Toward an Integrated Approach to Teaching Japanese Language and Culture: A Knowledge Perspective

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This paper examines the concept of culture in the context of foreign language education. We define culture as the whole knowledge related to the patterns of thought and action shared by every person belonging to a society or a group. Knowledge is the total of explicit knowledge, implicit knowledge, and tacit knowledge. Both language and culture are included in knowledge; their non-detachability is expressed in phrases like language is a part of culture, two sides of the same coin, language is the core of culture, and languaculture. Researchers have often pointed out that foreign language teaching should be linked to the social and cultural contexts in which foreign languages are used. Some have also argued that students, as ethnographers, can and should learn a foreign language and culture at the same time. We review the theoretical and practical literature pertaining to learning about culture in foreign language education, particularly focusing on H. Hosokawa's ideas regarding Japanese language education. We point out that implicit knowledge and tacit knowledge are also necessary in culture education. Finally, a model is presented to clarify the relationship between language and culture in language education from the perspective of knowledge. Considering future trends, we predict that the integrated study of language and culture will surely become a major issue in the practice of Japanese language education.

The Japanese language is becoming more and more popular in the world. At the end of 2006, about 2,980,000 people were learning Japanese as a second language in 133 countries (Japan Foundation). There were 2,217,426 foreigners residing in Japan in 2008, representing 1.74% of the overall population, while the number of foreign students was over 120,000 as of May 1, 2008 (Japan Student Services Organization). The Japanese government aims at taking in 300,000 foreign students by 2020. Thus, it is estimated that Japanese language education will prosper increasingly in the future. Japanese language education is available for foreign speakers and for native speakers. This paper focuses on foreign speakers only.

Although it has been said that the purpose of second language education is the cultivation of inter-cultural competence, Japanese language education in Japan is still almost completely focused on language only. In order to improve the acquisition of communication skills, we must integrate the study of both Japanese culture and language in the practice of Japanese language education (Hosokawa, 2002). Currently, the only subject devoted to culture in the Japanese language curriculum is a course called Japanese Civilization which essentially deals with the study of Japanese society and culture.

Today, therefore, Japanese language education does not help foreigners in adapting to the socio-cultural aspects of Japanese society; in fact, this is a major gap in foreign students’
education. For example, according to a questionnaire developed by the International Exchange Research Institute regarding difficulty in learning the Japanese language, 15.4% of the participants reported having difficulties with how to use honorifics. It is surmised that not only the rules of grammar, but also a lack of knowledge about the background of Japanese society, causes misuse of these indispensable honorifics. Many foreign students also mention difficulties in making friends with Japanese people. Yokota (1991) explained the facts which inhibit human relations: Japanese weak opinions, Japanese customs, and the barrier between foreign students and local people because of the former’s lack of Japanese-language skills. In interviews conducted by the author, the members of the Linguistic and Cultural Study Group in Japan Advanced Institute of Science and Technology (JAIST) reported they know Japanese words and sentence structures, but are unable to understand what the Japanese are really saying. Indeed, ambiguity, or implied meaning, is an integral part of the Japanese language and is strongly related to the difficulty of forming strong intercultural human relationships.

Obviously, today’s Japanese-language classroom education does not help foreigners adapt to the socio-cultural aspects of Japanese society. In this paper we discuss how to solve the cross-cultural communication problem, using an integrated approach to improve foreigners’ intercultural competence.

This article is organized into five sections. The first section presents a review of existing literature on the definition of culture and a redefinition of culture from a knowledge perspective. In the second section, we describe the relationship between language and culture, and analyze both language and culture as containing explicit knowledge, implicit knowledge, and tacit knowledge. The third section presents various methods for integrating language and culture in foreign language education, especially the techniques of anthropology used in culture education. We then present the specific issue of Japanese cultural teaching and explore Hosokawa’s (2002, 2003) ideas regarding Japanese language education; the fourth section is a model illustrating the integration of language and culture teaching. Finally, we discuss the contributions of this article, as well as some of its implications.

Redefining Culture from a Knowledge Perspective

Definitions of Culture

One of the earliest definitions of culture is this: “Culture, or civilization, taken in its broad, ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society” (Tylor, 1871, p. 1). Although more than 100 definitions have been proposed from various fields of research since that first definition, all of them regard culture as comprising the material civilization, moral culture, and lifestyles produced by human activities.

More recently, there has been a tendency to remove the element of material culture from the definition of culture. For example, Street (1993) argued culture is a verb, and believed the important function of culture is to define language, ideas, and things for a group. Biggs and Moore (1993) defined culture as the sum total of ways of living built up by a group of humans.
which is transmitted from one generation to another, and Broady (2004) concluded culture is the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group of people from another.

If we consider culture as the collection of social rules, beliefs, attitudes, and values mentioned in the definitions, we have to consider the relationship between the individual and culture. Minoura (1990) noted the difference between viewing culture as a set of patterns that govern behavior versus culture as patterns represented by behavior. The former definition is represented by Goodenough (1963), who explained that culture consists of standards for deciding feelings, purpose, and means of acts. An example of the latter is Geertz (1973), who argued that culture should be considered as observable action (culture as patterns of behavior). As Minoura (1990) summarized, Goodenough’s idea is that culture is always in people’s heads, while Geertz believed that culture is outside people’s heads. Although Goodenough (1963) and Geertz (1973) held different perspectives on the notion of culture, both of them thought that culture is a guide for how people grasp experience. We believe that Goodenough (1963) and Geertz (1973) both emphasized culture from an individual perspective.

Hofstede (1980) developed a framework for measuring cultural differences among 40 countries. He identified three cultural layers: (a) culture common to all human beings, (b) culture at the collective level, and (c) culture at the individual level.

Although, as mentioned above, there have been many attempts to define culture from various perspectives, none of the definitions has achieved wide acceptance. In fact, Minoura (1990) noted that the kind of definition used is ultimately determined by what is studied.³

Redefining Culture from a Knowledge Perspective

Based on the work of Goodenough (1963), Holland and Quinn (1987) moved to a knowledge perspective by treating culture as shared knowledge. The distinctive ways in which people act, create things, and think of themselves, they say, is based on this shared knowledge.

Although the image that knowledge consists of what is written in books is strong, the knowledge expressed in language and numbers actually represents only the tip of the iceberg. Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) viewed knowledge as consisting mainly of subjective insights, intuitions, and hunches—in other words, as primarily tacit rather than explicit. Nonaka (1990) described tacit knowledge as personal and difficult to formalize, transmit, and share, and he coined the term explicit knowledge to characterize that part that is formal and systematic, which can be easily transmitted and shared.⁴ These two kinds of knowledge, tacit and explicit, “interact with and interchange into each other in the activities of human beings” (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995, p. 61).

Meyer and Sugiyama (2007) have argued that knowledge can be classified into three categories based on the degree to which it can be codified: (a) explicit knowledge, (b) implicit knowledge, and (c) tacit knowledge. Explicit knowledge is the easiest one to codify, tacit knowledge is the most difficult, and implicit knowledge lies somewhere in between. Most of
our knowledge about our native language is unconscious implicit knowledge, while a second language must be considered explicit knowledge because we learn it consciously (Shirai, 2008).

These concepts can be arranged as follows. Explicit knowledge is knowledge expressed by language; implicit knowledge is displayed by language (or gesture) which contains the implied meaning; tacit knowledge is not expressed by language at all. Therefore, except when it is verbally explained in a textbook or a classroom, most of a society’s culture consists of implicit or tacit knowledge, while some knowledge, such as grammar explained in a textbook, is typical explicit knowledge.

We define culture as the whole knowledge about the patterns of thought and action shared by every person belonging to a society or a group. The term *group* as used in this paper means any of the various groups that exist within a society. The thinking and action patterns shared by such a group represent culture in its first meaning. This necessarily excludes Hofstede’s (1980) concept of the third layer of culture, that which is common to all human beings—unless, of course, we postulate the existence of another culture of highly-developed extraterrestrial life forms.

From the perspective of knowledge, we regard culture as dynamic knowledge in which not only visible, but also some invisible things are included, such as social customs and patterns of thinking and action. For example, the action patterns of a certain group can be observed and learned, and we regard this as implicit knowledge. Meanwhile, the world view shared by the members of that group is very difficult to observe and learn, so we have to utilize shared experiences and frequent conversations in order to fathom it. Knowledge like that is tacit knowledge. However, to a large extent, it is possible to express both implicit knowledge and tacit knowledge with language, and thus to change them into explicit knowledge. Culture education is a collaborative study during which teachers and students intentionally change implicit and tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge.

The Relationship Between Language and Culture

*The Non-Detachability of Language and Culture*

Most researchers agree that language and culture are closely connected. Agar (1994) coined the term *languaculture* and stressed the notion that language and culture are inseparable. Charbonnier (1961) explained that the emergence of language coincides exactly with the emergence of culture. Some have described language and culture as two sides of the same coin (Kramch, 1998; Seelye, 1993). The characteristics of language and culture as mutually dependant and inseparable are expressed very well, but it is not clear whether language and culture have the same range and whether or where they overlap.

Some researchers believed that language is at the core of culture. For example, Maruyama (1984) argued that language is the means by which we articulate the world; the structure of cognition based on language is culture. Another who thinks that language is contained within culture is Schiffman (1996), who considered there are *nested relationships*
in language. He claimed that language-as-text (including oral discourse) is nested in linguistic culture, while language-as-code is in turn nested in language-as-text. Thus, language is an integral part of culture. Hosokawa (1999) shared the same view as Schiffman, expressing the relation between Japanese language and Japanese culture as shown in Figure 1.

As is well known, culture nurtures language, but in foreign language education, it is very important to realize language also has very strong effects on culture. According to Kramsch (1998), language expresses cultural reality as common experience, embodies cultural reality as linguistic action, and also symbolizes cultural reality as value or social identity. Agar (1994) also noted that every language forms ways of action, thinking, and feeling. Lo Bianco (2003) claimed that social environment changes will result in changes in language, which will necessarily produce new culture. In the same spirit, Kawakami (2007) noted that both language and culture are dynamic; therefore, the relationship between them also changes dynamically. He suggests, therefore, that in language education, students must consider language and culture from a dynamic perspective and also master and assimilate new cultural behaviors.

Language and Culture as Knowledge

Bialystok (1978) noted a language has three parts: explicit linguistic knowledge, implicit linguistic knowledge, and other knowledge. Explicit linguistic knowledge contains all the conscious facts such as grammar rules and pronunciation rules. When we use an explicit linguistic language frequently for a long time, then we come to use it automatically. At that point, explicit linguistic language changes to implicit linguistic knowledge. Other knowledge refers to the rest of the information the learner brings to the learning process—knowledge about the target culture and the world in general. Another example is the use of implicit linguistic knowledge to determine the use of a certain language in the right context; once the usage is explained by means of language, the knowledge becomes explicit. The knowledge which is not related to language in context is other knowledge.
Ellis (2009) argues that foreign language learning entails the acquisition of both implicit and explicit knowledge. He identified the criteria that can be used to distinguish the two, shown in Table 1.

In Weaver’s (1986) The Iceberg Model of Culture, actions and some beliefs form the external culture, which is the part of the iceberg that shows above the surface of the water; this is objective knowledge which can be intentionally grasped as explicit knowledge, and which can be changed (see Figure 2). Other beliefs, values, and thought patterns are internal culture, forming the larger part of the iceberg under the water’s surface. This is the subjective knowledge which can only be mastered subconsciously, and which is difficult to change. We consider this part to be implicit knowledge and tacit knowledge. The iceberg model of culture is a significant attempt to connect knowledge to culture.

The implicit portion and tacit portion of culture may be shareable when we express it in language. For example, Okada (2009) rhetorically interpreted the act of conducting an orchestra during a concert rehearsal: “The intense sensation of motion in our body which is originally inherent in music is clearly evoked by expressing it in language” (p. 63). He noted nonverbal cultural business is nurtured by being expressed in language. Rhetoric and metaphor are good methods for changing implicit knowledge into explicit knowledge.

Teaching Methods Integrating Culture Education and Foreign Language Education

Language Learners as Ethnographers

Various attempts have been made to transfer the techniques of anthropology used for studying other cultures to foreign language education classes. For example, the ethnographic interview has been adopted as a way to discover some kinds of implicit knowledge, such as the natural categories of meaning in the interviewee’s mind (Bateman, 2002; Su, 2008). Language teachers have come to understand that culture in its anthropological sense is a proper domain of instruction in language classes (Brooks, 1968; Nostrand, 1974; Roberts, Byram, Barro, Jordan, & Street, 2001; Seelye, 1993). The interviewer builds subsequent questions based on the interviewee’s responses. This type of interview requires active
listening on the part of the interviewer, who must continually interact with what the interviewee has said (Robinson-Stuart & Nocon, 1996; Spradley, 1979). When we do ethnographic interviews, those who interview develop a strong awareness of their own culture as well as their partner’s culture. This is the goal of the exercise—to understand culture in its anthropological sense. Currently, mutual cultural awareness is already being used as a means of culture study (Broady, 2004; Gaston, 1984; Minoura, 1990).

Culture shock is another means to cultural understanding. When we experience a new culture abroad, it is very hard to avoid culture shock. Although the term often has a negative meaning, in cultural communication or cultural management, culture shock is an important survival mechanism in a foreign culture and is thus utilizable as an effective method of culture education. Culture shock contains both language shock and the shock of self-discovery (Seelye, 1993; Shweder & Le Vine, 1984; Smalley, 1963).

Culture Education in Japanese Language Education

Problems of Japanese Education for Foreign Students

Japanese education for foreign students focuses on language; the only subject related to Japanese society and culture is titled *Japanese Civilization*. The Japanese Civilization subject was established for foreign students and is based on Japanese history and the culture, politics, economy, nature of Japan, and technology of Japan from the 1960s. However, in the Japanese language education curriculum, Japanese civilization is merely an adjunct and its position is too weak. Hosokawa (2003, 2006) pointed out that the Japanese Civilization
course lacks the viewpoint of communication which is necessary in order to connect Japanese learners and Japanese society.

Many researchers have pointed out problems with the Japanese Civilization subject. For example, it can easily become trapped in stereotypes; the class, often, has been seen as an attempt to assimilate learners by turning them into quasi-Japanese (Kawakami, 1999; Kawano, 2001). Kawakami (1999) therefore proposed that the static model of Japanese society and culture presented in Japanese Civilization should be abandoned; both teachers and students should adopt the view that culture and society are dynamic and fluid.

H. Hosokawa on the teaching of Japanese culture. H. Hosokawa’s (2002, 2003) educational ideas give us a new perspective and a new approach for improving Japanese language education. Three of Hosokawa’s primary educational ideas are (a) Japanese language education by integrating language and culture, (b) learner-agency education, and (c) a holistic approach. When considering the state of language and culture education in Japanese language education, Hosokawa (2003) defined culture as follows:

The culture does not exist in a society as a group. It should be understood as the integral of invisible knowledge within each individual. The invisible knowledge here means the inner structure of a person including the implicit knowledge such as emotional feelings/sentiments, the logical linguistic knowledge (endophasia), and the scene recognition, which supports those. (p. 40)

Hosokawa (2003) indicated that culture is the integral of invisible knowledge; it is possible to discover the style of individual activity or capability, but it is impossible to clarify individual culture through observation. He presupposed that “culture can be developed as an individual’s recognition capability in mutual communication” (p. 40).

In Japanese language education, learner-agency education raises the individual’s recognition capability (Hosokawa, 2003). Ogawa (2007) called learner-agency education “an educational-paradigm which is a condition of creative participation based on students’ subjectivity” (p. 22). Ogawa (2007) recognized that active student participation is an integral part of the learner-agency education paradigm, noting that this is not a traditional component of Japanese education. Hosokawa (2003) also said that learner-agency means learners detect problems to be tackled and solve them by themselves, while teachers design and organize classroom activities to support that process.

The skills of the holistic approach include listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Hosokawa, 2003). Improving these four skills and bringing out what the student is thinking are the aims of the holistic approach to education (Hosokawa, 2007). The classroom with a holistic approach is a place where different learners try to express their own culture as individuals, using the Japanese language. In this way language education can become a means of integrating language and culture.

Hosokawa’s (2002, 2003) three educational ideals can be seen as three categories: ideal, means, and goal (see Figure 3). Learner-agency education has not been widely applied; we only can say it is an ideal at present. The holistic approach becomes the means of learner-
agency education, that is to say, when foreign students discuss their thoughts in Japanese, all four skills are taught in the same classroom. In this process, students obtain cultural awareness through language learning. The goal, in Hosokawa’s words, language education by integrating language and culture, is realized in the holistic approach classroom.

Hosokawa’s (2003) conception of culture is complicated. As mentioned above, he argued that culture is “the integral of invisible knowledge within each individual” (p. 40); he seemingly does not think culture exists independently of individuals. We conclude that is his intentional selection, because he never discusses culture on the group or societal level for the practical purpose of language education.

A Theoretical Model of Language/Culture Learning

Since this paper considers the theoretical relationship between culture and language from the perspective of knowledge, we do not adopt Hosokawa's (2003) view, which only focuses on culture at the individual level. We recognize not only culture as an individual’s unique experience, but also culture at the collective level and the society level.

We believe the three layers of culture model described by Hofstede (1980)—culture at the individual level, culture at the collective level and culture common to all human beings—can be improved by changing the third level to culture at the societal level (see Figure 4). Because culture consists of the thinking and action patterns of people belonging to a certain specific community or a group, we cannot recognize something common to all human beings as culture (at least until a highly developed extraterrestrial community has been recognized). Thus, our three layers of culture are: culture at the individual level, culture at the collective level, and culture at the societal level. These three levels of culture interact inside every individual.

For example, A and B are two persons from different countries; B is learning A’s mother tongue as a second language. The communication between A and B is, of course, both verbal and nonverbal, and can take place both in the classroom and outside it. With reference to Hosokawa’s (2003) holistic approach in the Japanese language classroom, this communication between foreign students and Japanese teachers or TAs must be the most important interaction. Through verbal communication, B will improve his language
competence, with both explicit knowledge like grammar and vocabulary, and implicit knowledge like the way to use language and implied meanings. After much communication practice, especially including nonverbal communication, B will eventually master a tacit knowledge of Japanese culture as well, thus achieving his study goals.

Both B and A (the native speaker) will gain cultural awareness through this communication process. While this communication seems only to be generated at the individual level, in fact, interaction at all three levels of culture is at work. Though A and B come from different cultures and societies, they must have some common topic for discussion. For example, if they talk about animation, then they are sharing that culture at the collective level. Soon, as they begin to interpret their favorite works based on their individual experiences, each may be able to grasp the other’s national culture through those individual interpretations. Thus, through this two-person conversation, both A and B encounter a foreign culture at the individual level, at the collective level, and at the societal level, and gradually come to understand each other. With this kind of communication, language and culture become one and cannot then be separated. Native A can even take another look at their own language and culture, and it will be a good chance to improve their understanding of them.

Now, in the age of globalization, the cultures of all countries are gradually becoming homogenized. With the spread of the Internet, it has become very easy to obtain foreign cultural information. Thus, a common cultural base (the shadowed portion of Figure 4) which promotes communication is formed. As an example, Japanese youth culture is spreading among young people in East Asia and the West through the media by not only the Internet, but also via television, comics, and animation (Sakurai, 2009). For those who encounter it, Japanese youth culture is the representation of Japanese culture, and may even become a motivation for studying the Japanese language (Matsumoto & Obana, 2001). Youth culture, such as comics and animation, is becoming a common international cultural base.

Conclusions

In this article we discussed how to solve cross-cultural communication problems in Japanese language education, which currently emphasizes a curriculum that creates barriers to foreigners in Japanese socio-cultural contexts. An integrated approach would be a process of improving the foreigners’ inter-cultural competence, which would in turn improve cross-cultural communication.

We have defined language and culture as dynamic knowledge, which contains all of explicit knowledge, implicit knowledge, and tacit knowledge. We defined culture as the whole knowledge related to the patterns of thought and action shared by every person belonging to a society or a group.

In foreign language education, the rules of grammar and vocabulary constitute explicit knowledge, which is transferred from teachers to students in a classroom. However, language cannot be used only in such an explicit context. Implicit knowledge, such as the way language is used, or its implied meaning according to time, place, and situation is also required. Furthermore, it is very difficult to express the tacit knowledge of culture with language, such
Language and culture share some characteristics; while they are not at all the same, the two are strongly connected, and cannot be separated. Therefore, in foreign language education, language and culture cannot be taught separately. Unfortunately, in the present Japanese language curriculum, the course Japanese Civilization is the only one to address culture education; this course has little substance, and only offers explicit knowledge which can be verbalized. In such a situation, Hosokawa’s (2003) language-culture education proposals offer the chance for a rare practical trial which will integrate culture education into language education based on the theoretical framework he has established over many years.

In this paper, we have considered Hosokawa’s (2002, 2003) educational ideas from the perspective of knowledge in order to understand them better. We note that Hosokawa only deals with culture at the individual level since he wants to avoid stereotypes in developing cultural understanding. However, we conclude there is no reason to restrict the study of culture only to the individual level in Japanese language and culture education. We argue it is possible to consider culture at three layers: at the individual level, at the collective level, and at the social level. This paper provides theoretical arguments focus on language and culture education from the perspective of knowledge.

There are some limitations that we have to note in this article. When discussing implicit knowledge in foreign language education, we emphasized the importance of teaching implicit knowledge both in language and culture studies. On the other hand, we argued implicit knowledge cannot be taught as explicit knowledge. We presented the idea of using metaphor and experience to improve students’ understanding of implicit knowledge. How, in a practical sense, should foreign language teachers train students’ implicit knowledge and tacit knowledge of a language and culture? Is there some more functional means to change implicit

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*Figure 4. Model of second language education integrating language and culture.*

as a native speaker’s value judgments, thought patterns, action patterns, and so forth, and to share that knowledge with students. This is the major difficulty in culture education.
and tacit knowledge to explicit knowledge? Our future work may investigate this point, as it might contribute to explaining and understanding the importance of implicit and tacit knowledge in foreign language education, as well as improve students’ inter-culture competence.

Author’s Note

This paper is based on a presentation at the 15th International Conference of the International Association for Intercultural Communication Studies, Kumamoto Gakuen University, September 2009. The original title was: “Toward an Integrated Approach to Learning a Foreign Language and Culture: A Literature Review.”

Notes

1. I asked 12,967 Chinese people (2002) International Exchange Research Institute (Kazuo Omori and Hiroko Omori). p. 292 (in Japanese). This analysis shows the results of the “30th anniversary of the normalization of diplomatic ties between Japan and China” questionnaire which the International Exchange Research Institute carried out from October, 2001 to January, 2002 for about a total of 13,000 Chinese people, such as students who study the Japanese language in China, their Chinese teachers, and also Chinese students who study in Japan.

2. Li Xiaoyan is the leader of the “Linguistic and Cultural Study Group” in Japan Advanced Institute of Science and Technology (JAIST). From October 2008 to August 2009, she interviewed the six members of the “Linguistic and Cultural Study Group,” who obtained degrees in Japanese language studies from Chinese universities and came to JAIST for their master’s degrees.

3. In the field of foreign language education, according to Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21st Century (1999), culture is generally understood to include the philosophical perspectives, the behavioral practices, and the products—both tangible and intangible—of a society.

4. Tacit knowledge is the concept built by Michael Polanyi (1958, 1966), while the term explicit knowledge was coined by Nonaka (1990). Although the practice and research of knowledge management has spread globally following the work of Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995), and much research has been accumulated, knowledge still is defined variously and is often confused with information. Umemoto (2006) points out the difficulties in defining knowledge, and emphasizes the close relation between knowledge and action; he defines knowledge as “a valuable information system which leads to acts” (p. 61).

5. Special Provisions for General Education Credits for International Students as published by the Ministry of Education Announcement No. 21, 1962

mediated via interactive social process ought to be considered, whereas cognitive concerns
suggest that autonomy may be an inborn capacity for learning” (pp. 7-8).
7. This translation is quoted from Hosokawa's homepage, retrieved August 7, 2009, from:

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