody for acquiring better listening skill and more intelligible speaking skill. Students are entitled to make the most of the knowledge about the difference between English and Japanese prosodies, and to acquire the rules and systems of English.

3.3.4.4. Personality

Scholars have found it difficult to investigate the effects of personality. As I have also observed, the intuitive hypothesis that extroverted learners learn more rapidly and more successfully than introverted learners is often agreed, although it is not a completed, proven theory. Naturally, learners are not all extroverted, but rather many Japanese learners are introverted. Some possess the traits such as perfectionist tendencies or quickness in grasping new concepts. Others have the traits to enjoy new things and to be experimental. These variations may require teachers to employ some or at least more than one teaching approaches.

3.4. Cognitive style

Cognitive style is a term used to refer to the manner in which people perceive the world. Ellis (1992) summarized the principal characteristics of a field-dependent and a field-independent cognitive style. He suggests that field dependence proved most facilitative in naturalistic SLA, but field independence leads to greater success in classroom learning. The reasoning behind this is that in naturalistic learning the greater social skills of the field-dependent learner will lead to more frequent contact with native speakers and so to more input, whereas in classroom learning the greater ability to analyze the formal rules of the language will be significant. Although this intuitive expectation runs counter to the results of some empirical researches, I believe the notion of these dichotomies can be also helpful when we attempt to create the effective learning environment.

3.4.1. Cognitive accounts of second (foreign) language acquisition

In this section, I will review the system and factors that relate to the process of language learning. Ellis (1994) postulates that cognitive style may be eventually turned out to be an important factor that determines the rate of development. He also examines a number of accounts of L 2 acquisition which adopt a broadly cognitivist stance in a sense that he sees language acquisition as a mental process involving the use of strategies that explain how the L 2 knowledge system is developed and used in communication. The mental process responsible for L 2 acquisition will be referred to here under the headings such as a general theoretical framework, fossilization with the concept of interlanguage, acculturation and language acquisition, and a definition of implicit and explicit knowledge.

3.4.2. A general theoretical framework

A complete synthesis of the various theories and models considered by many scholars is

not easily possible, but Ellis (1994) developed the theoretical framework of Gass (1988) by outlining a general framework for investigating L 2 acquisition. According to Ellis, Gass distinguishes 1) noticed input, 2) comprehended input, 3) intake, and 4) integration. Noticed input is the first stage of acquisition. It consists of noticing features in the input as a result of the saliency of the features themselves and of the learner's existing L 2 knowledge. Not all noticed input is comprehended. Similarly, not all comprehended input becomes intake. Gass claims that what is comprehended can be either turned out to be the intake component or alternately it may be not used by the learner for anything beyond communication. Intake is seen as a process that does not become part of the learner's implicit knowledge system until it has been integrated. Gass also postulates that some input may be processed and put into storage if it is not yet possible to integrate into interlanguage system. This storage takes the form of some kind of explicit knowledge. As we will see more closely later, explicit knowledge can contribute to output through monitoring, and also may aid the processes that contribute to intake. Output can influence input through interaction.

3.4.3. Fossilization with the concept of interlanguage

The term interlanguage is used to refer to both the internal system that a learner has constructed as a single point in time (i. e., an interlanguage) and to the series of interconnected systems that characterize the learner's process over time (i. e., the interlanguage continuum). This construct has been subject to both cognitive and linguistic interpretations.

Selinker (1972) first introduced this concept and identified five principal cognitive processes responsible for L 2 acquisition:

Language transfer (some, but certainly not all items, rules, and subsystems of learners' interlanguage are transferred from the first language).

Transfer of training (some interlanguage elements may derive from the way in which the learners were taught).

Strategies of second language learning (an identifiable approach by the learner to the material to be learnt).

Strategies of second language communication (an identifiable approach by the learner to communication with native speakers of the target language).

Overgeneralization of the target language material (some interlanguage elements are the result of a clear overgeneralization of target language rules and semantic features).

According to Ellis, a number of problems are apparent with Selinker's list. For instance, language transfer and overgeneralization should be listed as the examples for the learning

strategies. Nevertheless, the list is helpful when we try to specify the mental processes responsible for language acquisition.

Cognitive theories of interlanguage postulate that learners build mental grammars of target language. Learners draw on the rule they have constructed to interpret and produce utterances as a native speaker systematically does. These mental grammars tend to be as dynamic and subject to rapid change. Thus, the interlanguage continuum consists of a series of overlapping grammars. Each grammar shares some rules with the previously constructed grammar, but also contains some new and revised rules. Several current hypotheses are tested, which fact accounts for systematic variability in learner performance. While the nature of the learner's initial hypothesis is controversial, there is broad agreement that L 2 learners, unlike L 1 learners, generally do not reach the same level of competence as native speakers. In other words, certain rules and items fossilize.

Fossilized forms may sometimes seem to disappear but are always likely to appear in productive language use. The term fossilization has been used to label the process by which non-target forms become fixed in interlanguage. Ellis summarizes factors hypothesized to influence fossilization; age and lack of desire to acculturate are the internal factors, while communicative pressure, lack of learning opportunity, and the nature of the feedback on learner's use of target language are among the external factors for the cause of fossilization. Age could be a trigger because certain linguistic features cannot be mastered when learners reach a critical age and their brains lose their plasticity. Also, the nature of the feedback on learner's use of L 2 can influence fossilization; positive cognitive feedback that signals understanding what the learner meant results in fossilization, while negative feedback that signals not understanding what the learner meant helps avoid fossilization.

With this information, teachers may want to avoid putting communicative pressure on the students without requiring the use of language that exceeds their linguistic competence. We also need to provide the learning opportunities where students can receive proper input and feedback.

3.4.4. Acculturation and language acquisition

Students' desire to acculturate affects their ultimate success in language acquisition. Acton and Walker de Felix (1995) compare various studies and summarize the four-stage acculturation models as follows.

Table 1 The four-stage acculturation model (Acton and Walker 1995 : 30–31)

Theorist	Tourist(1)	Survivor (2)	Acculturation Threshold	Immigrant (3)	Citizen (4)
Schumann	Pidginization	Pidginization	Acculturation Threshold		
Brown Clarke	Socio-cultural critical period	Socio-cultural critical period	Acculturation Threshold	Clash of consciousness	Clash of consciousness
Cummings	Basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS)	Basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS)	Acculturation Threshold	Cognitive-academic language proficiency (CALP)	Cognitive-academic language proficiency (CALP)
Wong-Fillmore	Novice	Advanced beginner	Acculturation Threshold	Competent	Proficient
Ausubel	Exploration	Manipulation	Acculturation Threshold	Acquisition of knowledge	Ego enhancement
Gardner & Lambert	Instrumental and/or integrative	Instrumental and/or integrative	Acculturation Threshold	Instrumental and/or integrative	Integrative only
Maslow	Physical security	Identity development	Acculturation Threshold	Self-esteem	Self-actualization
Bloom	Receiving	Responding	Acculturation Threshold	Organizing a value system	Acting within a value system
Guiora	L 1 ego only	L 1 ego as L 2 develops	Acculturation Threshold	L 2 distinct	L 2 ego is as integrated as L 1
Cope	Anxiety management	Interaction management	Acculturation Threshold	Competence in self-monitoring	Teacher
Lozanov	Infantilization	New identity	Acculturation Threshold		
Curran	Dependence on teacher/group	Nurturing by teacher/group	Acculturation Threshold	Independence from teacher/group	

Although it is not obvious to what extent we can make use of these classifications for our teaching, it highlights the importance of the socio-cultural factors and their relationships with the language acquisition. Stage 3 appears to be ideal for our students to reach so that they can go beyond the acculturation threshold level. This can sometimes require adult as well as adolescent learners to develop childlike attitudes and drop their hesitation in learning new language and culture. In other words, it may be even wholesome for students to develop their target language persona to go beyond the acculturation threshold level. The aspect of

acculturation in relation to the cross-cultural awareness will be also discussed in section 6.

3.4.5. A definition of implicit and explicit knowledge

Ellis (1994) explains that explicit knowledge is generally used to refer to knowledge that is available to the learner as a conscious representation. It is not the same as the meta-lingual knowledge, although it is often developed together with such knowledge.

There are two types of implicit knowledge; formulaic knowledge and rule-based knowledge. The former consists of generalized and abstract structures that have been internalized. The assumption of the latter is that what is learned consists of underlying rules which have been induced from the stimulus material, ultimately becoming the basis for generalization and transfer. In both cases, the knowledge is intuitive and as a result, largely hidden. In other words, learners are not conscious of what they know. It becomes manifest only in actual performance.

According to the interface position, instruction facilitates acquisition by supplying the learner with conscious rules, and providing practice to enable them to convert this conscious, controlled knowledge, or explicit knowledge, into automatic knowledge, or implicit knowledge. Ellis (1994) claims that learners do not acquire structures that are not ready for, no matter how much they practice.

The selective attention hypothesis (Lightbown 1985) suggests that formal instruction act as an aid to acquisition, which supports the hypothesis that the explicit knowledge only facilitates the acquisition of implicit knowledge. Although not all L2 acquisition researchers have accorded the implicit/explicit distinction, such cognitive account for the process of language acquisition may be worth reviewing for language teachers.

3.5. Classroom interaction/formal instruction and second (foreign) language acquisition

3.5.1. Classroom interaction and second (foreign) language acquisition

A number of scholars have proposed that the most effective way of developing successful second language competence in a classroom is to ensure that the learners have sufficient opportunities to participate in discourse directed at the exchange of information. In addition, I believe the failure of many classroom learners also derives from the lack of comprehensible input/output and the interaction strategies.

There are some convincing evidences that learners can learn naturally in a communicative

classroom setting. A task-based approach is one of them. Although not all the researches show the advantage of this method, many results have been interpreted as being positive on the whole. Lightbown (1992) reported the project where Canadian French children in grades 3 to 6 in the communicative classroom were taught English by listening to tapes followed by the study of the written text. The results at the end of the third year of the project showed that students succeeded in learning as much English as those where learning had been guided by a teacher in a more traditional program, and they were as good even at speaking English. The program also resulted in very positive student attitudes.

Other studies by Krashen (1982) suggest that communicative classroom may not be so successful in promoting high levels of linguistic competence. Some researchers have recognized that immersion learners generally fail to acquire certain grammatical distinctions. My assumption is that my students may feel that the communicative classroom may not be well suited to the achievement of sociolinguistic competence. Ellis (1992) argues that classroom learners may experience interpersonal needs to perform speech acts such as requests, but that they do not experience any sociolinguistic needs to modify the way they perform speech acts. He continues that this is because the classroom constitutes an environment where the interactants achieve great familiarity with each other, removing the need for the careful framework that results in the use of indirect request-types and extensive modification. My teaching experience so far has been very similar to his observation; however, I strongly believe that providing my students with the opportunities to learn the sociolinguistic knowledge is inevitable for them to learn the practical and appropriate use of English, even if it is not completely acquired in the classroom.

Whether providing learners with the opportunity to negotiate meaning leads to interlanguage development or not has been investigated, and some suggest that negotiation and contextual support help acquisition of vocabulary. One of the results I have experienced is that the structured teaching style involving teacher-directed activities with multiple-choice quizzes is related to the higher scores on the formal tests for reading/listening comprehension skills, while a more open teaching style and games for the negotiation for meaning have helped to improve students' oral proficiency. Wong-Fillmore (1982) has the findings that successful language learning occurred in classes that had a high proportion of L 2 learners and were teacher-directed, and also in classes that were more mixed in composition (i.e., had more native English speaking students) and an open organization.

Some studies suggest that learners should have the access to a plenty, well-formed input tailored to their level. It goes without mentioning that in classrooms where students spend lots

of time talking to each other in Japanese or where the instructional language in English is not properly adapted, little learning is likely. Wong-Fillmore claims facilitative acquisition can be promoted by the engagement in formal lessons with already marked boundaries, the use of lesson scripts (i. e., regular formats), and well-established procedures for allocating turns.

The important teacher-talk characteristics include many of the features of foreigner talk. The followings are from the summaries by Ellis (1994 : 606)

- 1) Opportunities to negotiate meaning may help the acquisition of L 2 vocabulary.
- 2) Pushing learners to reformulate their utterances to make them more target-like may lead to greater grammatical accuracy in the long term.
- 3) Teacher-controlled pedagogic discourse may contribute to the acquisition of formal language skills, while learner-controlled natural discourse may help the development of oral language skills.
- 4) Learners need to access the well-formed input that is tailored to their own level of understanding. This can be achieved in teacher-directed lessons with a clearly-defined structure and well-adjusted teacher's talk.
- 5) Listening to other students in teacher-led lessons may be more important for learning than direct learner participation.

Though only a few students of mine appear to be able to benefit from the fifth facet, the rest should be remembered when creating optimal language learning environment.

3.5.2. Formal instruction and second (foreign) language acquisition

Classroom interaction will develop students' communication skills; however, formal instruction also has its advantage. Ellis (1992) distinguishes between formal instruction directed at cognitive goals, where the focus is on developing linguistic or communicative competence, and meta-cognitive goals, where the focus is on the use of the effective learning strategies. Either language-centered or learner-centered instruction will decide what the cognitive goal is. The goal of the language-centered instruction is some aspects of phonology, lexis, grammar, or discourse, where all learners receive the same instruction. The learner-centered instruction is directed at some aspects of language, but an attempt is made to match the type of instruction to the learner, so that different learners are taught in different ways. It may be ideal for the teachers to pay attention to all these aspects when we design our instruction.

3.5.2.1. The effects of formal instruction on general language proficiency

There are some results of the studies that instruction did not help, however, Long (1983) suggests that instruction be advantageous for children and adults, as well as for both intermediate and advanced learners, irrespective of whether acquisition was measured by means of integrative or discrete point tests, and in acquisition-rich or acquisition-poor environments. Formal instruction helps my students to facilitate their English proficiency to some extent. Especially when the goal of language-centered instruction is to develop their transactional use of English, such as speech-delivery, the formal instruction per se is beneficial to my students.

3.5.2.2. The effects of formal instruction on production accuracy

There is sufficient evidence to show that formal instruction can result in definite gains in accuracy. If the structure is simple and does not involve complex processing operations and is clearly related to a specific function, and if the formal instruction is extensive and well planned, it is plausible to work well. On the other hand, if the instruction is directed at a difficult grammatical structure that is substantially beyond the learners' current interlanguage, it will only lead to improved accuracy in planned language use, when learners can pay conscious attention to the structure. We should also bear in mind that the effects may be evident only some time after the instruction.

3.5.2.3. Formal instruction and the sequence of acquisition

It is not clear whether instruction should seek to follow the natural order of acquisition or should try to teach the more marked features in the hope that students will generalize their new knowledge to implicated unmarked features. For our information, the summary of Ellis (1992 : 635) about the language acquisition will be quoted here.

- 1) Instructed learners manifest the same order of morpheme acquisition as naturalistic learners.
- 2) Instructed learners also manifest the same order of acquisition of features comprising grammatical sub-systems such as relative pronoun functions as naturalistic learners.
- 3) Grammar instruction may prove powerless to alter the natural sequence of acquisition of developmental structures, and these are manifest in learner production.
- 4) Premature instruction may cause learners to avoid using structures and so may inhibit acquisition.
- 5) Grammar instruction can be effective in enabling learners to progress along the natural

order more rapidly. One way in which this might be achieved is by teaching marked features within the sequence.

6) Grammatical features that are not subject to developmental constraints may be amenable to instruction.

7) Formal instruction may help learners to comprehend the meanings of grammatical structures, even if it does not enable them to use structures in production.

3.5.2.4. The durability of formal instruction

We need to consider that even in cases where instruction appears to have worked, the beneficial effects may be only temporary. As time passes the effects may gradually abated and the learners return to similar levels of performance to those observed before the instruction. If this were to be the case, the utility of formal instruction would be severely constrained. An interpretation of my own experience is that only short-term effects are obtained when form-focused instruction is introduced in a way that is divorced from the communicative needs and activities of the students'. That is, they should be able to test the learnt hypotheses repeatedly.

Students' motivation also affects the durability. Only if they are motivated to acquire native-speakers' cultural norms, as a result of a desire of becoming integrated into the target-language culture, or as a result of an instrumental need to pass an examination that places a premium on grammatical accuracy, they will retain core features. In short, students have to be able to perceive structures in the input and also have reason for remembering them.

3.5.2.5. The effects of different types of formal instruction

It is impossible to reach any firm conclusions regarding what type of formal instruction works best, however, I would like to quote Ellis' work on hypotheses on this subject (1994 : 646, 657) for some implications.

A focus-on-form approach that encourages learners to pay attention to the formal properties of language in the context of trying to communicate—either by means of meaning negotiation or by corrective feedback—may facilitate acquisition.

If a focus-on-form approach is adopted, this is more likely to succeed if:

- rules are presented explicitly and supported by examples.
- the instruction is aimed at developing explicit knowledge through consciousness-raising activities.
- the instruction is directed at enabling learners to establish form-meaning connections during comprehension.

In contrast, there is a growing consensus that instruction directed at promoting growth of learners' interlanguage systems (i.e., their implicit knowledge) through production training is problematic.

Practice does work, but not always. Practice, however, can bring about some development in the learner's vernacular style especially in the EFL environment over the long run. Japanese students who are not blessed with the optimal naturalistic SLA environment would be able to greatly benefit from the practice.

3.5.3. Summary

Since it is our important task to find the most effective instruction as well as to create the acquisition-rich environment, the review of the studies about the effect of classroom interaction and formal instruction would be useful to serve our purpose.

3.6. Acculturation and cross-cultural awareness

The definition of cross-cultural awareness can be either target culture oriented or global culture oriented. Some of the goals for the former are 1) developing a greater awareness of and a broader knowledge about the target culture, 2) acquiring a command of etiquette of the target culture, 3) understanding difference between the target culture and the students' culture, and 4) understanding the values of the target culture. Some goals for the latter are "1) understanding and respecting for all peoples and their cultures, values, and ways of life, 2) developing the awareness of the increasing global interdependence between peoples and nations, 3) developing awareness of the rights and duties of individuals, social groups, and nations towards each other, and 4) getting ready for the students to participate in solving the problems of their community, country, and the world at large" (Cates, 2004 : 32).

Thus, it is important for us to consider our role as a teacher and to set the suitable goals for students. My emphasis is on taking both aspects into account. Recognizing that all people are different, students should be able to have a global perspective especially when they communicate in English. It is preferable for them to be able to do not simply successful interaction management, but also organization of a value system in English to think and act globally.

Four-stage acculturation model in Table 1 reviewed in the former section suggests that teachers help students to go beyond the acculturation threshold level and get closer to stage 3. It is up to the teachers to decide on whether we convey the complexity of the target culture in its many facets, or focus on one regional variation of the target culture. As for some Japanese

teachers of English including myself, it may be realistic to stick to one regional target culture that we are most familiar with through residence or research.

Be that as it may, we should make it clear that we are neither to be trapped by the mere romanticism, nor are we subject to the past imperialism or Western chauvinism. On the other hand, excessive excessive guilt over past imperialism or Western chauvinism on the part of some global teachers is not exactly healthy in terms of promoting language learning, because students will not go beyond acculturation threshold level if they hold too much negative view toward English-speaking cultures.

Although cultural resemblance usually surface through an examination of the difference, many teachers and linguists are more interested in the universality of language and consequently the universality of cognitive and affective experience. Brown (1995 : 47) quoted Ronald Wardhaugh to explain this notion of the universality of affective experience: "it appears possible to talk about anything in any language provided the speaker is willing to use some degree of circumlocution. ... Every natural language provides both a language for talking about every other language, that is, a metalanguage, and an entirely adequate apparatus for making any kinds of observations that need to be made about the world. "Therefore, I would like to think the question of "what is it that the human race shares in common ?" (Brown 1995 : 47) should be one of our best interests in the language education to avert the prejudice and even impartial hostility of the students, both of which often arise from their indifference to or misunderstanding of other cultures. My suggestion as to the classroom application of this view is to carry out the activities including some kind of paraphrasing. Students can work on some dubbing of movies in English and compare their work and English subtitles. To cite a concrete example, I asked them to dub in English while they were watching the Chinese movie with the Japanese subtitles, and later to compare their lines in English and the installed English subtitles of the movie. With the help of a Chinese student in our class, they made comparisons among the language use of the three. This activity enalbed them to feel the universality of cognition as well as the international difference of the linguistic expressions among three cultures, and they became more interested in learning learning how to understand other cultures.

With a view to leading students beyond the acculturation threshold level, teachers should realize the importance of providing cultural clues to assist our students to adapt themselves to the new environment and to recognize what values and behavior patterns of the target culture they most need to know. In Japan, the pragmatic aspect of language use has not been paid enough attention so far. Since we usually have time constraints for the classroom teaching, some intensive activities focusing on speech acts, conversational strategies, small talk, and the

notion of politeness among others should be effective.

With such attitude mentioned above, we should let students know that understanding and accepting the other cultures are sufficient to achieve while approval is not essential in the intercultural communication. The students' decision on whether they can approve or not in such communication should be based on their beliefs and principles. Therefore, they need to identify themselves first to make any judgment or decision. This is where I would like to suggest that global teaching play an important role. Learning not only target cultures but other cultures as well can help them to reconsider their identities and to form their philosophy from the global viewpoint. Students can also benefit from learning even an introduction of the cultures in the world especially by being engaged in some discussions on the global issues. Through the act of discussion and sometimes debating and presentation, they should be able to state their opinions as an individual in this global community.

Though no one can learn everything about all cultures, even a rough generalization can serve as a guide to better understanding in an effort to learn more about an individual. At the same time, it is important for the teachers to help students to avoid the pitfall of stereotyping and overgeneralization as well.

4. Concluding Remarks and Implications

In this paper, factors affecting language learning/teaching were investigated to enhance the oral communication skills and the cross-cultural awareness. Both forms of classroom interaction and formal instruction can be expected to be beneficial to the learners while they have to be treated in light of their needs and their individual differences along with some cognitive accounts.

Acculturation threshold level may be one thing to consider for the successful language acquisition, and suggesting the teacher's position to promote cross-cultural awareness has been another point I have made in this paper. Taking all these facets into consideration, contents of the classroom activities for the oral communication skills and cross-cultural awareness should be created. The components of such activities will be left for my further study and research.

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