An introduction to culture general cross-cultural training

Tadashi SHIOZAWA*
David HOPKINS**

I. Introduction

Cross-cultural communication entails a lot more than language skills and what we know about a certain culture. We could have very advanced target language skills and so much knowledge about a target culture, but we could still miserably fail to communicate effectively with people from overseas in a face-to-face communication situations. Misunderstanding occurs and awkward feelings or even hatreds develop. Why? It's because we lack skills to control our own emotions and behaviors. To become a effective cross-cultural communicator, we need training in affective and behavioral skills of communication. To effectively conduct cross-cultural communication with the people from different cultures, it is essential to deal with the feelings that the target language and culture evokes. Cramming ourselves with information about different cultures does not necessarily help in cross-cultural communication. Knowing is one thing, acting and feeling is another. We started to realize the importance of this "affective competence" in cross-cultural communication, but we are still not sure how we could train our learners to gain this competence. The objective of this paper is to describe the process of creating such trainings and activities, and suggest that not only cross-cultural communication trainers but also language teachers as teachers of communication adopt this approach in their daily language teaching/learning situations.

In this paper, the authors will first re-visit the definitions of culture and tries to define it from a pedagogical viewpoint. Secondly, they list cultural elements from five different perspectives. They hope this list should help trainers and teachers create their own training activities. Thirdly, they will examine why cross-cultural communication is so problematic and how it could be tackled. They suggest teachers and trainers use "culture general experiential approach." Some training methods they have created or adapted from conventional approaches are described in the end.

*外国語教室 (Department of Foreign Languages)
**American University Alumni Language Center (Thailand)

II. Definitions of culture re-visited

Culture is a way of life. Culture is the background of every human being. Culture is social environment. Every human being has a different background unique to him or her. Culture forces human beings to act the way they do. Without it, one cannot communicate effectively with others. Culture is the context within which we exist, think, feel, and relate to others. It is the "glue" that binds a group of people together (Brown, 1995) No one can live without being affected by culture. This fact is beautifully expressed by the famous line from John Donne, "No man is an island entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main."

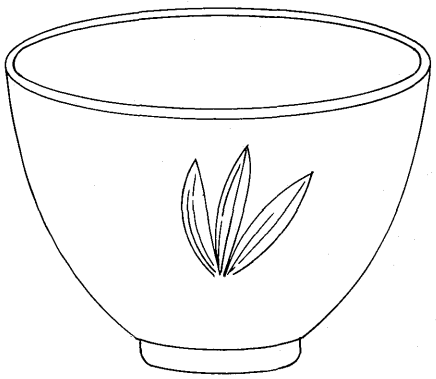
Since Tayler defined culture in 1889, probably for the first time, innumerable definitions have been made. They vary so much that Kroeber (1954) reported that there were no real common denominators among the 300 definitions they examined. However, when anthropologists, whose science is all about culture, use the "c" word, it is generally understood that it is "a total sum of the reality shared by a group of people in a certain time frame." Oswald (1970) called it "a way of a population." To put it in more precise terms, it is like an invisible thread which ties together a group of people in a community at a given time so that they can function as human beings. It is a total sum of their way of life and it has certain rules and patterns. If one does not know these rules, it is likely he or she will not be able to communicate effectively or may be misunderstood or feel isolated from the rest of the community. In the worst case, his or her life may be threatened.

More precisely, what we call culture here is made up of "mental culture" such as values, perception styles, thought patterns, world views; "behavioral culture," which is the expressed forms of the mental culture; and "material culture," which is represented by food, clothing, tools, and shelter. It is such a total entity of life that it is hard to define separate from our life view. At the same time, it is hard to extract one element of culture from the whole since all the parts are interdependent. Many cultural elements are also imperceptible which makes them even harder to define. All these factors make culture a particularly slippery topic to deal with.

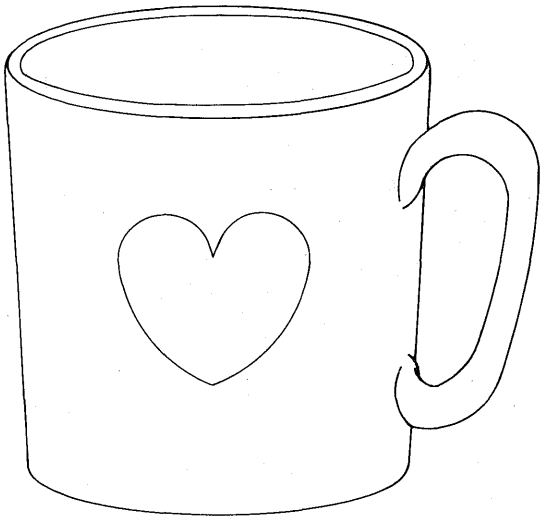
When we talk about culture, it is probably safe to use the general definitions above because our emphasis here will be on face-to-face communications. However, our focus should be on the background; understanding the feelings of people from different cultures and how they are reflected in communication behavior. Therefore, we will exclude 'high culture' such as arts, history, or music from our consideration in our discussion.

Seelye (1991) said, "Most of the argumentative discussions over the definition of culture have been a colossal waste of time." He is right. What is more important is to "describe", not to define, culture.

To understand what culture is in a simple way, let us look at the pictures below.



Japanese tea cup



American coffee cup

What do we see in the pictures above? Japanese and American values are represented by the cups. Compare the size, the thickness, the functionality, the way the cups are used and we can discover a microcosm of cultural values. The simple, delicate nature of the Japanese tea cup radiates its heat for the holder to appreciate. The sturdy, practical American coffee cup with a handle to let the holder get a good grip and protect against burning the fingers. The functionality of each cup is obvious to the beholder, each from their own point of view.

Culture is not something separated from things, but something that is reflected in the things we use as well as in our way of life. Everything seems to be a reflection of cultural values and beliefs in one way or another. Human beings are the reflection of their own culture whether they like it or not. Human beings are cultural beings. No group of human beings exists without a culture, and deprived of that culture most individuals suffer from the adverse effects of 'culture shock,' and culture is the cup that holds us together in a group and defines us as as 'the people' in a world of peoples.

Pennington's categorization of culture helps us understand its elements. He categorized culture into nine elements. (1985, pp.30-39)

1. behavioral patterns and their background reasons (world view, universal view, attitudes towards God or nature)
2. language and reflective system (language, non-verbal language, paralanguage)
3. style of interpretation (cognition, categorization, styles of selection)
4. values, attitudes, and beliefs
5. concept of time
6. concept of space
7. religions, myths, and its styles of expression (arts, music, etc.)
8. societal relationship and communication web (family, structure of community)
9. styles of innovation (ways to handle unexpected situations or emergencies)

III. Elements of culture from a pedagogical perspective

The above categories are useful for the study of culture, but are not adequate for the purposes of training. We need to focus even more closely to define the things that make up the subtle, mosaic tapestry of culture. We divided element of culture into five categories from a pedagogical perspective. These precise catagolization should help trainers and teachers create their own training methods and learning devices.

1. para-linguistic features

-voice (tone, stress, pitch, intonation, volume, noise, onomatopoeia)
-silence (its meaning and interpretations)
-others (laugh, crying voice, yawning, snoring)

2. non-verbal features

-kinesthetic (facial expressions, eye contact, body movements of shoulders, head, and hands, gestures, postures)
-personal distance (influence of space on face-to-face communication)
-olfactory (smell of nature, body, etc. and its influence on communication)
-touching (hugging, kissing, shaking hands, or lack of)
-appearance (clothing, make-up, ornaments)

3. values and assumptions about:

-time
-space
-family
-peace
-money
-nature
-equality
-education
-myth, spirits & religion
-hierarchy
-achievements
-youth/elderly
-efficiency
-dignity
-patriotism
-verbal communication
-fairness
-aggressiveness
-women
-roots in "the land"
-cleanliness
-materialism & wealth
-progress
-numbers
-success
-friendship
-love
-self
-death & ancestors

4. a dichotomy of values, attitudes and beliefs in:

action	thought
youth	age
measurable achievements	process
fairness	politeness
individuality	groupism
equality	hierarchy
frankness	modesty
privacy	non-existence of privacy
sin	shame
substance	form
innovation	tradition
independence	mutual dependence
freedom	collectivism
comfort	appearance
informality	formality
difference	unity
assertiveness	harmony
verbalization	unspoken communication
change	fixed patterns
lawfulness	morality
creativity	emulation
directness	vagueness
bigness	smallness
doing	being
logic	feeling
optimism	pessimism
praise	criticism
relaxation	stiffness
myself	others
competition	cooperation
right	duty
specialization of roles	generalization of roles
self being virtue	self being vice

5. cultural notions and functions

-small talk
-greetings
-how to start and end conversation
-turn-taking
-how to expand conversation
-summarization
-topic
-logic
-Grice's maxims of conversation (quality, quantity, relevance, manner)
-communication styles
-sociolinguistic and strategic competence
-functions of language
-social customs and functions
-social structure
-family relationships
-man-woman relationship
-gift exchanges
-home, community, town, city, country
-race
-stereotypes
-mobility
-holidays
-food
-social norms
-laws
-political and economical information
-social taboos
-cultural information and achievements
-geographical and historical information
-art
-literature
-music
-theater
-architecture

-philosophy

Using the above categories, we can easily select the cultural elements we want to deal with in cross-cultural training and construct activities around a specific element. In reality, however, we may need to deal with multiple elements in training sessions. The categories above are simply described for a pedagogical purpose and should never be understood as a description of entire culture. Culture is a complicated system and includes every phase of human activities. Its elements may never be described in a discrete categorization and the attempt to delineate it would always fail.

IV. Why is cross-cultural communication so difficult?

Cross-cultural communication may be defined as what happens whenever someone responds to the behavior, or the residue of the behavior, of a person from another culture. It is the communication which takes place between people with different cultural backgrounds. Cross-cultural communication is also a dynamic, transactional process in which people across cultures behave intentionally, or unintentionally, in order to induce or elicit a particular response from a person from a different culture. Cross-cultural communication takes place, whether or not the behavior is conscious or unconscious, when one observes another person's behavior and attaches meaning to it. The communication is cross-cultural whether or not the intentions of the correspondents are achieved.

Cross-cultural communication is problematic; even more so than the usual difficulties of interpersonal communication within our own culture. When people with different values and assumptions communicate with one another, they tend to interpret the messages in ways different from those originally intended. As a result, miscommunication or communication breakdown takes place. People communicate most effectively when they share common understandings of the behaviors or symbols exchanged. In the absence of this background knowledge, recipients unconsciously attach meaning based upon their own cultural norms. This may lead to successful communication, but often results in miscommunication aggravated by the fact that the communicators do not understand the source of the misunderstanding. These misunderstandings usually result in making a negative value judgment about the other person which at best makes further communication more difficult.

V. Culture general experiential approach

In order to avoid communication breakdown, cross-cultural communicators would ideally understand the assumptions behind messages sent by any person with different cultural values. This is, however, unrealistic since the probability that any one person could learn a complete set of values for mulitple cultures is unrealistic, but we would certainly want to produce cross-cultural learners who were prepared no deal with more than one other culture. The culture-specific approach also ignores the existence of a common set of "felt needs" (e.g. Maslow's hierarchy of needs-physical needs, social needs, work-related needs, and intellectual needs) underlying all cultural behavior. The common set of felt needs is the basis for the answer to the dilema posed by culture-specific learning. The common set of felt needs means that the motivation for learning about any culture follows a similar pattern - satisfying physical, social, work, and intellectual needs roughly in that order. If the felt needs are common to all cultures, then the process for satisfying these needs should follow a similar pattern. Thus, the training needs to be process-specific, rather than cotent-specific.

The process is, 'learning-to-learn from experience,' or what is commonly called "experiential learning." Learning to learn from exprience is an obvious, but elusive answer to the problem. It takes a conscious practice of reflection upon experience to uncover the differing values and beliefs which underlie cultural behavior since the values and beliefs that underlie C1 behavior are by definition inate. It also means that the starting point of c-c training must be to raise the individuals consciousness of C1. Moreover, we need to "objectify" these reflections to make them relevant to the general cultural environment - i.e. to focus on shared observations rather than individual interpretations.

The cross-cultural learning process needs certain conditions to be effective:

1. A group of persons with a reason; an intercultural objective - i.e. travel or work abroad, dealing with foreigners in your own culture, or communicating via traditional or electronic media. This could be a group of high school students, volunteers preparing for overseas assignments or study abroad participants. The important thing is that the group shares a commitment to learn from the experience.
2. A focus on process rather than content or results. Process is the learning objective in an experiential program. It is more critical to know how one came

to a certain understanding than it is to gain the 'understanding.'

3. A focus on feelings rather than knowledge. Dealing with new and difficult situations under stress is more dependent upon visceral coolness than rational thought.
4. A willingness to participate. If you want to learn new things you have to try new things.
5. Logistical integrity. The time and space to allow regular and open communication among participants in the learning group.

Becoming an effective cross-cultural communicator is no easy task because it involves dealing with our own emotions and behaviors. People can't easily change the way they feel, act, and react. They often can't change their attitude even if they know there is something wrong with it. Therefore, cramming themselves with information about different cultures does not necessarily help in cross cultural communication. Knowing is one thing, acting and feeling is another. Teaching cultural information does not insure that learners will become cross-culturally competent. To effectively conduct cross-cultural communication with the people from different cultures, it is essential, to deal with the feelings that the target language and culture evokes. Learners may know what is right and wrong in the social and cultural norms of the target culture. However, this does not guarantee that they can behave according to the social norms of the target culture. To illustrate, a Japanese may know that he or she should shake hands when introduced to a male person in the U.S., but may not be able to do so, or at least feel very awkward in this situation.

Donald Watt, the founder of The Experiment in International Living said, "Intelligence is not enough." Learners not only need information about a specific culture, but also the skills to handle their own emotions and behaviors. One approach is training designed to let the participants take affective risks, experience uneasiness, discover themselves as being "culture beings", and develop cultural sensitivity.

One can be cognitively aware of the appropriate behavior, behave accordingly, but still not feel comfortable in cross-cultural situations. This is the case of the Japanese handshaker. Effective cross-cultural training makes the learner aware of his or her own culturual attitudes, values and beliefs through structured experiences focusing on the affective rather than the cognitive aspect. Knowing by discovering, acting by imitating, and adapting by synthesizing what we know about ourselves with what we know about others, is the essence of the c-c learning process.

V. Types of experiential activity for cross-cultural training

Basically, there are only two types of experiential activities used in CCT: those that use the 'group experience' as base of exploration, and those that use interactions outside the group. For the sake of simplicity, we will call them "structured group" experiences, and "community exploration" activities respectively. Training programs specifically focused on CCT usually use both types of activities, but language classes are often limited to structured group activities. Structured group activities focus on the reality of the feelings that participants have about what they are doing, the other participants, and themselves. Examples of this kind of activity are: Tisouro, Crocodile River, and personal distance exercises.

A. Tisouro

Tisouro is a group experience that explores non-verbal communication, and in-group/ out-group feelings. A pair of ordinary scissors are passed around a group in a circle. There is a special code which only the facilitator knows, but as the exercises progresses, more and more people discover the code. This generates many of the "felt needs" of the CC experience - e.g. frustration in communication, feeling like and outsider, feeling foolish, etc. The main point of the exercise is the discussion which follows focusing on, "How did you feel?" This should focus on the very real feelings created, rather than on intellectualizations about, "the game."

B. Crocodile River

Crocodile River is a variant of the original "Alligator River" exercise in the book, Values Clarification. The short plot involves moral, cultural and sexist questions that must be resolves through a problem-solving process. The participants work in small groups to: 1) identify the problem, 2) identify three alternative solutions, 3) choose a solution and finish the story. Upon conclusion, the small groups report their resolution to the larger group. The discussion then focuses on the values, attitudes and beliefs that are reflected in the solutions.

C. Measure your Personal Distance!

Personal distance exercises focus on the comfort range that people feel in different circumstances - e.g. boy-to-boy, girl-to-girl, boy-to-girl, with a foreigner, etc. This is done

by acting out the distance comfort ranges in pairs. Trainers may want to actually have their trainee measure their personal distances using a plastic measure and report the differences of personal difference back to the entire group (Shiozawa, Hopkins, Shinjo 1993). As with the above exercises, the important thing is the discussion of the activity, more than the activity itself.

All these activities focus on the "here and now" rather than the "there and then." For example, a participant might explain himself by saying, "But I wouldn't (feel like that) (I wouldn't do that), if I were in a real situation." The point is, the group is "real" and the only thing relevant is what people think, feel and do in the group. The group is a microcosm of the larger and more complex interactions that occur in a CC context. Its value is that the group dynamic is not complicated by the wider range of cultural backgrounds and perceptions present in intercultural situations. It is a"laboratory" where groups experiment with communication, feelings and behaviors.

Community exploration activities focus on interactions outside of the training group like: the Drop Off, Martian Anthropology explorations, and the Route of Cultural Informants. In these activities the participants go into the community to experience in a relatively controlled environment the feelings and behaviors of CC interaction.

D. The Drop Off

The Drop Off is an activity where a training group is left to explore solo, or in pairs, a community different from their own. This might be having Japanese university students walk around a farming community asking questions, or, a group of Americans exploring a small rural town. Participants develop a list of questions to be asked in preparation meetings. The survey questions provide a point of reference and an excuse for the activity. The point, however, is to focus on the follow-up discussions of what was learned about feelings and behavior in this situation. Shiozawa and Hopkins (1993) reports that their trainees evaluated this method extremely highly in their CCT camp at a local community in Ena, Gifu.

E. The Martian Anthropology Exercise

The Martian Anthropology Exercise sends participants into a community to explore activities from a Martian cultural viewpoint. For example, a team might be sent to a MacDonald's to study "agriculture and food gathering," to a karaoke bar to study, "local politics", or to a pachinko parlor to study, "science and technology." The point is to

change the normal perception of things and have participants experience how a foreigner might view their own culture. The follow-up discussion should emphasize how much our cultural baggage influences how we see and interpret the world, but this must be developed from the group's comments about how they felt during the activity, rather than an objective offered by the facilitator.

F. The Route of Cultural Informants

The Route of Cultural Informants is usually used in in-country training programs - i.e. with American students studying in Japan, or visa-versa. Participants are asked to take a community walkabout once a day and try to establish seven to ten "cultural informants" that they can talk to on a regular basis. These might be policemen, storekeepers, children, elderly people, or others. Every day they make their walkabout and talk with their cultural informants using language studied in language class, or topics developed in discussion. Each days walkabout is followed by a discussion where participants share their experiences and feelings. This is an excellent technique to bring together language training, cultural observation and community exploration.

While Japanese university students talking with Japanese farmers is not the same as Japanese students dealing with American students in America, the experience is real and relevant. It is real because it involves dealing with strangers in an unaccustomed situation. It is real because it involves risk - risk of failure, and risk of embarrassment. Overcoming the fear of looking foolish, and dealing effectively and sensitively with different people and situations is the essence of the CC experience.

The key element in all of these exercises is the ACTION→REFLECTION model. An experience that creates some of the felt needs, ambiguities and risk of the CC experience, followed by a group discussion to share and synthesize what has been learned. It depends upon a discovery approach to learning, rather than a directive approach. The goal is learning-to-learn from experience which is critical in CC training.

VI. Conclusion

One can be cognitively aware of the appropriate behavior, behave accordingly, but still not feel comfortable in cross-cultural situations. This is the case of the Japanese hand shaker described earlier. Effective cross-cultural training makes the learner aware of his or her own cultural attitudes, values and beliefs through structured experiences focusing

on the affective rather than the cognitive aspect. Knowing by discovering, acting by imitating, and adapting by synthesizing what we know about ourselves with what we know about others is the essence of the process.

References

Brown, H.D. (1995). *Principles of language teaching and learning*. 3rd ed. New York: Prentice Hall Regents.

Hopkins. D. (1994). Tisouro. *Beyond Culture* 2ed ed. by T. Gorchenore. New York: Intercultural Press.

Kroeber, A. (1954). *Culture : A critical review of Concepts and definitions*. New York: Random House.

John Donne. (1624). *Devotion upon emergent occasions*. ed. by A. Raspa. 1975. Montreal: MacGill-Queen's University Press.

Pennington, Dorthy. "Intercultural communication" in *Intercultural communication: a reader*. 4th ed. Ed. Larry A Samovar & others. Belmount, Cal. : Wadsworth.

Porter, R.(1991). Basic principles of intercultural communication in *Intercultural communication: a reader*. 6th ed. Ed. by Larry A Samovar & others. Belmount, Cal. : Wadsworth.

Grice, P. (1968). Utterer's meaning, sentence meaning and word meaning. *Foundations of Language*, 4, 225-42.

Grice, P. (1969). Utterer's meaning and intentions. *Philosophical Review*, 78, 147-77.

Grice, P. (1975). Logic and conversation. In P. Cole & J. L. Morgan (Eds.), *Syntax and semantics 3: speech acts*. New York: Academic Press. 41-58.

Grice, P. (1978). Further notes on logic and conversation. In P. Cole (Ed.). *Syntax and Semantics* 9: pragmatics, 113-27.

Grice, P. (1989). *Studies in the way of words*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. Pennington (1985, pp.30-39)

Seelye, H. Ned. (1991). *Teaching culture*. Illinois: National Textbook Company.

Shiozawa, T., Hopkins, D. , Shinjo, I. (1993). Taikenteki ibunka communication kunrennno susume. An introduction to experiential cross cultural training. *Kyoiku Shiryo*, 15 .Chubu University.

Shiozawa, T. (1992). Bunkao gaikokugono jugyode oshieru- naze, nanio, doyatte- Teaching culture in the language classroom- why, what, how- *Jounal of the Department of International Relations at Chubu University 9*. Chubu University