コミュニケーション活動を通じた異文化理解
― 小学校外国語科における検定教科書を比較して ―

Intercultural Understanding through Communication Activities:
Comparing Authorized Textbooks for Japanese Elementary School EFL

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Abstract

The Course of Study for Elementary School asserts that it is necessary to understand the culture behind the communication, focusing on its relationship with society, the world, and others. In this study, the researcher analyzed the content of communication activities included in authorized textbooks for elementary school foreign language study from a cultural perspective, considering the characteristics of the culture therein. The results revealed differences among textbooks, with social culture as social topics and individual culture in the exchange of individual information the main cultural focus of interactive language activities. The paper closes by discussing the implications of these aspects of culture and the prospects for future research on deepening understanding of different cultures through communication.

Key words：Intercultural Communication, Authorized Textbooks, Elementary School EFL

1. Introduction

With the revision of the Guidelines for the Course of Study for elementary school, Foreign Language Activities have been introduced into the curriculum of the middle grades and Foreign Languages became a required subject from the upper grades. Thus, students are now increasingly expected to develop communicative competence through using foreign languages. The main justification for this is globalization. Thus, it is important for students to acquire both a perspective toward understanding different cultures and languages and the learning behaviors needed to put these perspectives into use.

The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology（MEXT）has defined these perspectives regarding to communication in foreign languages as:

> … the relationship between foreign languages and the culture behind them in terms of society, the world, and other people …（p. 67）.

In other words, MEXT asserts that the manner in which to approach intercultural communication is to be able to consider things in relation to your own culture together with the culture both of one's society and around the world in order to communicate according to the purpose, scene, situation in dialogue with various people and to think and judge by yourself while organizing information and form and reshape your own ideas（p. 67）. Consideration of this complex dynamic of culture and communication managed both for one's own view as well as the view of the other

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constitutes the content and conclusion of this paper.

In this research, the researcher will analyze learning contents of English in texts for elementary school upper grade English and consider how to correlate those contents with actual ideas and practices of culture and communication in a manner to teach them simultaneously.

2. Literature Review and Research Background

This research required a wide view of culture, of communication, of how we communicate based on culture, and how culture influences our communication.

2.1 Definitions of Culture and Communication

Hall（1959）asserted that "culture is communication and communication is culture"（p. 169），implying close contact between communication and culture, hence the focus on culture in communication. The presence research places individuals at the center of their culture. Indeed, Ferraro（2002）defined culture as everything that *people* have, think, and do as members of their society（italics added by author）. Referring to communication, an early definition emphasized symbols— broadly defined as a sign, object, or act that stands for something other than itself by virtue of agreement among the members of the culture that uses it（O'Sullivan, Hartley, Saunders, Montgomery & Fieke, 1994）—with communication thus a dynamic, systematic process in which meanings are created and reflected in human interaction with symbols. Reflecting again the importance of the human element, Matsumoto（2000）defined communication as the exchange of knowledge, ideas, thoughts, concepts, and emotions among *people*.

2.2 Definitions of Intercultural Communication

This paper will consider the relationship between culture and communication as intercultural communication in an educational paradigm. As for what constitutes such communication, Porter & Samovar（1997）said "intercultural communication occurs whenever a message produced in one culture must be processed in another culture"（p. 8）. Adding to this, Zait（2002）emphasized symbolism and context:

> Communication can be accepted as a complex relationship that is established between individuals or groups through a hereditary learned or inherited symbolism that enables messages to be transmitted and received in a certain context, at a given time and under certain spatial circumstances.（omission）Communication relations are therefore culturally dependent and therefore always interpretable in a certain context（p. 55）.

Balc（2018）concurred:

> At intercultural communication, there is an interactive relationship that brings together individuals or different groups, belonging to cultural environments that have particular aspects at the level of the symbolism and the meanings designated by words, behaviors, customs, gestures, etc.（p. 262）.

The importance of *particular aspects* in Balc's definition imply that intercultural communication may emerge because people believe that the particular aspects of their own culture are fundamental and essential, and they find difference in other cultures through the perspectives of these cultural values（Ikeda, 2010）. Emphasizing the importance of people as community, Zamfir（2007）said:

> Members of a group of individuals forming a community have something in common with everyone else, on the one hand, and yet, on the other hand, they are distinguished in a significant way from members of other groups. Thus, the community seems to simultaneously involve similarity and difference. The community actually exists in the minds of its members（p. 120）.

2.3 Intercultural Communication in Textbooks

Integrating these definitions to the relation of culture and communication in education, in this paper, the researcher will examine intercultural communication as directed by textbooks within a classroom occurring between students who have different cultural backgrounds based on their individual home culture. With that in mind, the objective of the research is identification of the combination of culture and communication that constitutes intercultural communication in English education and English education textbooks. To begin, Shin（2011）said culture in the case of English language is highly diverse but still based predominantly in the inner circle of English. In this sense, representation of the language that expresses culture is knowledge-oriented rather than being reflective of any diverse and variable cultural elements. Furthermore, as Huang（2019）said in a paper that focuses on the contextualization of culture in English educational textbooks, the topics, texts, and tasks of such textbooks are highly decontextualized, in that they have no 'meaningful' context that relates to authenticity, diversity, communication level, and representation of culture. In general, more attention is given to grammatical than to communicative functions or cultural elements.

The debate about culture and communication as intercultural communication in English educational textbooks has largely not moved beyond treating language as the mechanism of representing the dominant English language culture. The premise of this research is that intercultural communication is essentially cultural communication and must include the various elements of culture that are found at individual learner, learner community, and host nation levels, along with the communication of those cultures. What this means is that the attempt in this research to combine culture and communication as intercultural communication and examine this combined concept in English language and English educational textbooks in Japan is highly original, innovative, and important.

3. Research Method and Results

The researcher analyzed elementary school textbooks of English from three publishers: *NEW HORIZON Elementary Course 5 & 6*（TOKYO SHOSEKI）, *Here We Go! 5 & 6*（MITSUMURA TOSHO）, and *CROWN Jr. 5 & 6*（SANSEIDO）. The objective of this analysis is to identify how communication is tied to culture in the communication activities embedded in the textbook. The researcher classified cultural elements into three communities consisting of national culture, social culture, and individual culture. The research sought to find which of these three cultural communities are emphasized in elementary school English learning and how the intersection of these cultural contents can contribute to problems of complexity for students.

3.1 Analysis Criteria

While the general themes and communication functions were relatively uniform across the three textbooks, the overall text and unit formats varied greatly. Thus, the researcher identified and isolated the appropriate activity sections of the textbooks, those which required students' positive and spontaneous communication, and identified and isolated the origin of the cultural elements of that common content which are embedded in the communication as based in a national culture, a social culture, or an individual culture, with these cultures defined as follows:

Culture 1: national elements:［Japan］－［other countries］
      There is emphasis on understanding cultures of different countries.
Culture 2: social elements:［in Japan］－［school, local communities］
      There is a common understanding about these cultures among students.
Culture 3: individual elements:［in Japan］－［family］
      There is not a common understanding about this specific culture among students.

The assessment of these cultural communities was based on the following criteria rubric. While any unit may have all three cultural elements（national, social, individual）, the dominant cultural element（or elements）in any communication activity is indicated by 2 points（see below）. Any remaining cultural elements are indicated by 1 point. If there is no cultural element in the communication, no points are assigned for that communication. Determination of the dominant cultural element was on the basis of the primary theme of the communication. Additional cultural elements that could be noted simply reflected the fact that these occurred coincidently in the communication activity.

Culture 1: National Culture

    2 points   Dominant use of country names or country characteristics

    1 point   Notable use of country names or country characteristics

    0 points   No use of country names or country characteristics

Culture 2: Social Culture

    2 points   Dominant use of social affairs which students have common recognition

    1 point   Notable use of social affairs which students have common recognition

    0 points   No use of social affairs which students have common recognition

Culture 3: Individual Culture

    2 points   Dominant use of individual affairs which reflect students' own circumstances

    1 point   Notable use of individual affairs which reflect students' own circumstances

    0 points   No use of individual affairs which reflect students' own circumstances

3.2 Research Data

    The research data is shown below（Tables 1, 2 and 3）. The data is presented for each textbook for the 5th grade followed by the 6th grade（i.e. Table A and Table B）.

Table 1. A & B   *NEW HORIZON Culture Assessment*

A: 5th grade

Unit	Content・Theme（Major Components）	Culture 1	Culture 2	Culture 3
1	Self-introduction: name, sports	0	0	2
2	Birthday: birthday cards, what you want	0	0	0
3	School Time schedule: subjects, occupation, dream	0	2	1
4	Introducing someone else: occupation	0	2	0
5	Guidance: places, buildings	0	2	0
6	Traditional food: food, price	1	2	0
7	Four seasons: Japanese events	2	1	1
8	Introducing your hero: family members, people in local communities	0	1	2
Score		3	10	6

B: 6th grade

Unit	Content・Theme（Major Components）	Culture 1	Culture 2	Culture 3
1	Speech about yourself: name, where you come from, hobby, birthday	0	0	2
2	Introducing your treasure: places, school, hobby	0	0	2
3	Introducing foreign countries: sightseeing spots, special products	2	2	0
4	Summer vacations: memories, places, food, what you did	0	0	2
5	Food chain: creatures, scientific affairs	0	0	0
6	Original curry: food producing areas, social affairs	1	0	2
7	Best memories: school events	1	2	0
8	Dream declaration: school, your specific skills, occupation	0	2	2
Score		4	5	10

Table 2. A & B　　Here We Go! Culture Assessment

A: 5th grade

Unit	Content・Theme（Major Components）	Culture 1	Culture 2	Culture 3
1	Self-introduction: name, spelling, favorite things	0	0	2
2	Birthday: what you want	0	0	0
3	Subjects: a weekly school timetable	0	2	0
4	Time schedule: household chores, after school	0	0	2
5	What you can do: friends, teachers	0	0	2
6	Introduction of other countries: country attractions	2	0	0
7	Food ordering: menu, price	0	2	0
8	Guidance: location of things	0	0	0
9	Hero: occupation, celebrities, teachers	0	0	2
Score		2	4	8

B: 6th grade

Unit	Content・Theme（Major Components）	Culture 1	Culture 2	Culture 3
1	Self-introduction: animals, hometown, strengths	0	0	2
2	Japanese traditional events: introduction for foreigners	2	1	0
3	Sports: what you want to watch	0	2	0
4	Summer vacation: where you went, what you enjoyed	0	0	2
5	Famous people: favorite things, occupation	0	2	0
6	Good points of your town: prefectures	1	2	0
7	Best memories: school events	0	2	0
8	What you want to be: occupation, dream	0	2	2
9	Aspirations for junior high school: club activities, subjects, dream	0	2	2
Score		3	13	8

Table 3. A & B   *CROWN Jr. Culture Assessment*

A: 5th grade

Unit	Content・Theme（Major Components）	Culture 1	Culture 2	Culture 3
L 1	Birthday: favorite things, hobby, siblings	0	0	1
L 2	What you can do: sports, music	0	1	2
P 1	Self-introduction: name, what you can do, hobby	0	0	2
L 3	Introduction of someone else: teachers, family members	0	2	2
L 4	Your daily life	0	0	2
L 5	Activities: subjects, private lessons	0	2	2
P 2	Teacher interview	0	0	2
L 6	National characteristics: place name	2	0	0
L 7	Where you want to go: sightseeing	2	0	0
P 3	Introduction of Japan: place name, sightseeing	2	0	0
Score		6	5	13

Note: L: Lesson; P: Presentation according to the textbook design.

B: 6th grade

Unit	Content・Theme（Major Components）	Culture 1	Culture 2	Culture 3
L 1	Commonalities with friends	0	2	2
L 2	School events	0	2	0
P 1	School events	0	2	0
L 3	Memories	0	0	2
L 4	Self-introduction（as animals）	0	0	0
L 5	School events: your memory	0	2	2
P 2	School events	0	2	0
L 6	Dreams, occupation	0	2	2
L 7	Where you want to go, what you want to be	1	2	2
P 3	What you want to be, dreams, occupation	0	2	2
Score		1	16	12

Note: L: Lesson; P: Presentation according to the textbook design.

3.3 Research Results

In *NEW HORIZON* for the 5th Grade, the majority of the cultural elements in the communication activity section, "Enjoy Communication", were Culture 2: Social Culture. Meanwhile, the elements of Culture 3: Individual Culture was the most significant in the 6th Grade, as Table 1 shows. In *Here We Go!* for the 5th Grade, the majority of the cultural elements in the communication activities, "You can do it", were Culture 3: Individual Culture. On the other hand, in the 6th Grade, Culture 2: Social Culture was the most dominant element. These cultural elements combined account for more than half of the total elements of the text. In *CROWN Jr.*, the majority of the cultural elements was also Culture 3: Individual Culture in the 5th Grade and Culture 2: Social Culture in the 6th Grade. As Tables 2 and 3 show, despite minor differences, the two textbooks had a similar distribution of cultural elements in the communication activities.

A common feature of all three textbooks was that they overwhelmingly use elements of Culture 2: Social Culture or Culture 3: Individual Culture for communication activities, whereas the proportion of Culture 1: National Culture elements was low. As Figure 1 shows, for the 5th Grade textbook, the highest percentage of cultural material was related to individual cultural elements, while for the 6th Grade, social and individual cultural elements were dominant, the former by a small margin.
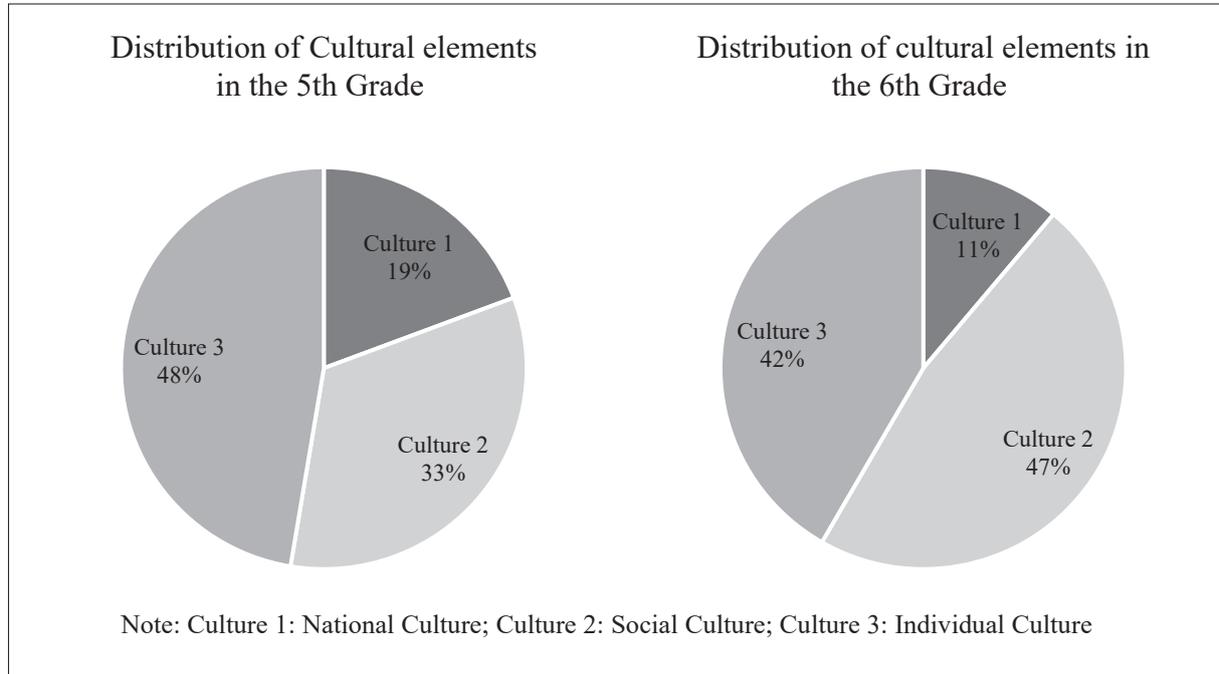

Figure 1. Distribution of cultural elements in 5th and 6th Grade Textbooks

4. Conclusion and Discussion

The research revealed that the dominant culture that constituted the cultural elements of communication activities in the three textbooks examined in the research was social and individual culture. The former was defined in this research as social affairs about which students have common recognition, such as school activities. The latter was defined as individual affairs which reflect students' own circumstances, such as family life or personal preferences.

That these two cultures are dominant is a slight shift from MEXT's focus on understanding culture in intercultural communication as mainly in understanding the dominant culture of the place that one is from. Learning about foreign culture is only one aspect of intercultural education and understanding. As premised in this research, culture is highly social as well as individual, and creating commonality at this level of culture is the essence of intercultural communication. That the elementary school textbooks are oriented toward such social and shared culture and individual and unique culture may not be totally by design, however, this reflects the richness of interaction in any communication activity. It can be said that these textbooks, which deal with culture dynamically, are the basis for developing students' communicative attitude that considers the language background or the culture of others.

The question that concludes this research is consideration of the degree to which intercultural communication will continue to be viewed as based on knowledge—cross-cultural knowledge at its broadest, or nationally-representative level—or rather on interaction—the human interaction that creates common cultural understanding between communicators at the level of both common social affairs and unique individual affairs. This research suggested learning about both foreign and familiar culture through communicating with others is necessary in the future and also creates a real sense of communicative reality in Japanese Elementary School EFL.

As an extension of this study, the implications of intercultural communication activities on forming relationships

among students are considered. Communicative activities in foreign languages are intended to familiarize students with languages and eventually acquire knowledge and skills related to them, and it can be thought that the focus is primarily on the learning aspect rather than on the extension and deepening of students' relationships. By extending the contents of these activities from a cultural perspective, it may be possible for students to understand the similarities and differences between one's own cultural background and that of other people, other societies, and other countries in a realistic manner. This can have a positive impact on self- and peer-awareness in the broadest sense, and also be an activity that contributes to the development of an attitude of mutual respect while accepting various differences. Thus, incorporating multi-level cultural elements into language learning means that learning a foreign language goes beyond the realm of language learning and has an aspect of cultivating human nature. This research is limited to a textbook analysis and has not yet reached the point of considering this from a practical perspective. Therefore, it is expected that further research will be conducted to explore the application of communication activities that incorporate cultural perspectives to actual educational settings.

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