

Teaching Japanese Culture and Language¹

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Introduction

What I am attempting to present in this paper, and would like to invite your comments on widely, is how we can maximise the effectiveness of teaching Japanese culture in the classroom situation at tertiary institutions outside of Japan. I would also like to propose, dare I say, a national standard guideline in Australia for 'Japanese culture awareness'. This is something that should be discussed amongst colleagues in Japanese Studies, both language instructors and non-language instructors, throughout the nation. If we succeed in this project, dare I say again, it would be of some reference for instructors of other Asian languages taught at Australian higher education institutions.

What is culture?

But before I look into teaching Japanese culture in the classroom and Japanese cultural content in curricula, let us ponder the basic, perennial question: what is culture? If I may be so bold as to attempt a definition, I would like to quote what Ryootaroo Shiba, a prolific and well-known author of historical Japanese fiction, says from time to time: "culture is something that is shared and treasured by a group of people who feel comfortable within that cultural boundary as if they were wrapped up in a soft, warm cover no matter how strange and ridiculous it may look to outsiders". For example, taking off footwear before going into a

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Japanese house, even into modern apartments which do not have traditional 'tatami' rooms, is something all Japanese people take for granted. To a non-Japanese, however, it might be a cumbersome custom to take off their footwear every time they go into a house. Another example: slurping 'udon' or 'soba' -- noodles -- is a great pleasure and gustatory joy for Japanese people, but it may be an eyebrow raising habit to non-Japanese. At any rate, for the sake of this paper, let us limit our discussion to Japanese culture.

When we talk about "Japanese culture", it is often associated with so-called traditional culture such as Kabuki, Noh, Sadoo or Chadoo -- tea ceremony -- or Kadoo or Ikebana -- flower arrangement. Some might associate "Japanese culture" with more esoteric Zen meditation, calligraphy or Bushidoo -- the samurai spirit -- as manifested recently by a popular movie entitled "The Last Samurai".

On the other hand, people, young people in particular, think of "Japanese culture" more along the lines of contemporary pop cultural phenomena such as Karaoke and Anime, the latter of which is abundant on Australian TV.

If these two aspects were all that was meant by "Japanese culture", our task of teaching culture in the classroom would be relatively easy. We could show them on video and students would immediately perceive them visually. This is far easier than trying to explain verbally what they are. However, we know that these are only a small part of "Japanese culture" and we would like students to be aware of different cultural aspects that are overtly and covertly contained and presented in language.

Then, what is this "Japanese culture" that we think we know subconsciously or unconsciously? In my observations through a long teaching career, Japanese culture is the way Japanese people think and the way Japanese society functions. It is the basic principle or philosophy of people in the street. It is certainly not something the Ministry of Education and Science in Japan can define and impose upon people. Of course, needless to say, there is no absolute consensus in the way of thinking of the Japanese people. There is definitely a generational difference, the young and the old do not think alike, and there is perhaps a regional difference as well, for example people in the Tokyo area think differently from those in the Osaka or Kansai area. Then there may be a gender difference as well.

However, there is a common way of living daily life amongst the Japanese as a collective body when you compare it with any non-Japanese way of living daily life outside of Japan. It is, I believe, reflected in the Japanese language that people use every day. For example, let us take a very basic greeting word, "konnichiwa", which is usually translated into English as "Hello", "Hi", or "G'day". If, on day one in the beginners' class, you simply teach this word as being equivalent to the English greeting word "Hello", there will be all sorts of incorrect usage by the students. For instance, the Japanese do not use "konnichiwa" amongst family members. They say "ohayoo" or "ohayoo gozaimasu" to each other, but they never say "konnichiwa" or for that matter "konbanwa" to other family members, either. Why? Because "konnichiwa" comes from the word "today" and what you are saying when you say "konnichiwa" is "talking about today, ...", which is a rather formal way of starting a conversation. You don't need to be formal amongst family members, because they are 'in-group' people. It is precisely this reason that we feel, or at least that I feel, uneasy about saying "konnichiwa" once you get to know your students well enough. Yes, at the beginning of a new semester, an instructor and students may exchange greetings by saying "konnichiwa", but the instructor should be able to show an example by NOT saying "konnichiwa" to students after a few weeks. Then, what are they supposed to say in place of "konnichiwa"? They should, of course, say nothing and simply acknowledge a brief encounter by nodding slightly, what we call "eshaku-suru" rather than bowing deeply which is "o-jigi-suru". Or else, you say something to the effect of "ii o-tenki desu ne (It's fine weather, isn't it?)", "samui desu ne (It's cold, isn't it?)" or "moo o-hiru wa tabemashita ka (Have you eaten lunch?)", depending upon the time of the day and the situation. On the subject of 'saying nothing', the instructor should tell students when they introduce greeting expressions that once people have met and greeted each other, they would not continue to use a greeting word again to this person should they run into them again on the same day. For example, you meet students in class in the morning. You happen to come across one of your students at lunchtime, say, in a cafeteria. The student tends to say to you "konnichiwa", but you would simply nod in return. As you can appreciate, with just a simple greeting word, you can introduce plenty of 'cultural differences' from day one.

This kind of 'cultural differences' is embodied not only in spoken Japanese but also in written Japanese as well. This is because any written materials, whether they are books, magazines, newspapers or private letters, written by Japanese, reflect the way people think. For instance, a warning sign near the pond says, "koi ni esa o yaranai yoo ni shimashoo (let's not feed the carp)" rather than stronger prohibitive tone of "don't feed the carp (koi ni esa o yatte wa ikemasen)". There is not enough space to elaborate on this point, but the instructor should be able to tell students the way of thinking behind this sign. Literature, including

Classical Literature, and Philosophy were mentioned in the "Teaching East Asian Languages in Australia" Session earlier in this Conference as important and effective way of teaching advanced students in terms of cultural awareness. I fully agree. Course material should reflect the way the Japanese people think and instructors should know what to select for students with a view to expose students to a different culture.

To summarise thus far, there are two transmitters of culture in classroom situations. One is the instructor and the other is the teaching material. Therefore, we need to have a certain degree of a unified standard for both instructors and teaching materials, not simply from a language point of view but from a cultural point of view as well. This leads on to the second topic I raised at the beginning, a national 'Japanese culture awareness' standard guideline in Australia.

Standard guideline for "culture"

It may be a daunting task if we need to build up everything for a national 'Japanese culture awareness' standard guideline from scratch, but there is a model that has been proposed in the United States along the lines of the OPI (Oral Proficiency Interview) which has been administered by the ACTFL (American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages) since 1988. One of the strong proponents of the OPI is Professor Seiichi Makino of Princeton University and he recently wrote an article, "Bunka nooryoku kijun sakusei wa kanoo ka (Is it possible to make a cultural ability standard?)" in the July 2003 issue (No.118) of "Nihongo Kyooiku (Japanese Language Education)" -- a journal of the "Nihongo Kyooiku Gakkai (Association of Japanese Language Education)". I assume that all Japanese language instructors read this journal, so this is just a reminder for them, but I mention this for non-language instructors in the field of Japanese Studies and for non-Japanese area instructors.

Although I do not necessarily agree with everything that Professor Makino says in this article, I think it is a good starting point for us to think about our own version of "culture awareness standards". In brief, Professor Makino argues that culture is a mode of communication and that if there is a cultural difference, it is merely a difference in mode. He says it is important not to give culture an emotional sense of value. Professor Makino notes that 'amae (dependence)' and 'honne to tatemaie (true feeling and disguised feeling)' are often said to be unique to Japanese culture, but they are not peculiar to Japanese and all there is is a difference in mode. He then introduces the five targeted areas in the "Standards for Foreign Language Learning" issued in 1996 in the United States. They are Communication, Cultures, Connections, Comparisons and Communities. In this Project, "Cultures" are divided into three elements, namely, Perspective, Practice and Product. He elaborates in detail the

Progress Indicators for "Standards for Japanese Language Learning". The next section in the article is a list of 'cultural notes' in the two Japanese textbooks widely used in the United States, 'Yookoso' and 'Nakama'. He then proposes his idea of 'culture standards' by listing potential 'culture' words in the following categories.

"A: physical/spatial 'uchi (in-group) and its vicinities (for survival).

1. Inside the house ('uchi') and things there and behaviour therein.): e.g., structure of houses, gate, fence, garden, entrance, toilet, bathroom, 'futon', 'nenchuu-gyooji (household annual rituals)', etc.
2. 2. In the vicinity of the house and behaviour therein: city structure, distribution of fauna and flora, transport, temples and shrines, bank, post office, 'Pachinko-ya (slot machine parlour)', etc.

B. Understanding and analysis of 'soto (out-group)', impossible to perceive by touching.

1. Understanding of social and psychological 'culture' key words: e.g., 'amae', 'honne', 'tatemaie', 'giri', 'ninjoo', 'nemawashi', 'omoiyari', etc.
2. 2. Systematic/structural/organisational: e.g., company/enterprise organisation, management system, education system, bureaucracy, women's status, 'ijime (bullying)', etc.
3. 3. Understanding of literature, mythology, history, art, science and other academic fields and their viewpoints: e.g., well-known authors and their work, characteristics of historical periods, traditional art (Noh, Kabuki, etc), the current situation in science, etc."

Professor Makino brings up the ACTFL Culture Ability Standards, which were designed in the 1980s. They were not taken up seriously, because the dominant thinking was that it was impossible to gauge cultural ability.

Attached please find both Japanese and English versions of the ACTFL Culture Ability Standards as food for thought and for future reference. Professor Makino is calling for the development of a CPT (= Cultural Proficiency Test), similar to the OPI (= Oral Proficiency Interview) in the United States. I would very much like to propose that we develop our own 'cultural standards guideline' in Australia through the exchange of information with Professor Makino and other colleagues in the United States. In so doing, as I mentioned before, I would very much like to have the participation of both language and non-language instructors and researchers.

It goes without saying that this proposed 'cultural standards guideline' is by no means aiming at 'standardising' cultural indicators that all instructors in Japanese need to follow, nor is it restricting the variety of cultural elements that have to be taught in classrooms. Rather, it is aiming at, I do hope, providing a basic yardstick for each and every instructor of Japanese can refer to or rely upon when they are not familiar with some cultural aspects of Japan. Not all native speakers of Japanese know every aspect of Japanese culture and it is hoped that this 'cultural standards guideline' may become a reference tool for them. For non-native speakers of Japanese, it is also hoped that these 'cultural standards guidelines' may be a starting point to give them the confidence to introduce cultural aspects of the Japanese language, and that they may become an indispensable reference resource.

To my readers, being as they are linguistically and culturally aware scholars of Asia, I do not think I need to further elaborate on the reasons for this proposal.

Appendix 1 (English Version Source: "Nihongo Kyooiku (Japanese Language Education)", No.118, July 2003, pp.15-16)

ACTFL Culture Standards Draft (1985 Edition)

FUNCTION (i.e., BEHAVIOR)

Novice:

Unlimited interaction. Behaves with considerateness. Resourceful in nonverbal communication. Limited in language. Lacks generally knowledge of cultural patterns requisite for survival situations.

Intermediate:

Survival competence. Can deal with familiar survival situations and interact with culture bearer accustomed to foreigners. Uses behavior acquired for purpose of greeting and leave-taking. Expressing wants, asking directions, buying food, using transportation, tipping. Comprehends responses.

Advanced:

Limited social competence. Handles routine social situations successfully with culture bearer accustomed to foreigners. Shows comprehension of common rules of etiquettes, taboos and sensitivities, thought home culture predominates. Can make polite requests, accept and refuse invitations, offer and receive gifts, apologize, make introductions, telephone, purchase and bargain, do routine banking. Can discuss a few aspects of home and foreign country (general current events and politics, field of personal interest). Not competent to take part in formal meeting or in group situation where several persons speak informally at same time.

Superior:

Working social and professional competence. Can participate in almost all social situations and those within one vocation. Handles unfamiliar types of situations with ease sensitivity (also those involving common taboos, other emotionally charged subjects). Comprehends most nonverbal responses. Laughs at some culture-related humor. In productive skills, neither culture predominates; makes appropriate use of cultural references and expressions.

Generally distinguishes between formal and informal register. Discusses abstract ideas relating the foreign to the native culture. Generally limited in handling abstractions.

CONTENT

Novice:

Limited in language. Lacks generally knowledge of culture patterns requisite to survival situations.

Intermediate:

Greeting and leave-taking. Wants. Directions. Food purchase. Transportation. Tipping.

Advanced:

Etiquette. Taboos sensitivities. Polite requests. Invitations. Gifts. Apologies. Introductions. Use of telephone. Purchasing and bargaining. Routine banking. General current events and politics. Field of personal interest.

Superior:

Almost all social situations. Those within one vocation. Common taboos or other emotionally-charged subjects. Culture-related humor. Cultural references and expressions. Distinction between formal [and] informal register. Abstract ideas relating the foreign to the native culture.

ACCURACY

Novice:

Unreliable in interpretation of nonverbal cues.

Intermediate:

Can interact with culture bearer accustomed to foreigners. Makes errors as result of misunderstanding. Miscommunications occur, in interaction with one unaccustomed to foreigners.

Advanced:

Handles routine social situations successfully with culture bearer accustomed to foreigners. Does not offend culture bearer, but some important misunderstanding and miscommunications occur, in interaction with one unaccustomed to foreigners.

Superior:

Minor inaccuracies occur in perception of meaning and in expression of intended representation, but do not result in serious misunderstanding, even by culture bearer unaccustomed to foreigners.

Appendix 2 (Japanese Version Source: "Nihongo Kyooiku (Japanese Language Education)", No.118, July 2003, pp.11-12)

ACTFL 文化能力基準

機能（すなわち、行動）

初級：

無限の相互作用。思いやりの行動。非言語伝達が豊か。言語は限られている。サバイバル場面での文化パターンの知識が一般に欠けている。

中級：

サバイバルの能力。身近なサバイバル場面をこなせて、外国人に慣れている母文化者と相互作用ができる。挨拶や別れのために必要な行動ができる。希望を言う、道を聞く、食べ物を買う、交通機関を使う、チップを払う、などができる。返答が分る。

上級：

社交的能力は限られている。外国人に慣れた母文化者となら型にはまった社交状況ではうまくやれる。母文化が強く出てしまうが、礼儀作法、タブー、思いやり行動などの基本規則の理解を示す。丁寧な依頼、招待の応じ方、断わり方、贈答行為、謝り方、紹介、電話、買い物、値切る行為、決まった銀行での取り引きができる。自国、他国の情勢（一般的な出来事、政治、個人的な関心のある分野）について議論できる。公式な会合、あるいは、四、五人が打ち解けて話しているようなグループの場面に参加することはできない。

超級：

社交上、職業上使える能力。ほとんどすべての社交状況と、一つの職業内の社交状況に参加できる。慣れない種類の状況（さらには、タブーや、ほかの相手の気持ちを傷つけやすい話題）も楽に、相手の立場に立って扱える。たいていの非言語的応答が分る。文化的なユーモアを理解して笑える。能力を実行する時にどちらかの文化[筆者：母文化か異文化]も優位に立たない。文化的な指示及び表現を適切に使える。フォーマルとインフォーマルのレベルをすべて区別できる。異文化を母文化と結ぶ抽象概念について議論できる。一般に抽象能力に限界がある。

内容

初級：

言語が限られている。サバイバル場面での文化パターンの知識が一般に欠けている。

中級：

会ったときと別れの挨拶。希望。道順。食べ物を買う。交通機関。チップ。

上級；

礼儀作法。タブーと思いやり行動。招待。贈答行為。謝り。紹介。電話使用。買い物。値切る。決まった銀行のやり取り。一般的な、現在の出来事と政治。個人的な関心のある分野。

超級；

ほとんどすべての社交状況。一つの職業の中の社交状況。普通のタブーと相手の気持ちを傷つけやすい話題。文化的なユーモア。文化的な指示の仕方と表現。フォーマルとインフォーマルのレベル差。異文化を母文化と結ぶ抽象概念。

正確さ

初級；

非言語の手がかりの解釈が頼り無い。

中級；

外国人に慣れた母文化者とは相互作用ができる。誤解に基づく間違いを犯す。外国人に慣れていない人とは伝達のまちがいが起きる。

上級；

型にはまった社交上の場面は外国人に慣れた母文化者となら扱える。母文化者の気持ちを傷つけることはないが、外国人に慣れていない人との相互作用では重要な誤解や伝達のまちがいがいくらか起こる。

超級；

意味のとり方と意図した内容の表現に多少不正確なところが出てくるが、外国人に慣れていない母文化者との間でも重大な誤解にはならない。

Appendix 3 (Source: "Nihongo Kyooiku (Japanese Language Education)", No. 118, July 2003, pp. 11-12)

文化能力基準試案

| タスク | 場面／内容 |
|---|--|
| 超j級： 抽象的な認知を中心としたソト的な、従って ソト的なポストサバイバル能力。待遇行動が 的確にできる。 | フォーマル／インフォーマルな状況 でソト的な内容を扱え、ポストサバ イバル文化（認知）行動ができる。 |
| 上級： 具体的なモノ的な、従ってウチ的なポスト サバイバル能力。 | かなりソト的な場面でかなりポスト サバイバル文化（認知）行動ができる。 |
| 中級： 言語をとまなうウチ的なサバイバル能力。 | ウチ的な場面で、ウチ的なサバイバル 文化行動が出来る。ポップカルチャー 的な行動が出来る。 |
| 初級： 言語以前のウチ的なプリサバイバル能力。 | ウチ的な場面でわずかのサバイバル 文化行動が出来る。 |

正確さ

| (文化／言語文化学) のきまり | 待遇（文化／言語）行動 | 被理解度 |
|---|----------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 超級： ウチ／ソト的な文化のきまりに まず間違いない | ウチ／ソトの区別なく適切な 待遇行動が出来る。 | 母文化者のだれに でも分かってもらえる。 |
| 上級： ソト的な文化の決まりに弱さ がある。 | ソト的な待遇文化／言語行動 がまだ難しい。 | ほぼどの母文化者にも 分かってもらえる。 |
| 中級： ウチ的なきまりは正しく使 える。しかしむらがある。 | 待遇文化行動がウチ的で ある。 | 外国人の文化行動に 慣れている人には 分かってもらえる。 |
| 初級： ウチ的な文化のきまりも 身につけていない。単発的な 文化行動（e. g. お辞儀）が わずかに出来る程度。 | 待遇文化行動はゼロか それに近い。 | どの母文化者にも 分かってもらえない。 |