The possibility of culture training in the English classes at NIT -Introducing Culture Assimilator, The first part-[*1*2]

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to investigate the possibility of introducing culture training, referred to as "Culture Assimilators", into standard English classes at NIT. In this trial, students are supposed to acquire intercultural communication competence as well as English proficiency when instructors implement this method properly. This trial is predictably effective. However, there are not many materials on cultural training for the English classes and the teachers may require considerable preparation for the classes.

This is the first part of the comparative controlled study, covering the sections from the introduction to the pre-test results. Therefore, this paper does not show the results of the subjects and main conclusion. They are to be shown in the following papers.

Keywords: English Education, Culture Training, Culture Assimilator

1. Introduction.

English teachers at Kosen, National Institute of Technology (hereafter referred to as NIT), are teaching English with various methods. There have been few studies into introducing culture training into English classes as a fresh approach. If it is successful, this study will serve a dual purpose, in the sense that students will develop both competence in English and intercultural communication. The author of this paper conducts a comparative controlled study and reports their findings from the first part of this study. The purpose of this study is to find out whether Culture Assimilators (hereafter referred to as CA), which is one of the forms of cultural training, can be introduced into English classes at Kosen and to investigate how this method contributes to English education.

Specifically, we would like to find out whether CA, which is being recognized on a subjective basis, can provide enough evidence of effectiveness on an objective and empirical basis. If this method has problems, we would like to examine what they are and what the solutions are. It may eventually be beneficial for us if using CA in English classes blossoms into an effective instructional methodology.

2. The validity of introducing CA into English classes.

On a higher principal, the aim of English education itself is to let the students acquire English competency at the high school level. The aim also involves studying "Culture" in English classes with three purposes. First, learning language equals learning culture; when we learn one language, we also learn its culture as well, including the concept of values and patterns of communication. This means English education itself entails intercultural communication (Shiozawa, 2010).

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Second, Knop (1976) mentions as follows; teaching culture in language classes enriches the learner's mind, increases their liking for knowledge, and we can learn culture more easily compared to learning language. In addition to these two reasons, we can evaluate the importance of studying culture from the perspective of the course of study in Japan. In the course of study at the high school level, the overall objective is to cultivate communicative abilities (MEXT, 2009). In the contents of the course of study, MEXT mentions an important detail about English teaching materials as follows:

> A. Materials that are useful in understanding various viewpoints and ways of thinking, developing the ability to make impartial judgments and cultivating a rich sensibility.
> B. Materials that are useful in deepening the understanding of the ways of life and cultures of Japan and foreign countries, raising interest in language and culture, and developing respectful attitudes toward these elements.
> C. Materials that are useful in deepening international understanding from a broad perspective, heightening students' awareness of being Japanese citizens living in a global community, and cultivating a spirit of international cooperation.

(MEXT, 2009, English version. p.7.)

Much of the same content is stipulated in the "Model Core Curriculum", the course of study for Kosen (National Institute of Technology, 2012).

From the standpoint of these matters, the author of this study hopes that there is considerable validity for introducing CA into English classes. This paper is intended to serve a dual purpose: enriching students' English and cross-cultural communication skills.

3. CA in cross-cultural training.

The first point that we should define is what CA is. It is the cultural assimilation training developed by Fiedler, Mitchell, and Triandis in 1971, with simulation experience which consists of real stories with misinterpretation and critical incident (Yashiro, 2005, p.100). First, students read the stories; the stories are made up of the misunderstanding and the mistakes caused by the cultural differences. The second is to detect why the trouble happened and choose one answer from among four multiple choices, which is thought to be the best for the problem solving. The last is the discussion; they talk with group members about why they choose the answer.

4. Discussions of CA's advantages and disadvantages.

Now, we will discuss the advantages and disadvantages of CA.

4-1. Advantages.

Misumi (1997) mentioned the following two points:

1. We can simulate the extraordinary experience of other cultures with CA

2. Intercultural adjustments and second language acquisition reveal a correlation; when students learn English as a second language, it would be the best time to learn intercultural communication.

Iwata (1992, pp.139-140) indicates the following matters; Not only can students learn cross-cultural awareness, but English skills would also be improved when CA is conducted in English. CA is basically conducted in English, however, their mother language can partly be used when students are not so proficient in English. Iwata (1992) also presents several merits of CA. First, CA employs a participatory approach; students can learn in enjoyable ways with practical steps. They can also foster logical thinking ability through discussion activities. Beyond that, CA is consisted of cognitive content and tasks. For this reason, students can learn without psychological resistance. The last point she mentioned is administration. It is an easily administrated training method; as long as materials are prepared, teachers easily implement CA even in a large-sized class. Tolbert & McLean (1995) also mentioned several advantages; the teachers can use CA in combination with others, and they mention four merits for students with CA;

students can learn with optimum speed, can relearn CA as many times as they wish, can obtain feedback immediately after they learn, and can participate both individually or in groups.

4-2. Disadvantages.

Kato (2009, pp.18-19) mentioned several weak points of CA; first, practicing CA can deviate from the goal of English education itself; acquiring English proficiency is considered to be the top priority.   In addition to that, it would be difficult to show the achieving results in figures.   According to Kobayashi (2010, pp.101-102), nourishing the ability of cultural communication would go beyond the scope of regular English classes of even experienced teachers. Another point is about CA materials.   There are few textbooks so far, thus the teachers may have to develop and produce CA materials by themselves (Knop,1976).   In addition to that, the creators of CA materials would not be able to use complex cases and would need to be updated for the preparation of cultural changes (Tolbert & McLean,1995).

5. Method.

5-1. Participants.

The participants in this survey were 168 second-year students, at NIT, kagawa college, who were taking "English IIA"

5-2. Method of implementation.

Data were gathered from the participants, in class and out of classes.   Students were divided into an experimental (85) and a control (83) group.

5-2-1. In class.

In the experimental classes, part of lecture, approximately 1/3 of all, was conducted with CA materials, "Culture Riddles"（NAN'UN-DO publishers）, without deviating from the syllabus.   Classroom observations were also conducted while they were learning from CA textbooks.   In the control groups, students took regular lessons.

5-2-2. Out of class (Qualitative study).

A semi-structured interview, lasting 15 minutes, was conducted after students finished their academic year. Approximately 15~20 students were interviewed by the experimenter.

5-3. Quantitative study.

To examine the English and intercultural communication competence, three tests were conducted on the group of participants, at the beginning and the end of the term (pre- and post-test).[*3]   The first test was STEP, Eiken, 3rd grade, which was thought to be appropriate for the junior Kosen students to check their English ability.   The others were Ethnocentrism Scale and IUS2000; International Understanding Scale 2000, that are the criteria for measuring ethnocentrism and international understanding.   Those three tests are generally recognized as a reliable and validated exams (Neuliep, J. W., and McCroskey, J. C., 2013, Suzuki, et al., 2000).

6. Pre-test results (Quantitative study):

On this survey, these two groups had to show no significant differences in each pre-test.   In order to be sure that there was little or no difference between them, *T-test* were performed to make sure that the results were usable (Table1).   As a result, the *P-value* was greater than 0.05, which showed no significant differences between the "Experimental" and "Control" groups.

Table 1: Pre-tests results

	n	Test-1:STEP		Test-2: Ethnocentrism Scale		Test-3: IUS2000	
Group		M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Experimental	85	69.33	18.20	39.29	9.97	115.93	17.69
Control	83	67.77	15.09	39.61	11.13	120.58	19.78

<div align="center">P= .549> .05   P= .845> .05   P= .112> .05</div>

7. Conclusion at the first part.

Under the present conditions, it is not clear whether conducting CA training in English classes would be objectively effective or not.　This study fortunately met the conditions necessary for the pre-test as a starting point.　A continuous examination of the post-test will be examined further in the following papers to check the effectiveness of CA.

Notes:

*1: This paper was presented at the 41st COCET, Kyoto, on 3 September, 2017.

*2: This survey went through by the 8th Shikoku regional Kosen bioethics committee.

*3: English proficiency is not the main measuring element in this study, however, this CA method would be used in English classes, for this reason, English proficiency needs to be measured as a parameter.

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