One-Minute Speeches: Students Developing Speech and Presentation Skills

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Abstract　Both the instructor and students' past learning experiences influence their expectations of what should happen in the second language classroom. Understanding how past learning experiences influence present learning expectations should be of importance to instructors of second languages. The instructor, who understands the past learning paradigms and the cultural learning ideologies of students, can use that as a base to integrate other learning techniques. This would enable students to expand their learning repertoires, and become autonomous learners within their own learning context. The following addresses how the process of giving weekly speeches could be broken down into stages, to allow Japanese students the time needed to develop a learner autonomy where they become independent learners with the support of their learning group. Utilizing Japanese cultural norms of maintaining group cohesion, the four stages of speeches have been broken down to facilitate students in increasing their spoken fluency, and subsequently building their confidence in using English. Finally, students end the term with a PowerPoint presentation; this enables them to combine creativity with use of their second language skills to enhance communication. This process allows students to develop their second language skills with confidence, while acknowledging specific cultural learning norms that may prevent students from otherwise developing both fluency and confidence in their second language.

Key words　speeches, autonomous learning, language development, cultural background

1. Introduction

The notion of internationalization is not new. What is new, as Jiang (2006) illustrates, is that the focus is now turning towards understanding how two cultures interact. Personal attitudes, or the values and ideals we hold true, would influence this interaction. Within the realm of university education, where value systems and ideals are often firmly entrenched, there can be "… conceptual difficulties and questionable causation(s)…" (Otten, 2009, p. 408), particularly in the domain of language learning. Within a university, there are many scenarios where personal attitudes interact

with others. One scenario relating to conceptual difficulties and questionable causations would be the English as a foreign language (EFL) instructor's values and ideologies towards the Japanese educational environment, in contrast to those of their Japanese colleagues and students in their home environment. To create a successful learning community for EFL students, the foreign instructor must be reflective of their pedagogy and how this influences cultural interactions. This would require that the EFL instructor is committed to professional development, so as to come to a greater understanding of how they can improve their pedagogy. This raises questions of what is the significance of cultural attitudes on our teaching situations, and how these attitudes would benefit or hinder second language education.

Culture, to a greater extent than most are willing to recognize, influences the way students learn and how they perform in class (Chen, Chen, Lo, & Yang, 2008). In Japan, modern society undulates between the traditional values of collectivism and the contemporary ideals of individualism (Donnery, 2009). This has very specific consequences on the learning of English as a foreign language, particularly at the university level. At Japanese universities, the successful completion of first and second year English courses is a graduation requirement. As English is mandatory for graduation, it is important that EFL instructors recognize how this creates a difference between their teaching psyche and the learning psyche of their students. Understanding the significance of the cultural attitudes behind their students' learning, would allow EFL instructors to create a learning atmosphere which encourages students to develop their English skills in a way that is pertinent for both their current and future needs. Finding a balance between students' perceived need of English communication, their actual communicative abilities, and their unacknowledged goals for English use is of importance. This paper addresses how cultural differences in language learning, between the foreign EFL instructor and their Japanese students, influence students' learning. In recognition of the importance of cultural influences on language learning, an analysis of cultural differences of the Japanese student, and their foreign EFL instructor will first be addressed. Particular attention will be paid to the collaborative and behaviorist pedagogies. This will be integrated into a discussion of the implications of culture on EFL teaching in Japan, and how the instructor could use this information to encourage learner autonomy. The discussion will then conclude with specific examples using the ideology behind developing student autonomy through one-minute speeches. It will exemplify how learner autonomy can be developed by Japanese students, while also promoting the development of oral communication skills.

2.Cultural Influences
2.1 The Western Student

Relationships at university between the student and the professor can be formal or informal. Here, formal means that the instructor is the holder of knowledge, which she/he imparts to students. The instructor is in a position of authority, which should not be questioned. In an informal setting, it

is acknowledged that the instructor has a greater depth of knowledge, yet students are encouraged to respectively disagree and question this expertise. Western societies are typically described as having a short-distant power relationship. In this relationship type, students are encouraged to question their instructors. Often, students are encouraged to be vocally critical, and study interactively through group work, projects, and discussions (Klem & Connell, 2004). This is not to say that students do not maintain a respectful relationship with their instructors, but rather that most students feel that they can directly question their instructor's position or knowledge about a specific topic. In this setting, instructors generally welcome a questioning and quizzical mind. It is generally agreed that in a western setting, students are not only encouraged, but also expected to act independently from a young age (Shi, 2011). This is in contrast to the long-distant power relationship in teaching and learning which is emphasized in the Japanese education system. Here, as McCarthy and Anderson (2000) describe from a western stance, Japanese students are perceived as taking a passive role in the classroom, and simply regurgitate what they have been taught in exams or papers. However, this is not to say that learning is not occurring. The point is that western instructors are perhaps looking for learning to occur in situations that their past learning experiences dictate it should be occurring, which might be different in their current teaching positions.

2.2 The Japanese Student

Understanding the preferred learning styles of students is important for instructors. As Hlebowitsh (2005) describes, learning styles are "the preferences students exhibit in their learning" (p.40). The values of the collectivist ideology are still strongly infused in the Japanese classroom. The collectivist ideology "promotes interdependence, respect for authority, hierarchical roles and relationships, and group consensus" (De Capua & Wintergerst, 2004, p.54). In this light the group itself is the facilitator of knowledge expansion and accruement. However, these characteristics may make some EFL instructors lament that their students are shy, un-quizzical, and quiet (Moritoshi, 2009). However, to be outgoing and quizzical in class goes against the collectivist ideology where students work together in small groups to help each other understand, and discover points of misunderstanding, or to raise possible explanations for questions posed by their instructors (Donnery, 2009).

Small group work is a vital part of the Japanese learning culture. Group members are all expected to participate through venturing ideas, and considering other member's opinions. In this learning methodology, the group acts as a collective. While there might be a group leader, everyone is expected to work together; it is their responsibility (Tsuchida & Lewis, 1998). This collectivist participation allows ideas and knowledge to develop, however it also has another function: that of face-saving. Japanese students are not known for spontaneously speaking out in class, rather they will answer questions when directly asked; face-saving tactics are at play here. Wenzhong and Grove (1999) describe how students at all levels of ability worry about losing face in the classroom.

Students with lower ability worry about losing face by answering the question incorrectly. Conversely students of higher ability may be concerned whether or not their classmates consider them as showing off; and students with middle level abilities may consider that their answers would not add additional dimensions to the question posed. Another consideration is the language skills of the EFL instructor. Many native-English speaking instructors of EFL have limited Japanese skills, however not all Japanese EFL instructors have a full command of English. In either case, questioning the instructor could potentially be a problematic situation for students; hence they employ face-saving tactics. Maintaining harmony is important in the collectivist ideology. Asking either a Japanese or native-speaking EFL instructor a question, which the student feels the instructor might not be able to answer satisfactorily, could create an uneasy situation. As maintaining harmony is of importance, to keep this balance means that questions in situations which could cause another to lose-face are not asked (Schulz, Salter, Lopez, & Lewis, 2009). Hence, it is often found that while questions are asked, typically they are asked employing unconscious face-saving tactics such as within small study groups or outside of the classroom situation.

3. Implications for Communicative Language Teaching

Clearly broad generalizations of typical educational experiences have been described above. While it is possible to generalize about the global education scene, it is important to remember that there are differences not only between countries, but also regional differences within a country. These regional differences influence both verbal and non-verbal language use (Byram, Gribkova, & Starkey, 2002). This highlights a key point: in any international communication setting interaction and comprehension necessitates patience and willingness to reach a common ground by both the instructor and students. Students are a product of the culture they have grown up in. It is important and necessary that instructors of EFL understand these cultural differences, so as to minimize misunderstandings, particularly regarding how culture influences learning styles (Sheorey, 1998).

Effective teaching strategies are needed to minimize misunderstandings due to differences in culture and learning styles in the EFL classroom. Effective teaching strategies require that instructors are willing to adapt to the educational needs of their students. The effective instructor must recognize that the educational needs of students are influenced by culture just as much as they are by the level of institution and level of student. This necessitates that an instructor has an understanding of popular teaching paradigms and learning ideologies students have experienced in the past. In addition, EFL instructors must recognize that their current teaching situation should be dynamic; their own experiences in class will enable them to grow and develop professionally. Furthermore, EFL instructors must recognize the importance of having language learning goals. Here a significant point made by Prince (2004) must be acknowledged: the traditional lecture style class is connected to a strict syllabus; a certain amount of material must be completed. This, however, is not only limited to the traditional class at university, the untraditional class also has this requirement. All classes have a

syllabus and must complete a required amount of material. What Prince (2004) is suggesting is that student absorption of material will increase, to an extent, if students are more involved in it. This does not suggest that a syllabus influences teaching style. In fact, it seems that Prince (2004) is suggesting that there is a fine line between the over use of traditional and non-traditional teaching methods and students' developing dynamic learning skills. What is important is that clearly defined goals for a class are articulated to students. Therefore, EFL instructors must be aware of the cultural learning styles their students are most familiar with, and use this as a base from which other learning techniques can be integrated. This, and clearly outlining the goals of a class, will allow students greater opportunities to develop their repertoire of learning skills as well as improve their EFL.

4. Achieving Autonomy in the Japanese Learning Context

Acknowledging that students have primarily experienced a behaviorist learning paradigm will allow the EFL instructor, a deeper understanding of their students' current learning behavior. Most Japanese students have experienced learning as a process, with the end product being an observable change (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007). Observable change is a central point, as how change is observed is typically done through examinations. Accordingly, this has several implications for Japanese students in their learning process. Most importantly, the EFL student has focused on learning English in terms of passing through hoops, whether it is an entrance examination for high school or university, or some other exam (Mori, 2002). As these examinations emphasize knowledge in grammar translation, communicative abilities received far less weight in students' past learning experiences (Seargeant, 2008; Yoshida, 2003). It follows, that many students have had minimal opportunities to freely speak in English before they enter university. The result is that students have a set repertoire of English phrases, which they can readily use; anything outside of this repertoire causes distress or miscommunication. In sum, many students are inhibited to speak English by intense worry of their poor performance in spoken English activities (Mori, 2002). This worry often leads students to fall back on stock responses, and to not employ non-verbal communication skills such as making direct eye contact with their interlocutor. Students are further inhibited by their worry of being exposed to criticism; this is most likely in the form of laugher from their classmates (Wenzhong & Grove, 1999). Thus, worry about how others view them, seemingly separates students from their cohesive group. It is these obstacles that EFL instructors of university communication classes must overcome, to allow their students to develop confidence in their English communicative abilities.

The EFL instructor must acknowledge the rote learning paradigm their students have experienced in their past English learning, and consider how to use this to their advantage. In rote learning, the distance in the power relationship between learners and the instructor is great. The instructor is seen as the expert knowledge holder, whose authority is neither questioned nor challenged. Instructors view their students as having a novice level of knowledge. Rote learning

encourages surface learning skills; students only learn what is needed to pass the test and rarely question the knowledge that is presented to them. Students are not viewed as autonomous learners but rather as a part of a homogenous body. That knowledge is seen as being controllable is exemplified through copious examinations in Japan. Students are encouraged to become dependent on their instructors for knowledge transmission, and this influences their study habit formation by encouraging students to study only what is needed to pass the test. It also encourages a helpless-orientation to learning where students neither question their responsibility in learning nor overtly challenge themselves (Elliott & Dweck, 1988).

The EFL instructor in Japan needs to build upon the Japanese learner-culture through maintaining the value placed on the homogeneity of group dynamics and collaboration in task work. However, this does not negate the role of student in terms of their willingness and motivation to participate in a collaborative learning situation. In order for collaborative learning to be successful, relationships of engagement are important (Jones, Dirckinck-Holmfeld, & Lindstrom, 2006). Accordingly, in developing an autonomous learning situation, the EFL instructor must recognize the importance of group cohesiveness in Japanese learning.

Over the years, the term autonomous learning, has taken on several different definitions. Holec (1985, in Benson, 2011), describes learner autonomy as "a capacity of the learner" (p. 14) to take charge of their own learning. This is opposed to the autonomous learner studying on their own, without direction from an instructor, and being solely responsible for their own learning. In the Japanese context, the first definition is the more suitable. This could be interpreted both in terms of ability and effort. In any group situation some members are more able to do the required work than others. However, a student's role as the expert in the group should not negate the responsibility of the weaker student to also participate. If the expert student understands that the weaker student is trying to participate and make contributions, then everyone is satisfied with the group effort. In order for collaborative exercises to work well, everyone must know what is expected of them (Colbeck, Campbell, & Bjorklund, 2000). If everyone in the group believes that their success depends on a cohesive group working together, then all members are more likely to coordinate their efforts. This implies that they share a common goal.

Collaborative learning is not only a social activity, but also a process-orientated activity. The instructor must introduce the lesson, make sure students have the necessary tools to complete the assignment, intervene when students do not understand their role in the task, and evaluate each student (Summers, Beretvas, Svinick, & Gorin, 2005, p. 170). Students will not actively participate in a community of practice (CoP, for more information see Wenger, 2000) until they are at a cognitive stage to do so. Atherton (2011) describes this as the maturation of the learner. In order for students to see the benefits of a CoP, they have to experience it first. This suggests that smaller group work should be an integral part of an EFL class.

Currently in Japan, the communicative classroom is a popular pedagogical method. This is a

learner-centered approach that is a combination of collaboration and learner autonomy (Kojima, 2012). If autonomy is the capacity of the learner, as described by Holec (1985, in Benson, 2011) above, it implies a degree of interdependence. In any learning situation we make personal decisions based on our social context. Our decisions are based on our autonomous ability to decide what we will do, and how we perceive our decisions will affect others. Thus, there is some interdependence as we have the capacity to choose to do something; yet in a collaborative situation we must work well with others, and try to effectively resolve conflicts. Our decisions accordingly, might be influenced by our group work. In the Japanese setting, where the influence of the group is very strong, students feel pressure to maintain a healthy social connection to their group. Working collaboratively, in small groups, can allow individuals to tentatively at first express different opinions, effectively allowing them to test out their reception with other group members. As instructors, we might encourage students to present differing opinions as part of the group work, which would enable students to develop an autonomous ideology with the support of their group. This is an avenue that students might not have outside of the language classroom.

5. The One-Minute Speech Assignment

The purpose behind the weekly one-minute speech assignment is two fold. First, in response to students' lament of their poor spoken abilities in English, the purpose of the speech assignment is to give students' the opportunity to develop their spoken English abilities focusing on topics of interest to them. Secondly, in terms of understanding cultural learning ideologies, the methodology of one-minutes speeches has incorporated the need to develop students' confidence in tandem with their need to work within the collective embrace of the class. Over a period of weeks, as students' EFL fluency and confidence in speech giving increase, the instructor can slowly encourage students to step away from this collective embrace and move towards being an autonomous entity. In this way students can slowly face their fears of publicly speaking in English, while also gaining confidence in speaking in English.

Students' learning abilities vary vastly and as stated above, learning cultures differ. These differences are further influenced by the region, the type of institution, and the subjects students are majoring in, as well as their past learning experiences. In utilizing the one-minute weekly speech activity, it is important to recognize that students' EFL level will dictate the speed that students are able to complete a level, and in turn how many levels students complete throughout the term. While students with lower EFL abilities may only be able to complete the first two levels, and students with higher EFL abilities may rapidly reach level four, what is important for the instructor to remember is that the purpose of this activity is for students to develop their EFL skills in topics of interest to them. In their past, most Japanese students have had few opportunities to not only speak freely in English, but also to talk about a topic that interests them. Weekly one-minute speeches enable students to develop their fluency and confidence in speaking English on topics that are of interest to them.

5.1 Stages of Development

The process of speech giving is broken down into four main stages to allow students to develop speaker autonomy, and to improve their spoken fluency in English. As students' self-confidence in speaking English increases, a cyclical effect develops where they slowly increase the quality and quantity of what they say. Ideally, each of the four stages should be completed in three to four weeks. However, differences in student's language ability, their level of foreign language anxiety, and length of course may alter this. In a conversation class, where the aim is to improve students' confidence and competence in using English, students should be encouraged to choose their own topics for the one-minute speech. However, as some students may feel uncomfortable choosing a topic, the instructor can also provide suggestions based on the topics covered in students' textbooks. Classes with a focus on a specific theme in English could direct speeches to this theme, to align the learning purpose. When delivering their speeches, students are provided with a microphone. This allows the speech to be amplified, thereby enabling the presenter to focus on their speech, without worrying about audibility. The microphone allows students to monitor both their own and others' speeches. Furthermore it fosters the feelings of being productive and satisfaction upon completion of the speech to develop.

Over the period of the course students are guided through developmental stages in speech giving, which allows them slowly to separate from the collective and become autonomous speech givers. At all levels students must prepare their one-minute speech in advance of class.

Level One: At the beginning of class students give their speeches. Students stay in their seats and using the microphone, read their speech to their classmates.

Level Two: Students stand beside their desks and using the microphone, read their prepared speech to their classmates.

Level Three: Students move to the front of the classroom. While standing they read their prepared speech to their classmates, using the microphone.

Level Four: Students again are standing at the front of the classroom. Unlike the other stages, students are now required to memorize their one-minute speech. This allows them to develop other presentation skills such as making eye contact and using natural hand gestures and body language while giving their speech. At this stage, some students may not want to use the microphone, as they feel they are unable to make natural gestures while holding the microphone.

5.2 Final Presentations

In higher education, autonomy in the EFL classroom should entail allowing students the power to set their own goals and their learner direction. While one-minute speeches foster oral communication skills, an end of term PowerPoint presentation encourages students to utilize communication skills with creativity. Throughout the term students have worked individually on their one-minute speeches, but also collaboratively through listening and giving moral support. Conversely,

in their final presentations, students have the option of working together or on their own. In his keynote speech, Wenger (2009) discusses the importance of engagement when building a learning community. Two points he makes are the alignment of standards within the learning community and being accountable to the community. When working collaboratively, it is not always possible to achieve these two points (Ryberg & Larsen, 2008). Some students simply do not want to work with others. However, often students do choose to work in teams. While this might be because they feel they need the support of a group for the presentation, it could also be because they realize they could do a more effective presentation working collaboratively. Considering Ryberg and Larsen's (2008) notion of trust, other students do not trust that their classmates will put the effort necessary in to the final project, and perhaps feel they could get a better grade working on their own. Therefore, students should have the freedom at this stage to work in groups or alone. This allows students to work at a stage in their EFL development that they are comfortable with; either independently or co-dependently depending on their language needs. In giving their PowerPoint presentations students, similar to the fourth level of one-minute speeches, again work on the physical elements of speech giving: eye contact, intonation, body language, as well as the creative elements of the slides. This allows EFL students to give communicatively rich presentation, through speech and images. In today's technically enhanced world, PowerPoint presentations are becoming a life skill. Giving students opportunities to practice this skill at university will allow them to understand what they must do to make a good PowerPoint presentation. Students, when watching their classmates' presentations further understand this. Students quickly learn what is or is not a good presentation.

Lastly, listening is a part of developing communicative skills. Therefore those students who are listening to their classmates' speeches and presentations are required to complete a listening task. Depending on the students' EFL skills this could simply be filling in a form where the listener writes down the topic of the speech along with what they felt they learnt from the speech. This listening activity has two important outcomes. First, students have to learn to listen to each other, and they realize that there are many different accents in English. Students learn the importance of communicative ability. Secondly, as the speech giver knows that their classmates must listen to them, this influences what they will talk about. This fact acts as a regulator to the speech topics students cover, as well as the quality of the speeches they plan.

6. Conclusion: The Past Influences Present Action

Native English as a foreign language instructors must recognize that their teaching practices and learning styles are different from their host culture. Together, instructors and students need to become familiar with what they each expect from the other. Part of developing a cultural understanding, particularly in this circumstance, would necessitate an understanding of how students' past learning experiences influence their present learning situation. In Japan, university students must develop new models of understanding and coping, particularly when taking EFL classes. It is

the responsibility of instructors to provide students with the opportunity and encouragement to develop their EFL skills autonomously. However, the instructor must acknowledge that in this context students depend on the support from their collective group. This necessitates a willingness by both the instructor and students to understand the situation, and patience to allow students to develop individually. Here, students need guidance to develop their autonomous learning skills. This guidance should not only be in the form of the language skills necessary for interaction with others, but also should allow students opportunities to reflect on their learning. The four levels of speech presentations allow students to work within their cultural comfort zones and slowly develop their cognitive communication skills. Furthermore, this process enables students to slowly become autonomous learners within the collective group. Thereby, the ultimate goal of finding a happy medium between the cultural learning expectations of instructors and students is achieved, while also allowing students to constructively expand their EFL abilities. In this way, the breakdown of speeches empowers students in the EFL classroom to become autonomous learners within a collaborative unit.

Acknowledgements:

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