

TEACHING OF CONTENT COURSE IN A FOREIGN LANGUAGE: NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION TAUGHT IN ENGLISH TO JAPANESE UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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I. OBJECTIVES

Over the past decade, the first author has taught several related courses on the subject of nonverbal communication as a part of the intercultural communication curriculum in undergraduate as well as graduate course levels at two Japanese universities. While the graduate courses necessarily include materials in English as part of course assignments, the undergraduate courses are generally regarded as being exclusively Japanese native language presentations. In this paper, we would like to present the observations from the undergraduate seminar content courses of two different groups of students who completed two consecutive years of the course and the analysis of the results of the students' reactions toward their seminars elicited in questionnaires completed at the end of the second year of instruction.

The two seminar groups chosen for the purpose of analysis and discussion in this paper were enrolled in the course entitled as "Nonverbal Communication" (*higengo komyunikeeshon* in Japanese). It had been offered as a regular undergraduate content course in the Department of English Language and Literature in the Faculty of Letters. The course was established and promoted as a content course to be taught using English as the primary medium of instructions. In recruitment for these courses, the two objectives openly announced to the prospective students were (1) to acquire the knowledge and skills of nonverbal behavior of the various national and ethnic grounds, including Japanese, and (2) to promote English-Japanese bilingual ability from the exposure to the two years of seminar instruction.

II. BACKGROUND AND ACADEMIC THEORY BASIS

Probably like most projects of this nature, the impetus for its undertaking came from personal educational experiences (of the first author) and the intuitive application of the positive aspects of that experience to the teaching of others. Not directly, of course, since the author's experience was as a native Japanese speaker rudimentarily trained in

English via traditional grammar-translation method in Japanese secondary schools, who jumped into the middle of the shoreless pond of American English at a small denominational college in South Dakota in the early 1960s. The only other “foreign language” speakers were those of the native Dakotan Indian dialects or the two or three European foreign students, who didn’t function effectively as life preservers. The nearest known Japanese speaker was Seiji Ozawa, the then young aspiring symphony orchestra director beginning his career in far off Chicago. So it was sink or swim – the total immersion method of language study. Standard undergraduate courses in American literature, mathematics, Western civilization or history, and the like were only taught in English with only English tutorial help. Understanding and acquisition of vocabulary needed to pass the exams came mainly from the context of the course materials or from the patient, simplified explanations of fellow students. Dictionary translation was of very little value. The courses were overwhelmingly Western-oriented and fundamental Christian biased such that literal meanings (particularly of the simple abridged dictionaries used at the time) more often missed the intent of the text writers. Also text writers usually presumed the innate American/Christian cultural knowledge of native students in the presentation of their course materials. The source of interpretation of such can only be a person who has grown up in that culture. Paradoxically, in the first year the only course in which the author excelled over native speakers was Freshman English, with its emphasis on grammatical form.

From this experience the author has developed a personal hypothesis that teaching of a content course in a foreign language – particularly in the foreign language that the student is trying to master – is doubly beneficial. For the language learner it gives practical application of attained language skills in specific context where the relationships of the target language elements can be observed in a natural (real world) setting. Vocabulary learning here has an applied context which aides in the retention of new words and lexicon. Perhaps it is the extra effort that is required in coping with the language that causes the student to realize the second benefit, that of having a more concentrated focus in the study of the subject being taught. This forced extra attention to detail pays dividends in greater retention of the course content.

So it is not the fortuitous survival with the acquisition of fairly functional English ability from this experience that is held to be of particular merit here, since the ordeal of the linguistic struggle would have very little appeal to those of the current college-age generation. Rather, it was the ability to build a solid enough linguistic and educational foundation, which permitted continuing successfully on through post-graduate courses, that is the source of inspiration in this project. In looking back, it seems that the process of studying the content courses in English provided not only the development of stronger

English language ability, but instilled a greater ability to comprehend and express the content ideas beyond that attainable by only studying solely in one's native language. It was not just a bilingual exercise, but also an acculturation on a higher magnitude (the structuring beyond that acquired in only Japanese or only English) of the rational and logic thought processes and communicative abilities.

While the primary motivation of this particular project has been personal experience and intuitive extrapolations, there does appear to be solid theoretical pedagogical foundations for the teaching of content courses in a foreign language. A large part of such theory can be found in the writings growing out of the bilingual educational programs in Canada and the United States, particularly during the period of increased immigration of period from 1960 to 1990. Indeed a body of linguistic jargon had been created in the formulation of this theoretical basis and the ensuing discussions of practical applications (Ovando & Collier, 1987; Richards and Rogers, 2001).

Bilingual programs are said to have the three objectives of the continued development of limited English proficiency (LEP) students in their primary language (L_1), the acquisition of the target second language (L_2); and instruction in the content areas of the courses utilizing both L_1 and L_2 . English as a second language (ESL) and English as a foreign language (EFL) are typically designated as the programs designed to teach English to students for whom English is not their native tongue. (Ovando & Collier, 1987: 44-45) And typically, as in the United States, most schooling contexts in which LEP students may be submersed are monolingual English instruction in all content areas. To be sure, what is said of English here applies as well to school systems of most countries that have dominant monolingual populations. It has been only in recent history that sufficient concern for the disadvantages to the education of minority language speakers has been politically recognized and become the topic of wide-spread academic attention.

Bilingual programs seem to have started as transitional bilingual education in which high priority has been given to the teaching of English. This progresses on to the maintenance bilingual education in which students receive content-area instruction in L_1 and L_2 throughout the school career. Attempts made to expand into two-way enrichment bilingual education for all members of society, not just providing L_1 speakers with instruction in L_2 but having it go both ways so L_2 speakers get equal instruction in L_1 mode as well. This has led to what is called "immersion bilingual education". Particularly as practiced in Canada it is mainly designed for speakers of the dominant language. Under this regime, all students will be instructed with some parts conducted under L_1 and varied with other parts under L_2 (Ovando & Collier, 1987: 43). In the Canadian political context, there is the established government agenda to give parity to French and English languages among the citizenry, and apparently this method of instruction is recognized as a means to

accomplish that end. The mastering of coordinate bi-lingual competence seems to be the prime objectives in these programs, although the course subject are part of the established curriculum.

Academic recognition more directly related for the subject project with a slightly different shift of emphasis is to be found in the discussions of “Content-Based Instruction” (CBI) in the writings of Richards and Rogers (2001). CBI is a teaching approach that organizes the teaching of a second (target) language around the content or information that the students are intended to acquire, and the emphasis is on the latter objective. A definition of this is in their cited quote of Krahnke:

It is the teaching of content or information in the language being learned with little or no direct or explicit effort to teach the language itself separately from the content being taught. (Krahnke, 1987: 65)

There are two central principles of CBI stated by Richards and Rogers that the authors found particularly applicable to the experience of this particular project:

1. People learn a second language more successfully when they use the language as a means of acquiring information, rather than as an end in itself.
2. Content-Based Instruction better reflects learners’ needs for learning a second language. (Richards & Rogers, 2001: 207)

In application to theory of language, they point out that language is text- and discourse based, that language use draws on integrated skills, and that language is purposeful – all of which are addressed by CBI views and application (Richards & Rogers, 2001: 207-208). Further in their discussion on application to theory of learning, they have extrapolated the following corollaries:

1. People learn a second language most successfully when the information they are acquiring is perceived as interesting, useful, and leading to a desired goal.
2. Some content areas are more useful as a basis for language learning than others [e.g. geography, psychology, or national art or literature courses].
3. Students learn best when instruction addresses students’ needs.
4. Teaching builds on the previous experience of learners. (Richards &

Rogers, 2001: 209-211)

Richards and Rogers also point out that CBI itself draws from the principles of Communicative Language Teaching, which supports the argument that the focus of real communication and exchange of information could be where the subject matter of the language being taught is the content and not the grammar, function or other language-based organization. Their quote of Widdowson was cited to support this:

I would argue, then, that a foreign language can be associated with those areas of use which are represented by the other subjects on the school curriculum and that this not only helps to ensure the link with reality and the pupil's own experience but also provides us with the most certain means we have of teaching the language as communication, as use, rather than simple as usage. (Widdowson, 1978: 16)

So, it is with some assurance that this effort was pursuing a valid academic track that the offering of a content course in nonverbal communication with English as the primary medium of instruction was instituted in a Japanese university for students of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). The response to the challenge was rather rewarding as is discussed further below. From the observable results so far, the authors are of the opinion that such classes can be a viable part of a school's curriculum. It certainly would be more beneficial if there could be attempts in languages other than English so that more extensive testing could be done to provide solid, statistically reliable evidence of the effectiveness, and it is hoped that encouragement for such can be provided by this reporting.

III. METHOD

For those not familiar with the Japanese university system a brief explanation might be helpful, since what constitutes a "seminar" as referred to in this paper is not the one-term, specialized, research-oriented class of US universities. Under the Japanese university system practice, undergraduate students are enrolled upon entry to the university in one of approved departments (or faculties), which constitutes their major field of study for the entire four years. As part of the core requirements, each must complete a *zemi* (which is commonly translated into English as "seminar") under a faculty member of their department for two to four years (depending upon the particular university's policy). Once enrolled in the "seminar", the selected students and the instructor are an unchanging unit for the full period of study. In the subject case, students were required to apply for

their seminar (*zemi*) choice at the end of their second year of study in the Department of English Language and Literature, and after selection and placement, attended the seminar in their final two years.

Under the curriculum in effect for the seminars that are subject of this study, the students in their sophomore year were offered selection among different seminars published by respective instructors in the second semester (October 1999) for seminars beginning the following school year (April 2000). After reading the explanation of the purposes and procedures of each seminar, they were asked to submit three choices in order of their preferences since some seminars were more popular than others and attracted a far larger number of applicants than they could be accommodated in limited seminar classroom capacity. When the number of applicants exceeded 16, the entrants were selected either by drawing of the computer or by the department chairman, who reallocated the overflow applicants to their second or third choice.

The response to the offering of the subject seminar, “Nonverbal Communication” (NVC), was surprisingly strong, with the highest number of applicants in spite of the challenging course description. This was the first academic content course at this university (other than customary English language or literature courses) to designate a foreign language medium of instruction. The reaction and result was the same when the seminar was offered the next year to the new group of applicants (enrolling for the school year beginning April 2000). From informal discussions with students, it seems that most chose the course both from interest in the academic subject content and a desire to improve their ability to better function in English expression and communication from the offered exposure of classes conducted in English. Indeed, it appeared that the idea of being able to realize two benefits (content and language) was an attractive feature, and few were discouraged by the added burden of studying in a foreign language medium.

IV. PROCEDURE IN A TWO-YEAR SEMINAR COURSE

The instruction program and schedule for the two years of the seminar were the same for both seminar groups. The first year after they are selected to enter the seminar, “Nonverbal Communication”, they learn:

- (1) General taxonomy or subdivisional disciplines of the field of NVC taught in the first classes. Here the lecture is given to explain the background and terminology with its etymological meaning. The intent was to give students some working knowledge and vocabulary to support further study.
- (2) Since the course proceeds mostly with printed media in English and with lectures in English (augmented with Japanese explanation or interpretation if necessary), the articulatory phonetics on the English consonants and vowels were taught in the

following class sessions.

- (3) In order to be exposed to the overall framework or parameter of NVC, Braun's five-page article (Braun, 1999) on nonverbal communication was used as an easily readable text for introducing basic concepts of the communicative aspects of body movement, touching, space, and time. Using it primarily as reading assignments, class discussion on the content was supplemented with some translation exercises into Japanese (to test and assure accuracy of understanding), grammar instruction as needed, vocabulary practice (using word-roots approach), and cultural and historical explanations.
- (4) Thereafter the main textbook, *Eye to Eye* (Marsh, 1989), was used to cover in detail the seven areas of territoriality, distance/proxemics, body language, posture, appearances, facial expressions and tactility (haptics).
- (5) The final seminar project of each student was to research and make a report presentation (in English) about NVC behavior and patterns of a selected ethnic or nationality group.

V. QUESTIONNAIRE

In order to provide some evaluation of the effectiveness of this program of study, at the end of the second year seminar sessions each group was asked to complete a questionnaire to solicit their reactions about the seminar. The questionnaire forms were written and answered in Japanese to avoid misunderstanding and to solicit candid responses not hindered by language. The contents of the first two sections of the tripartite questionnaire are provided in the appendices, with the third being simply an invitation for personal written comments. The first section (Appendix A and referred to as Form A in other appendices and below) deals with how they felt about their grasp of the content of the course taught in English and how they value the experience. The second section (Appendix B and cited elsewhere as Form B) inquires about their evaluation of teaching materials and method and how they valued the experience of English as the medium of study. For the third aspect of the questionnaire (appearing as Question 9 in Form A and Question 12 in Form B), the students were given an opportunity to freely write in any thoughts or comments about the seminar.

VI INTERPRETATION OF THE RESULTS

!!! Summary tables of the responses to each item of the questionnaires appears in Appendices C and D. Appendix C includes data related to the responses of the first seminar (class of 2000-2002) to the two questionnaire forms A and B, and correspondingly, Appendix D relates to those of the second class grouping (class of 2001-2003) to the same

sections. However since the content of the questionnaires used for both groups was the same, the following comments on interpretation of the two sets of the questionnaire responses combine the responses of both groups first for those of form A and then for form B.

1. Questionnaire form A (Appendix A):

The questions in this questionnaire related to the students' perceptions of how well they understood and retained the course content on nonverbal communication and its value to them. These questions invite consideration of the use of the medium of instruction (English) throughout – in the textbook, lectures, handouts, speeches and following question and answer session, and the final oral presentations (using English audio-visual aids).

For most of the categories of Form A, a majority of students responded with selection of the more positive response choices. This tends to support the authors' basic premise that the experience would prove beneficial for these Japanese university students. Although it is not clearly indicated in these results, there were observable indications that these students grasped the content at a higher level than was expected and demonstrated greater awareness of cultural habits and customs of peoples of other ethnic and national groups. Specific summaries of the positive nature of responses to each question are as follows:

- Q1: 63% of the first group and 77% of the second group showed that they either understand “well” or “widely” about the nonverbal behaviors of the people overseas.
- Q2: 84% of the first group and 86% of the second group indicated that they have come to have “much interest” or “deep interest” in nonverbal behavior overseas.
- Q3: 37% of the first group and then 60% of the second group replied that they have come to understand “much” or “well” the daily social behavior of the people in their environment.
- Q4: 53% of the first group and then 45% of the second group have come to be aware of their own nonverbal behaviors rather “pretty much” or “very much”.
- Q5: 21% of the first group, and 14% of the second group answered that they thought their ability of daily communication was improved “much” or “very much”.
- Q6: 21% of the first group and 32% of the second group have indicated that having learned about nonverbal communication, it helped the job placement activities “pretty much” or “very much”.

- Q7: 53% of the first group and 32% of the second group indicated that they wished to recommend for the underclassmen to study “pretty much” or “very strongly”.
- Q8: 84% of the first group and 32% of the second group showed that they felt there were “clear results” or “big results”.

From the above statistical results, the authors have come to realize that the wording of the four of the electives given for each question might not have accurately portrayed the researchers’ intentions. In the Japanese language, the words “helped a little”, “helped”, “helped pretty much” and “helped a lot” are not indicative of English meaning that what the authors had intended to solicit from the students as they might be in English. Also the wording of the four electives were given in the order of “understood a little”, “understood”, “understood pretty much”, and “understood a lot”. In other words, the four electives were all positive in their meaning and there were no choices to allow for truly negative reactions. If the electives included negative ones such as “did not contribute”, “contributed very little”, “contributed” and “contributed a lot”, then their responses might have shown much higher scale.

Another point to be noted here is that, at the bottom of the table, the total number of responses shows that it has a slight tendency to increase in number. It may be interpreted that the students that the questions contents being solicited are toward positive, stronger in semantic implication.

As for Q9, which invited free volunteer opinions or evaluations, the following are some of the more notable ones given (translated into English):

1. The seminar was fruitful because nonverbal communication and English were learned simultaneously.
2. The final [oral] presentation [in English] was useful since each student did research on nonverbal [behaviors] of a different country. Toward this presentation, I rewrote [my delivery] many times, each time with advice from a foreign student, which helped upgrade my English ability and my confidence.
3. The fact that we wrote our reports in English was very effective. I will continue studying English.

2. Questionnaire Form B (Appendix B):

The contents of the questions of this Form B are related to general curriculum matters such as teaching materials (main textbook and printed handouts), reports, speeches and a 30-minute long oral presentation at the final semester of their senior year which were all

orally presented in English.

- Q1: 89% of the first group and 86% of the second group submitted their replies as their main textbook being “appropriate” or “very appropriate” in its level of difficulty.
- Q2: 68% of the first group and then 50% of the second group showed that they judged the speed of the class procedures using the main textbook “just right”.
- Q3: 68% of the first group and 50% of the second group evaluated that practice of giving speeches every week was “helpful” or “very helpful”
- Q4: 63 % of the first group and 64% of the second group felt that reading and then writing a report on *Nonverbal Communication* by Marjorie F. Vargas were “helpful” or “very helpful”. (The assignment was that each student was to read this book in the Japanese translation and then select two chapters to summarize and write their thoughts or comments in English for a term paper.)
- Q5: 100% of the first group and 95% of the second group reacted that preparing for their own final oral presentation (bibliography, outline, research and delivery) was “useful” or “very useful”.
- Q6: 94% of the first group and 100% of the second group responded that the final presentations by classmates were “helpful” or “very helpful”.
- Q7: 32 % of the first group and 23% of the second group thought that their hearing ability of English was improved “pretty much” or “very much.”
- Q8: 37% of the first group and then 23% of the second group evaluated that their speaking ability in English improved “pretty much” or “very much
- Q9: 32% of the first group and 23% of the second group judged their reading ability improved “much” or “very much”.
- Q10: 32% of the first group and 18% of the second group expressed that their writing ability has improved “much” or “very much”.
- Q11: 42% of the first group and 23% of the second group responded that their overall English ability improved “much” or “very much”.

As for Q12 for free comments on their general class evaluation, some of the more notable ones are cited below:

1. To give oral presentations for what I prepared myself [in English] had a considerable positive effect in order to develop my English skills.
2. It took a great deal of time [and effort] to prepare for [weekly] speeches and [final oral] presentation in English by they were excellent experiences to test my English ability.

3. It was painful in the beginning because the reading materials were in English. But as we accumulated efforts and analyzed [the texts], I came to know the joy of comprehension. In the future, not studying only [the content of] nonverbal communication, I'd like to read books of my interested genre in its original [English].

VII. CONCLUSION

From the results of the questionnaire provided above, we may fairly be certain that the students in the seminar were generally satisfied with the teaching materials used in the seminar for two years. Also it looks as though the attempt to nurture them into the direction of "bilinguals" was successful even though some students were not fully confident whether they are so-called "bilinguals" or not. Nevertheless they feel that their listening ability in particular has risen compared to two years prior in their beginning of junior year.

The fact that the first author still teaches the same type of seminar described above, sophomores, juniors and seniors in the current academic year, the findings through this research gives us more insight and stimulation as to what are the directions and methods to further improve the seminars.

It is the authors' conviction that the students have gone through a new exposure of the content course on the subject of NVC through the medium of English rather successfully. It is hoped that what they have acquired in the class for two years will be of some support and assistance in their future careers whatever the directions they may choose to proceed.

APPENDIX A

Questionnaire⁴ : English as a medium of instruction (translated from Japanese)

Note: You have studied "Nonverbal Communication" in this seminar for two years using books and handouts written in English as well as listening to lectures spoken primarily in English. Also you have given several speech presentations in English. Please answer the following questions based upon such experience.

1. Compared to before the seminar started, regarding the nonverbal aspects in intercultural contexts, I now understand
(a. a little, b. some, c. well, d. widely)
2. Compared to before the seminar started, regarding the nonverbal aspects of intercultural contexts, I now am interested
(a. a little, b. some, c. much, d. deeply)

3. Compared to before the seminar started, regarding the social behaviors of people around me, I now understand
(a. a little, b. some, c. much, d. well)
4. Compared to before the seminar started, regarding my own nonverbal behaviors, I have come to be aware
(a. a little, b. some, c. much, d. well)
5. By having learning nonverbal communication, my ability to communicate has become
(a. a little better, b. better, c. much better, d. very well)
6. By having learned nonverbal communication, I think it helped my job placement activities
(a. a little, b. some, c. much, d. very much)
7. I would recommend my underclassmen to study nonverbal communication
(a. a little, b. some, c. much, d. very much)
8. By having learned nonverbal communication, I feel it was worth
(a. a little, b. some, ! c. much, d. very much)
9. Regarding the study of nonverbal communication in this seminar, write freely below.

APPENDIX B

Questionnaire B: Curriculum of Nonverbal Seminar (translated from Japanese)

1. The contents, level of English, and degree of difficulty of the main text *Eye to Eye* are (a. inappropriate, b. a little inappropriate, c. appropriate, d. very appropriate)
2. The speed of teaching the text is (a. too slow, b. a little slow, c. just right, d. too fast)
3. The speeches in English we delivered were (a. not helpful, b. helped a little, c. helped, d. very helpful)
4. The report assignment from Marjorie Vargas' *Nonverbal Communication* submitted in July in junior year was (a. not helpful, b. helped a little, c. helped, d. very helpful)
5. My own final oral presentation in English (making bibliography, outline, research and delivery) this semester was (a. not helpful, b. helped a little, c. helped, d. very helpful)
6. Final presentations in English by classmates were (a. not helpful, b. helped a little, c. helped, d. very helpful)
7. Comparing before the seminar started, I think my hearing ability in English improved

- (a. a little, b. some, c. much, d. very much)
8. Comparing before the seminar started, I think my speaking ability in English improved (a. a little, b. some, c. much, d. very much)
 9. Comparing before the seminar started, I think my reading ability in English improved (a. a little, b. some, c. much, d. very much)
 10. Comparing before the seminar started, I think my writing ability in English improved (a. a little, b. some, c. much, d. very much)
 11. Comparing before the seminar started, my overall English ability improved (a. a little, b. some, c. much, d. very much)
 12. Any comments regarding the English curriculum of the seminar (text, handouts, speech, reports, presentation)

APPENDIX C

Seminar I: These are the results for the first group (class of 2000-2002)

Questionnaire Form A

electives questions	a	b	c	d	Total number of students
Q1	0	7	6	6	19
Q2	0	3	7	9	19
Q3	5	7	1	6	19
Q4	3	6	7	3	19
Q5	12	3	4	0	19
Q6	5	9	1	4	19
Q7	0	9	4	6	19
Q8	0	3	9	7	19
Total responses	25	47	39	41	152

Questionnaire Form B						
electives questions	a	b	c	d		Total number of students
Q1	0	2	13	4		19
Q2	0	6	13	0		19
Q3	0	6	8	5		19
Q4	1	6	11	1		19
Q5	0	0	7	12		19
Q6	0	1	6	12		19
Q7	11	2	5	1		19
Q8	11	1	6	1		19
Q9	4	9	2	4		19
Q10	10	3	2	4		19
Q11	6	5	5	3		19
Total responses	43	41	78	47		209

APPENDIX D

Seminar II: These are the results for the second group (class of 2001 to 2003)

Questionnaire Form A

electives questions	a	b	c	d	Total number of students
Q1	1	6	6	9	22
Q2	1	2	6	13	22
Q3	4	5	9	4	22
Q4	3	9	3	7	22
Q5	8	11	2	1	22
Q6	3	12	5	2	22
Q7	0	6	7	9	22
Q8	0	1	13	8	22
Total responses	20	52	51	53	176

Questionnaire Form B

electives questions	a	b	c	d	No response	Total number of students
Q1	0	2	18	1	1	22
Q2	0	9	11	1	1	22
Q3	1	10	6	5	0	22
Q4	0	8	8	6	0	22
Q5	0	1	7	14	0	22
Q6	0	0	4	18	0	22
Q7	7	10	5	0	0	22
Q8	12	7	3	0	0	22
Q9	8	9	4	1	0	22
Q10	13	4	4	0	1	22
Q11	5	11	4	1	1	22
Total responses	46	71	74	47	4	242

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