

Non-Verbal Communication: A First Step for Intercultural Learning

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Abstract

A drastic change took place in the public elementary schools when the strategy to “foster Japanese who can use English” became an action plan in 2002 which triggered the start of English conversation activities in almost all schools in Japan. In spite of on-going discussions whether English should be or should never be taught in elementary schools, the Ministry of Education and Science has just announced that English will be a part of the curriculum in two years. Although the results of the testing in model schools have been published, what needs to be taught at the elementary school level is still in question. I would propose here, that intercultural communicative competence as one of the vital components in language teaching, that some aspects of intercultural communication should be and can be taught at an early stage of education. This paper is two-fold. First is to briefly discuss the importance of teaching culture in language classrooms and review the background of English language education during the *Sogo-Gakushu* in elementary schools. Second is to analyze the results of a survey conducted on the college junior year students (n=159) to find which aspect of intercultural communication is applicable in elementary school education. The introduction of some aspects of communication and culture will demonstrate that they will form vital components in foreign language teaching.

Communication and Culture

Communication is at the heart of second language study, whether the communication takes place face-to-face, in writing or across centuries through the reading of literature. Through the study of foreign languages, students gain a knowledge and understanding of the cultures of that language. In fact, one cannot truly master a language until one has also mastered the cultural contexts in which the language occurs.

As we well know, words are powerful tools of communication. However, not many of us are aware that the meanings of words are very much influenced by culture. Meaning is in the person, not in the word, and each person is the product of a particular culture that passes on shared and appropriate meanings. Thus, if we want to learn to communicate well in a foreign language, we must understand the culture that gives that language meaning. In other words, culture and communication are inseparably linked. Culture gives meaning

and provides the context for communication, and the ability to communicate allows us to act out our cultural values and to share our language and our culture. I believe acquisition of such skill is only possible through the learning of intercultural communication in which attaining of intercultural communicative competence is the ultimate goal. Therefore, learning of culture as well as of attaining intercultural communicative competence is intrinsic matter to language learning. How then, can culture be taught in a language classroom and how can students acquire intercultural communicative competence?

In order to answer this question one needs to find definitions of culture first. Culture is an elastic, dynamic concept that takes on different shades of meaning depending on one's perspective. It contains both concrete and abstract components and is a multifaceted phenomenon. Of many definitions given by scholars in various academic disciplines, I would like to cite Ting-Toomey's description (1999) which she drew from D'Andrade's (1984) conceptualization of culture.

"Culture is a complex frame of reference that consists of patterns of traditions, beliefs, values, norms, symbols, and meanings that are shared to varying degrees by interacting members of a community." (Ting-Toomey, 1999: p. 10)

The original concept described above is drawn from the Iceberg Metaphor (D'Andrade, 1984) in which deeper layers (traditions, beliefs and values) are hidden from our view. We only see and hear the uppermost layers of cultural artifacts (fashion, popular culture, etc.,) and of verbal and non-verbal symbols. The concept of iceberg metaphor is further developed into a dichotomy of the Big "C" Culture and the little "c" culture defined by Bennett (1998). The former represents objective culture which refers to concrete aspects of phenomenon that can be seen in artifacts, art, literature, drama and history which includes social, economic, political and linguistic systems (Bennett, 1998: p. 3). The latter refers to the psychological features that define a group of people and their everyday thinking and behavior. In other words, subjective culture is the learned and shared patterns of beliefs, behaviors, and values of groups of interacting people (Bennett, 1998: p. 3). Bennett states that understanding objective culture may create knowledge, but it doesn't necessarily generate competence. However, understanding subjective cultures, one's own and others' is more likely to lead to intercultural communicative competence (Bennett, 1998: p. 3). Therefore, learning of subjective cultures as well as objective cultures must be at the heart of second language teaching.

When culture is taught in college classes such as "cultural studies", "cultural anthropology", "history", "literature" and "cross-cultural communication", it usually deals with aspects found in the upper layers of the iceberg metaphor or the objective cultures. What's underneath may not necessarily be revealed except in "cross-cultural communication" which gives learners opportunities to see differences and to share values and norms which are vital

components in communication between people from different cultures. What then are the aspects in both subjective and objective cultures that are currently taught and can be taught in an educational setting, especially at the early stages?

Cultural Awareness

The importance of teaching culture has been emphasized in the field of Foreign Language Teaching, in a form called 'cultural awareness' in which the movement began in the early 90s. Cultural awareness is the term used to describe "sensitivity to the impact of culturally-induced behavior on language use and communication" (Tomalin & Stempleski, 1993: p. 5). It refers to an ability to recognize the behaviors of one's own culture as well as of others. Although there are a number of textbooks and resources on cultural awareness for classrooms, what is covered in the range varies according to how "culture" is interpreted by teachers and their curriculum and by institutions. Here, I would like to turn to the cases in the Japanese public elementary schools where English is taught under the rubric of Global Understanding Education during the Integrative Study Hours.

Background of the Integrative Study Hours

Since 2002 when the strategy (proposed by the Ministry of Education and Science) to "Foster Japanese who can use English" became an action plan, English Conversation Activities (*Eikaiwa Katsudo*) were added to the hours of *Sogo-Gakushu* as a part of Global Understanding Education (*Kokusai-rikai Kyoiku*) in the public elementary schools across the nation. According to the report, 95% of the schools have already conducted some form of English classes where the number of class meetings varies from once or twice a year to thirty-five times a year (Matsukawa, 2004).

The founding of *Sogo-Gakushu* owes its existence to the UNESCO counsel of 1974 in which education on human rights and freedoms were emphasized as parts of global cooperation and peace. After that, global education spread across Europe and in the United States taking its form as "multicultural education". It was enhanced by the need to educate children of immigrants who were of many races with different cultural backgrounds. In the States, the multicultural education is focused on cultural differences to make children aware of diversity and to appreciate the differences of others. In Europe, with a growing number of immigrants from Eastern Europe, especially after the Cold War, the education is focused on the mainstream children to establish appropriate attitudes and mentality to live together with the children from minority cultures. It is related to the teaching of the human rights which gradually changed its name and form to "Global multi-cultural education" or "Education of global villagers" in which their aims are to help people attain global

perspectives. Japan, on the other hand, left the mainstream of global education and made its own interpretation of the UNESCO counsel. Only Japan claimed for rights to emphasize their ethnic (Japanese) identity rather than being one of the "global villagers" (Minoura, 1997).

Japanese education has undergone many changes over the past few decades. After the war education in Japan took place under the assumption that children in the Japanese schools would spend their lifetime in their own country and that the main goal was to internalize the values and norms of the society that they live in (Minoura, 1997). However, now in the new millennium, that goal was altered by a different perspective. Whether or not children spend their entire lives in Japan, they are now expected to have knowledge and skills to relate themselves to the world outside. What is necessary now is an education which creates people who can grasp and analyze the problems they have never encountered before, from which they can create new values and cultural meanings by means of the proper understanding of the other party's cultural background. Such skill I believe is at the heart of intercultural communicative competence.

The major goal of the *Sogo-Gakushu* is to provide children opportunities to learn about 1) global understanding, 2) information technology, 3) environment, and 4) social welfare and health, all of which are expected to interrelate with the courses of study in the current curriculum. English is not mandatory but is now taught in most schools as a part of global understanding education. Since there is no teaching manual for *Sogo-Gakushu* provided by the Ministry of Education and Science, the content and syllabus depend very much on the creativity of the classroom teachers in each school.

Since 1992, the Ministry has regularly appointed and funded a number of schools as the test models in developing curricula for English. Over a hundred schools have been designated and they reported the consequences of various types of curricula they had developed. From what I have observed, there seems to be two major concepts which differentiate the curriculum. One is based on English communication skills and the other is focused on global understanding education. The former aims to draw from young learners, their interest and curiosity for new language so that they will be able to express themselves in simple English using gestures and authentic materials. The main focus of the latter is not on English per se but on understanding of the differences between one's own and other cultures. It emphasizes the experiential learning such as inviting people from different cultures, eating foreign foods, learning about games and plays, or festivals such as Halloween, Christmas and other holidays in different countries. The latter, of course, is somewhat limited in teaching of the language since the goal is to know about the culture rather than to learn to use English. The consequences of those trials in the designated schools brought an issue to consider. When English is taught under the rubric of *Kokusai-rikai Kyoiku*, then, it could easily be deterred from the actual language teaching because the goal

of the classroom hours is to enhance children's understanding of the world outside. Global understanding, by its definition, "encompasses the broad range of education which includes enhancement of the recognition related to the global issues, education of human rights and environmental issues, and therefore, the amount of English covered within this range is very much limited" (Matsukawa, 2004: p. 25. My translation). What the Ministry of Education and Science aimed for in the elementary schools was English Language Teaching targeted for the global understanding. However, according to Matsukawa, the two are completely separate. Since English in the elementary schools can be taught as a part of global understanding education by the Ministry's decree, incorporation of the global perspective is encouraged but English is and cannot be the global understanding education per se (Matsukawa, 2004). There is no point in discussing whether the English Conversation Activities in the Japanese public elementary schools should be confined to English language learning or global understanding education. What is more important for ELT professionals is to find what experiential learning in English would be appropriate for the children so that they can open their windows to the world. Here, I would propose non-verbal communication as one kind.

Non-verbal Communication

The inclusion of training in non-verbal communication as a part of intercultural communication has been emphasized in the foreign language teaching (Byram, 1997). As for the children, I assume this is the best item to teach as the first thing to learn about intercultural communication. Non-verbal communication consists of two types of non-verbal messages. The first is called "non-verbal voiced messages" called Vocalics which include prosodic features and paralinguistic. Accent, tone, pitch, loudness, speed, sounds that express emotions (sigh, sob, laughter, etc.) and physical conditions (yawn, sneeze, grinding teeth, etc.) are all parts of the non-verbal messages that have sounds. The other type is called "non-verbal non-voiced messages" which encompass a wide range of non-verbal phenomenon and actions. They are 1) Objectics or physical appearances of people including colors of skin, eyes and hair; clothing and accessories and how people wear those; 2) Kinesics such as gestures, eye contact and facial expressions; 3) Haptics or a sense of touch; 4) Proxemics or the concept of space; 5) Chronemics or the concept of time; and finally 6) Olfactics, a sense of smell (Suda, 2004). As it is true with any cultural phenomenon, non-verbal messages are culture-bound as well as context-bound. Learners of second language need to know that meanings of those messages vary according to the contexts and cultures in which they are used. From the intercultural perspective, non-verbal messages are one of the easy aspects to raise intercultural awareness for learners because people produce those messages all the time whether consciously or unconsciously. They are the phenomenon that

people can easily relate to and see the differences between one's own and the other's.

What I would propose now is to incorporate teaching of the non-verbal communication during the hours of the English Conversation Activities as a first step to raise intercultural awareness in elementary schools. Acquiring its knowledge will be a good starting point for achieving intercultural competence which will be a powerful tool for learners of any age who are involved in interactions between people from cultures that are different from their own. The main purpose of acquiring such knowledge of intercultural communication is to help learners be able to recognize and appreciate the differences found in the people from different cultures. Actually, some scholars have started to point out the importance of accepting diversity as one of the primary goals in language teaching (Matsukawa, 2004; Torikai, 2005).

The Purpose of Study

The study was aimed to find 1) what cultural issues and aspects of intercultural communication were taught in the English classes while the subjects were in their junior and senior high schools, and 2) what cultural items and intercultural aspects those subjects would think are appropriate to learn at each stage of school lives from elementary school to college level. The subjects were 159 female students (n=159) who were in their junior year at a women's university. They have all taken an introductory course related to communication and culture in which the covered items are listed below. Those items were mainly designed to raise students' awareness on intercultural communication, which is how differences in cultural perspectives bring out differences in communication between people. The course also aims to find and appreciate the diversity among two cultures, mainly of American and of Japanese.

The Items Taught in the Course

1. **Defining communication:** Introduction of the main communication models proposed by scholars such as Ruben (1988), Shannon & Weaver (1949), Schramm (1954), and Barnlund (1970), and what those models entail. Feasibility and the kinds of communication are also introduced.
2. **Defining culture:** Introduction of the Iceberg Metaphor to interpret objective and subjective cultures, and of the relationship between culture and communication.
3. **Characteristics of symbols:** Introduction of the concepts called "culture-bound" and "context-bound" which are the key factors to define phenomenon of communication.
4. **The developmental process and the breakdown process in human communication:** The model defines each stage of processes of person-to-person communication from the

first encounter to the end of the human relationships.

5. **Non-verbal communication:** Introduction of “non-verbal non-voiced messages” such as gesture, appearances, facial expression and eye contact.
6. **Concept of space:** An aspect of non-verbal communication which helps to define how people create unseen boundaries and use space during communicative interaction.
7. **Vocalics:** “Non-verbal voiced messages” such as accent, tone and paralinguistic features that affect the meanings in communication.
8. **How speech is regarded in the American and the Japanese cultures:** Defining what the ‘speech’ means in two cultures using examples from two different endings in an Aesop fable, “Ants and Grasshopper”.
9. **Influences of the concepts on the communicative behaviors in each culture:** Japan’s “Sweet Interdependence” deriving from “*Amae no kozo*” (Doi, 1971) and America’s “Equal Opportunity Independence” (Yamada, 1997).
10. **Introduction of dichotomies to describe differences of communicative styles in Japanese and Americans:** The dichotomies are: Linear/Circular theories, High/Low Contexts (Hall, 1976), Individualism/Collectivism (Hofstede, 1980), Subject-centered/Predicate-centered languages, Person-oriented/Status-oriented languages (Okabe, 1983), “*Erabi/Awase*” cultures (Mushakoji, 1976) and Speaker Talk/Listener Talk (Yamada, 1997).
11. **Synthetic and analytic thinking through *haiku* and English poems:** Basho and Tennyson.
12. **Sources of communication breakdown between Japanese and Americans:** Double standard (*honne* and *tatemae*), and the use of silence.

Those twelve items can be classified mainly into two categories: communication and culture. However, since the two are inseparable, categorization will overlap and each of them is closely related with one another. Ones that are categorized in “communication” would be 1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, and 12. Ones in “culture” can be divided into two kinds, objective and subjective cultures. The former includes 2, 5, 6, 8, 10, 11 and the latter 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10 and 12. What comes under non-verbal communication will be 5, 6 and 7.

Method

One-page questionnaire consisted of two parts were distributed to the subjects after they completed the coursework on the twelve items listed above. The first part consists of a few multiple choice questions asking whether they have learned certain aspects of intercultural communication during the English language education in either junior high school or senior high school. The questions focus especially on non-verbal communication. The latter part of the questionnaire lists the twelve items and asks which of those items they think would

be applicable in learning at four separate stages of education: college, senior high school, junior high school and elementary school. The questionnaire concludes by asking whether the learned items would be useful to the subjects for their future communicative interactions. Before the experiment took place, subjects were told that the Japanese public elementary schools have been teaching English as a part of *Sogo-Gakushu* that it will soon be installed as one of the required subjects. This explanation was done to make subjects understand that the starting point in learning English in Japan, unlike when they were children, is no longer at junior high but during the elementary school.

Results

In the first question asking whether the subjects have ever learned about non-verbal communication especially the non-voiced messages in English classes, 33.3% (n=53) answered "yes" and 38.4% (n=61) answered "little" while 27% (n=43) replied "none". However, 48.4 % of those who answered "yes" and "little" have learned those items in college. Only 13.8% have learned the item in senior high school and 5% in junior high school, both of which account for very low percentage. In the second set of questions asking about paralanguage, the majority (68.6%, n=109) have been taught in English classes while 28.3% (n= 45) have not. Out of 68.5% of responses, 62.4% (n=68) have learned the item in college while 25.7% (n=28) learned it in high school and 10.1% (n=11) in junior high school. Others (6.4%, n=7) learned it in a cram school or during a home stay program abroad.

The next question was on a five point scale which asked subjects whether they would agree to include those items of non-verbal communication in English classes as a means to raise learners' curiosity towards the language. The majority seemed to be in favor of incorporation of the non-verbal communication in English classes (55.3% (n=88) for "strongly agree" and 22.6% (n=36) for "agree"). 13.2% (n=21) were neutral while "disagree" and "strongly disagree" compiled only 5% (n=8) of the total. This question was followed by an inquiry to find when would be the most appropriate stage (college, senior high, junior high and elementary school) to learn non-verbal aspects of communication. The highest percentage was occupied by junior high school (34%, n=54) a stage where most subjects had started to learn English for the first time. The second highest was senior high school level with 28.3% (n=45) and the third was elementary school (16.4%, n=26). Those three scores signify that non-verbal communication is an item that is easy enough to be taught at early stages in second language learning. As for college, 13.2% (n=21) has suggested to learn at such a later stage of education.

The latter part of the questionnaire gives a multiple answer question asking which of those twelve items they would want or consider necessary to learn at each stage of education. Subjects were asked to fill in the numbered items (1-12) in any of four columns

(college, senior high, junior high, and elementary school). They were allowed to fill in the same number in as many columns as they wanted if they consider it is appropriate.

The result shows some distinctive features between all stages. In the column for what they want to learn at elementary school level (**Figure 1**), non-verbal non-voiced messages accounts for 55 points followed by Proxemics, the concept of space with 42 points. Next closest was again non-verbal communication focused on paralanguage (26 points) immediately followed by differences in speech signified by an Aesop fable with 25 points. From the results, subjects seem to regard non-verbal communication as one of the very basic items which can be taught at an early stage of language learning.

The aspects of non-verbal communication (item numbers 5, 6 and 7) ranked as the highest three in the junior high school level (**Figure 2**) too. However, subjects also marked communicative theory (item number 1) and synthetic/analytic thinking (item number 11) as the second highest group. Those items are more conceptual than non-verbal communication that they require certain level of cognitive development for learners to understand.

As for senior high school (**Figure 3**), most items exceed well over 40 points and the overall scoring shows that subjects considered all items were necessary before they enter college. The most prominent scores appeared on item numbers 2 (defining culture), 4 (the developmental process and the breakdown process in human communication) and on 12 (the sources of communication breakdown between Japanese and Americans).

While non-verbal communication accounted for the majority of scores in elementary and junior high schools, it marked the lowest in college level (**Figure 4**). After completing the coursework, students seemed to classify non-verbal communication as one of the basic aspects of intercultural communication that it should be introduced at an early stage. What the subjects regarded more appropriate to learn at a college level were: the item number 3 (characteristics of symbols) which marked the highest and 9 (influences of the concepts on the communicative behaviors in each culture) which was the second highest. These were followed by 12 (sources of communication breakdown between Japanese and Americans) and 10 (introduction of dichotomies to describe differences of communicative styles in Japanese and Americans). All of these have abstract notions which require a higher level of cognitive and world knowledge in the learners.

The final question in the questionnaire asked whether the knowledge in those twelve items would be useful to the subjects for their future communicative interactions. The result showed that, "strongly agree" accounts for 52.8% (n=84) and "agree" for 32.1% (n=51), both of which make up almost 85% of the total. This concludes that subjects did find those twelve items useful and necessary to communicate with people from cultures including their own and others'.

Figure 1

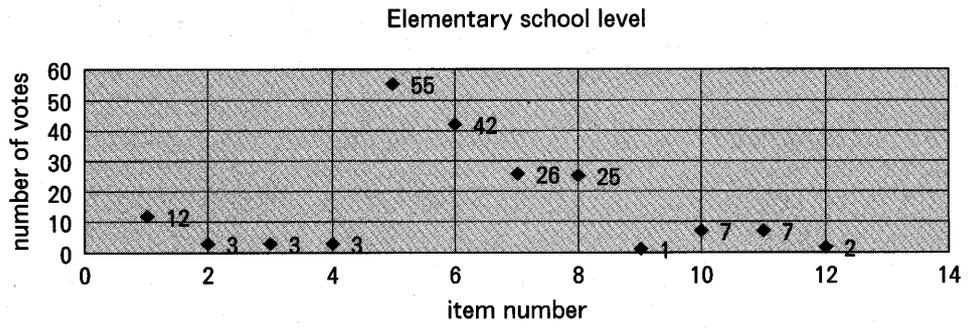


Figure 2

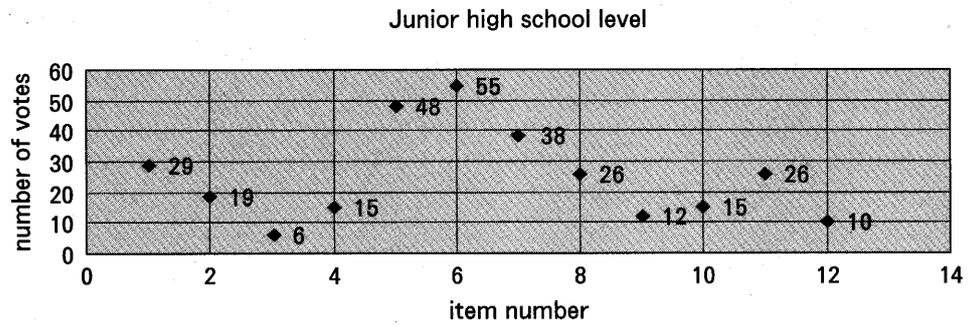


Figure 3

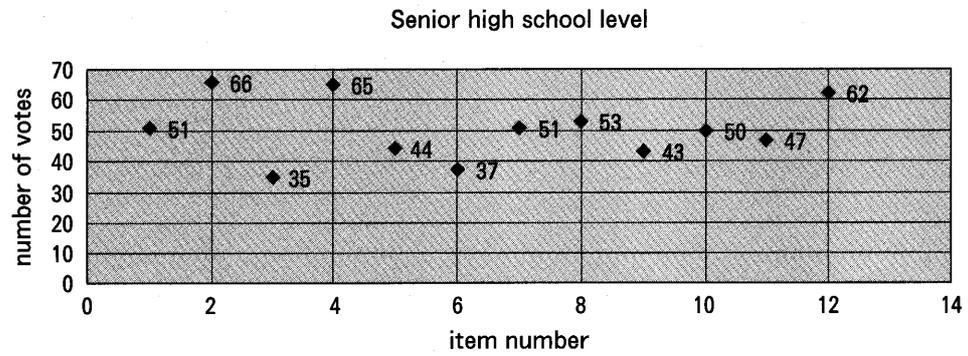
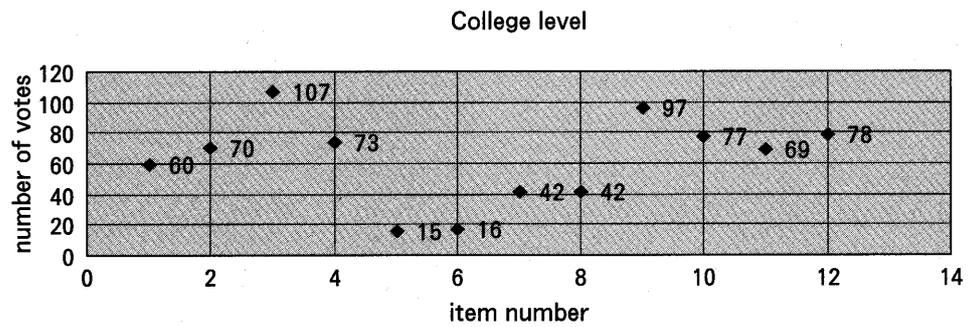


Figure 4



Discussion

The results of this short questionnaire have revealed some important issues regarding the teaching of intercultural communication during the elementary and secondary schooling. It is evident that the subjects have felt the achievement of such knowledge and skill is necessary but those aspects of intercultural communication have not been much treated in the English classes during their schooling before college. I believe this is due to the lack of understanding among the language teachers and the curriculum planners that intercultural communication is a separate field of study taught in the higher education. However in reality, any learners of foreign language have a need to acquire the knowledge and the skills of intercultural communication, because the assumption underlying the foreign language education is that learners use the language in a cross-cultural environment.

Subjects have also noted that there are stages in learning each aspect of intercultural communication. Some aspects of intercultural communication indeed require certain level of cognitive development in the learners and for the young children, a different kind of intercultural communication should be expected. As I anticipated, the subjects claimed the most appropriate item to teach children is non-verbal communication. Defining cultural concept (item number 2) or finding value differences that cause communication breakdown (item number 12) have abstract notions that may cause confusion among young learners who seek for more concrete and authentic examples while learning.

Conclusion

What the public elementary schools in Japan must face in the next two years before English is included in the curriculum is a battle against time and the rapid reform in the school curriculum. As almost all subjects are taught by the classroom teachers in the elementary schools, the biggest problem of placing English in the curriculum next to the core subjects such as *Kokugo* (Language Arts), mathematics, science and social studies will be who is to teach the English class. Those teachers who have no experience in language teaching will have to depend on outside resources such as ALT (assistant language teachers) or volunteers who may also not have enough experience and knowledge in language teaching. Most syllabi I have seen are focused mainly on language skills and it is hard to find a glimpse of aspects of intercultural communication. Incorporation of intercultural communication in a language class may seem like a goal that is too far to reach. However, it is evident from the survey result that at least some aspects of intercultural communication must be taught in elementary school.

Although the result assured the adequateness of teaching non-verbal communication at

an early stage of education, how it should be incorporated in English language teaching is still in question. This requires collaboration between syllabus designs, material development and teacher training in which a team work with the classroom teachers will be most necessary. When teaching children, it is always important to think of an environment that those children will be living in twenty or thirty years from now. The world will have far fewer boundaries than now and the number of times that those children would have cross-cultural encounters will be uncountable. The need to equip them with intercultural communicative skills and competence is a mission given to all of us who are involved in the fields of language teaching and of intercultural communication.

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Appendix

以下の質問に対し、該当する番号をマークしてください。

1. これまでの英語教育の中で非言語コミュニケーション（アイコンタクト、ジェスチャー、空間の取り方）について教わったことがある。（ある場合は5、少しの場合は3、ない場合は1にマーク）
5と3にマークした場合は2番へ。1にマークした場合は3番へ。
2. それはどこで教わったか。大学（5）、高校（4）中学（3）、塾（2）、ホームステイなど（1）
その他の場合はこの用紙の空白に記入してください：_____。
3. これまでの英語教育の中で音調学（声のトーン、強勢の置き方など）について教わったことがある。（ある場合は5、少しの場合は3、ない場合は1にマーク）
5と3にマークした場合は4番へ。1にマークした場合は5番へ。
4. それはどこで教わったか。大学（5）、高校（4）中学（3）、塾（2）、ホームステイなど（1）
その他の場合はこの用紙の空白に記入してください：_____。
5. アイコンタクト、ジェスチャー、空間の取り方、声のトーンのような非言語要素は英語を習いはじめた時に一緒に習った方が、英語に対する興味も増えてよいと思う。
6. 上記については具体的には次の段階で習うのが望ましいと思う。
大学（5）、高校（4）、中学（3）、小学校（2）、特に必要ない（1）

7番についてはこの用紙に記入してください。

7. その他授業で扱った内容をもっと前に知っていれば自分の英語に役立ったかもしれないと思う項目（①～⑫）を選び、それらを習うとしたらどの段階（大学・高校・中学・小学校）で習いたかったか下記の表の該当する場所に項目（①～⑫）を記入してください。項目はそれぞれ重複しても複数回記入してもかまいません。
 - ① コミュニケーションとは何か（自在性、コミュニケーションモデル、種類について）
 - ② 文化とは何か（氷山のメタファー、コミュニケーションと文化の関係）
 - ③ 記号における culture-bound と context-bound の性質について
 - ④ 対人コミュニケーションにおける人間関係発展・崩壊の段階プロセス
 - ⑤ 非言語コミュニケーション：ジェスチャー、外見的特徴、顔の表情、アイコンタクトなど
 - ⑥ 人と話す適切な距離について
 - ⑦ 音調学：アクセント、トーン、音声による表現など
 - ⑧ 日米のことばに対する概念の相違：アリとキリギリスの話など
 - ⑨ 日本人の「甘えの相互依存」とアメリカ人の「平等機会的独立心」について
 - ⑩ 日米のコミュニケーションスタイルの特徴：直線/螺旋、主語/述語主体など
 - ⑪ 俳句を通してみる日米の文化差
 - ⑫ 日米のコミュニケーションブレイクダウンの要素・本音と建前、沈黙など

大学で専門として習うべき項目	
高校の英語で習いたい項目	
中学校の英語で習いたい項目	
小学校の英語で習いたい項目	

8. 授業で扱った内容はこれからの自分の対人コミュニケーションで役に立つと思いますか。5段階でマークしてください。

（須田 紀子 英語コミュニケーション学科）