Title	Communication issues in the L2 classroom
Sub Title	第二外国語クラスでのコミュニケーションの問題
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Publisher	慶應義塾大学日吉紀要刊行委員会
Publication year	2016
Jtitle	慶應義塾大学日吉紀要. 英語英米文学 (The Hiyoshi review of English studies). No.68 (2016. 10) ,p.25- 49
JaLC DOI	
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Notes	
Genre	Departmental Bulletin Paper
URL	https://koara.lib.keio.ac.jp/xoonips/modules/xoonips/detail.php?koara_id=AN10030060-20161031-0025

Communication Issues in the L2 Classroom

Martin K. Hynes

Abstract

Poor communication between native English-speaking instructors and low-level language learners, can be a familiar feature of the Japanese classroom. From the observations of an English lesson, this paper will examine the reasons for this breakdown, arguing that a combination of factors were responsible. These included; inter-cultural issues, low student motivation and the instructor's teaching methodology. Chapter 1 will describe the teaching context and provide a linguistic and ethnographic analysis of the opening exchanges between the lecturer and the learners. In chapter 2 this discourse will be examined in greater detail and reasons for the breakdown in communication discussed, focusing on such host-culture concepts as '*group*' and '*individual face needs*'. Chapter 3 will briefly examine different aspects of motivation from an educational perspective and give reasons for the students' apparent disinterest in learning English (herein L2). In the final chapter, a number of proposals are made, which it is hoped, could diminish the inter-cultural misunderstanding, enhance motivation and thus improve L2 acquisition.

1. The Context & Analysis

The Institution The faculty of Science & Engineering in a major university based in Tokyo. Like many tertiary level institutions in Japan, *English Communication* (OCM) classes were compulsory and all students in the faculty had to take one 90 minute class per week.

The Learners The precise number of students enrolled on the first year of the program is unknown. However, in each OCM class there were approximately 40 students, all Japanese, with an average age of eighteen. Their level ranged from false-beginner to pre-intermediate and with science–based courses generally attracting more male students than female, only a small percentage of the class were girls (approximately 20%). The majority of the students would graduate from the university and pursue careers in fields such as urban planning, architecture and engineering

Past Learning Experience Obviously, the students' previous language learning experience strongly influenced their expectations on how languages should be 'learned'. Middle and High School students were generally taught the L2 for approximately 4 hours per week, of which 3 hours would be devoted to 'passive' skills, grammar and vocabulary, and one hour to 'speaking & listening'. With theories from the *Behaviorist* schools of psychology still a strong influence on teaching methodologies in Japan, the *Grammar Translation* and *Audiolingual* methods of language learning and teaching were still quite widespread. For the 'passive' skills, this generally involved tedious exercises translating Japanese (herein L1) into the L2 and memorizing long lists of lexical items and grammatical rules, while in the 'speaking & listening' class there was a heavy emphasis on pattern practice.

As a result of such an approach, the learners were used to adopting a passive role in the classroom, with teacher fronted activities the norm. Additionally, with so much focus on grammar and vocabulary, the students had acquired an extensive formal knowledge of English but poor listening and speaking skills. As such, the aim of the OCM class would appear obvious – to activate their formal knowledge through active use in the classroom.

The Instructor The lecturer was a native English speaker, male, with just three years' experience in education, firstly in ESL and then more recently in Japan, teaching EFL. As part of a much wider study on teacher- student classroom interaction, the lecturer agreed to have one lesson observed.

Lesson Structure Most lessons would follow a similar pattern every week. Generally, after a brief 'warm up', the lecturer would ostensibly follow the *Communicative Approach* to teaching a second language with the familiar *Presentation*, *Practice* and *Production* stages to the lesson. In the presentation stage, the students were instructed to read and listen to a dialogue from the textbook[1]. This would be followed by students practicing the dialog in pairs and at least two listening comprehension exercises. Students would then move on to semi-controlled speaking activities, again from the text. The lesson would usually conclude with a reading comprehension which the learners would complete individually, in silence.

Linguistic Analysis A frequent complaint from the instructor was the continual breakdown in communication between himself and the learners. This would usually occur either in the 'free conversation' stages of the lesson when the lecturer was in complete control of the discourse or when he was nominating students to gain feedback. In Sinclair and Coulthard's

(1975) hierarchical model of discourse in the classroom, they identified a 'teaching exchange' which typically had three phases; an initiating move, a responding move and a follow up move. For example;

Teacher: '*What did you do last night?'* (Initiate / Nominate)
Student: '*I went to the movies with my brother.*' (Response)
Teacher: '*Very good*.' (Follow up)

This exchange became known as the 'IRF model'. Each move in the model may be realized by a variety of acts, (the smallest units in the discourse system). For example, the follow up move could be an 'evaluation' (as above), or a comment ('*how interesting'*), or an 'accept' ('*yes*'). The Sinclair and Coulthard (ibid) template is regarded as the basic fundamental pattern in teacher student interaction. However, as the following transcript exemplifies, the 'IRF model' was not characteristic of this teaching context.

Transcription The following is a typical example of the classroom discourse which would open the lesson. It could also occur in later stages of the lesson when the lecturer was either; a) addressing the students in smaller groups or b) trying to elicit answers from the class as a whole. It should be noted, that in the first class of the academic year, the lecturer had instructed the students to make small nameplates which they were to place on their desks in front of them, each week. This was ostensibly to foster a better rapport between himself and the learners, although it also meant the lecturer could nominate students very easily.

(**I.**: Instructor / **Ss.**: Students / **S.**: Student)

1. **I.** *O.K.* (Marker) *Good morning everyone*. (Greeting) *O.K., get your names out. Yeah…..that's it…make sure I can see them, (*Long pause*)…..O.K., O.K. Let's go. Good morning everyone.* (Greeting again)

2**. Ss**. *Good morning, ohaiyo gozaimasu* (Only a few students respond, generally in the students' culture with a Japanese teacher they would all reply clearly.)

3. **I.** *So how was your weekend?* (Address to the whole class/elicitation.)

4. (No discernable response from the students.)

5. **I.** *Come on guys! What did you do over the weekend?* (Re-elicitation to the whole class)

6. (Again no clear response, students start to quietly talk to themselves in the L1.)

7. **I.** *Tadashi, how about you…what did you get up to? What did you do*? (Nomination)

8. **S.** (Tadashi) (long pause) *Up to….do? Albite - job* (Response)

9. **I.** *O.K. Great.* (Evaluation) *You were working right? Your part time job.*

10. **S. (**Tadashi) *Yes.*

11. **I.** *Right.* (Marker). *So say; 'I was working'.*

12. **S.** (Tadashi) *I was working.* (Response – the reply is identical to the instructor's prompt.)

13. **I.** *Good.* (Evaluation) *Well now Ryota…..how about you. What did you do last weekend?* (Nomination)

14. **S.** (Ryota) *I was working.* (Response)

15. **I.** *As well,….O.K. You have a job too?*

16. **S.** (Ryota) *Yes….in combini.* (Response)

17. **I.** *Great…great…..in a convenience store.* (Evaluation) *O.K. How about someone else? Over here…how about you?* (The instructor gestures to two female students, immediately to his right, in the front row.)

18. (Eventually, one of the students gradually raises her hand, slightly.)

T. *Sachiko, how about you then? Don't tell me you were working as well!* (Nomination)

19. **S.** (Sachiko turns to her partner) '*Eh? Nani sore'* (switches into the L1); *'What'*?

20. **I.** *So what did you do? .... Sachiko?* (Re-nominates)

21. **S.** (Sachiko) *My club.....tennis* (Unclear response /very low voice).

22. **I.** *Er, sorry ...what, what did you say*? (Re-nominates)

23. **S.** (Unclear answer. Student turns to friend again and mumbles in the L1.)

24. **I.** *Once again, Sachiko, I couldn't catch....what did you say you did?*

25. **S.** (No response from Sachiko, silence.)

26. **S.** (Sachiko) *Club….tennis* (Response)

27. **I.** *Oh…oh you went to your tennis club. Good.* (Evaluation) *Japanese students love their clubs, don't they?* (Elicitation)

28. **Ss. (**Some students give very quiet minimal answers in Japanese and the L2); *Hai / Yes*

29. **I.** *I really love playing tennis too – but I'm not good at it! I'm terrible!*

30. **Ss. (**Some quiet laughter from some students.)

31. **I.** *So who else went to their club at the weekend?* (Elicitation) *How about you at the back…er…Aya?* (Nomination)

32. **S.** (Aya: silence, No response)

33. **I.** *Yes you, Aya.* (The instructor points directly at the student.) *Did you get up to anything? Did you catch up with your friends?*(Re-nomination)

34. **S.** (Aya) *Watashi? (L1) –... Er,.... I'm not sure.* (Negative response)

35. **I.** *Not sure……..well I went to Hakone with my friends… it was beautiful…….and now, how about you Aya. Come on. What did you do?* (Nominates same student again)

36. **S.** (Aya) *Movies.* (Just intelligible, low response)

37. **I.** *Good.* (evaluation) *You went to the movies……..anyone else? What did the rest of you get up to*? (Re-elicitation to the whole class.)
38. **Ss.** (No clear response. Students turn to their respective partners and talk quietly in the L1.)
39. **I.** *Anyone?……No?. ….O.K., well er….let's get a move on then. Open your books at Unit….*

As the transcript clearly demonstrates there were numerous breakdowns in communication. Listed below are the main examples:

1. No response by the students to the instructor's elicitation.
2. Students responding in a shy manner, in very low voices.
3. No response by specific students to nominations.
4. Students simplify responses if the instructor has difficulty understanding.
5. Students give short, minimal, one-word answers.
6. Students resort to the L1.
7. Students' respond with embarrassed laughter to instructor's elicitation.
8. Students' claim "*I'm not sure.*"
9. A student repeats a previous student's answer.
10. The instructor repeatedly encourages the students with word prompts.

2. An Examination of the Communication Breakdown

As the analysis reveals, there were frequent breakdowns in communication between the lecturer and the students. What was particularly salient was the breakdown which occurred between the instructor and the entire class! For example, the almost complete lack of a discernible response to the elicitations on lines; #4; #6; #28 and #38. Usually, in western conversational discourse teachers expect their students to attempt to competitively engage

for the floor, either by raising their hands to attract attention or by simply calling out the answer. Yet, the response from the students was silence. Not surprisingly, this is frequently interpreted by native English instructors new to the Japanese classroom, as disinterest and uncooperative behavior. However, as we will now explore, a more accurate interpretation of such conduct can be apportioned to the learners' '*group face needs*'.

Group Face Needs Although in recent years there has been a major shift in attitudes and behavior amongst many young Japanese, the Confucian value of the '*Group'* still remains powerful. In stark contrast to Western culture with the importance it assigns to the individual in their pursuit of individualistic achievement and satisfaction, for the Japanese:

> '*Individual fulfillment is attained through finding and maintaining one's place within the group. If the group is successful so is each part of it.'*
>
> (Cathcart & Cathcart 1988; 252)

Linguistic anthropologists who have closely examined Japanese language and culture, assert that such values have been shaped by a number of cardinal principles. Lebra (1987) sees the group as being influenced by concepts of '*dependency*', '*reciprocity'* '*enryo*' and '*empathy*'. Empathy ('*omoiyari*'), as Matsumoto (1989) postulates, is particularly strong. '*Omoiyari*' is effectively having sensitivity to the feelings of others, which enables members of the group to understand the emotions of those around them, without the need for verbalization. It is realized in the concern to achieve and maintain consensus, even at the expense of personal preference. Lo Castro (1987; 110), sees such '*omoiyari*' for group harmony as being responsible for what she has termed '*Aizuchi*', the fixed expressions and

'sounds' which continually punctuate Japanese discourse[2]. Noguchi's (1987) comparative study of Japanese and English speech patterns illustrates the powerful influence of group face needs in Japanese conversation. As Noguchi (ibid) asserts;

> '*The rule to protect face in Japanese culture is usually more highly valued than, for example, the rule to protect conversation.'*
>
> (Noguchi 1987; 18)

Finally, one must consider the influence of '*enyro*'. There is no direct translation into English, but basically '*enyro*' combines the characteristics of 'awareness', 'restraint' and concern for others within the group. The virtue of '*enyro*', Japanese believe, is in the ability to avoid causing problems for others and to respond to group pressure for conformity.

The need to conform to the group, goes some way to explaining the poor responses to the instructor's elicitations (#4, #6, #28, & #38) and the subsequent breakdown in communication. For an individual learner to enthusiastically answer an undirected question, would show disregard to the group. It would be construed by the other students as an individual assuming authority, claiming the right to speak over the rest of the class. Such a claim would threaten the groups' positive face needs.

For the lecturer, the absence of a response is interpreted as uncooperative behavior, where in fact the students are more concerned with producing an egalitarian classroom atmosphere based upon their mutually observed concern for face.

Silence In the transcript there are numerous examples of where nominated students don't reply immediately (#8; #19; #23), or only give very minimal answers (#10; #26; #36). One reason for such behavior may be attributed to the social significance attached to silence in Japanese society. Traditionally traced back to the powerful influence of Buddhism, with its emphasis on silence, vagueness, ambiguity and intuitive expression, the Japanese have placed a high value on the role of silence. Loveday (1982), acknowledges the influence of Buddhism, particularly Zen, which:

> '*...reinforced the notion that oral expression was superficial if not superfluous (and that) 'satori' or enlightenment cannot be obtained by talking about it.'* (Loveday 1982; 3)

As equally influential as '*satori*', are the overlapping Zen-like values of '*isshin-denshin*' and '*sasshi*', which is the ability to gauge another person's thoughts and feelings through intuition, without the need to resort to verbalization.

With many inexperienced instructors in the low-level L2 classroom interpreting such silence as uncooperative behavior, they frequently encourage their students to respond in the negative with, for example; '*I don't know*', '*I'm not sure*' or '*I don't understand*'. Such an approach explains the rather absurd response where the student claims she 'isn't sure' what she did at the weekend (#34). The frequency of such replies does not necessarily represent a total lack of understanding but is rather an attempt by the learners' not to threaten the teacher's face by remaining silent[3)].

Hierarchy Another factor which may contribute to the learners' behavior is

the contrasting politeness axis which exists between Western and Japanese cultures. Loveday (1982; 6) drew a distinction between the Japanese vertical axis based on age, status, gender and rank and the Western horizontal axis based on intimacy.

As anyone who has experienced teaching in the Japanese state school system can testify, this vertical axis still remains particularly powerful. All lessons are teacher-fronted with the instructor in an authoritative role and the learners taking a subordinate role in the hierarchy. Teachers are expected to maintain a position of authority over the students at all times, while the students are in turn expected to listen attentively and in general, never question the teacher or give their own opinions. Such behavior, Stapleton (1995) argues (as with '*Groupism*'), can be traced back to the powerful influence of Confucianism:

> *'In today's Japan, to question or challenge the authority of the teacher's world would demonstrate a lack of awareness of his or her place in the hierarchy. The silence of students and the respect they accord teachers is still a strong component of classroom behavior reflecting Confucian values.'* (Stapleton 1995; 14)

Under such influences, it is hardly surprising that the passive role the learners' adopt in the Japanese classroom is carried over to the L2 classroom.

Individual Face Finally in this section we will briefly explore the concern for the individual's 'face'. Student repetition is a common feature in the low-level L2 classroom, which for the inexperienced western English

teacher, with their cultural assumptions of individual expression and independence, frequently misinterpret as uncooperative behavior and a threat to their own 'positive face'. Ironically, for the learners, repetition is looked upon as the appropriate strategy to adopt in an attempt to save their own 'face' and the 'face' of the teacher! This is clearly the case with Ryota's answer (#14). The teacher had responded favorably to the preceding answer (#13; '*good*') and thus for Ryota an identical response is considered appropriate. It is very possible that both students were working at the weekend but Ryota could have attempted to embellish his own response. Instead he simply gives an identical answer to his classmate.

With the learners trying to protect their own individual face needs and the positive face of the teacher, while simultaneously, the teacher is trying to protect his own face and encourage the learners to use the L2, it's not surprising that confusion quickly set in! For example, in an attempt to block any continued repetition, but maintain a relaxed atmosphere in the classroom**,** the teacher tries to inject humor into the discourse (# 18; *Sachiko….don't tell me you were working as well*!). Although the teacher is obviously trying to encourage a wider use of language amongst the learners, his approach fails, as the student who had initially shown a willingness to speak is suddenly unable to respond. Unsure as to exactly what the teacher wants, Sachiko turns to one of her classmates and resorts to the L1 for clarification. The consequent breakdown in communication, takes eight moves before the student gives a response to the teacher's 'satisfaction'. Ironically, the learner's final answer (#26; '*Club….tennis*'), is linguistically less complicated than her earlier response (#21). As many experienced teachers will assert, progressive simplification, or responding with minimal one-word answers (i.e.; #10; #36), is a common face-protecting strategy in

the classroom. It would appear that the learners feel, the less they have to say, the less chance there is of making a mistake.

3. Motivation

Compounding the inter-cultural issues there was also the problem of motivation. As the lesson progressed to the *Practice* and *Production* stages, it was glaringly obvious that the learners appeared almost completely unmotivated! No matter how much the lecturer nominated, the students always seemed reluctant to give any kind of answer or speak up in front of their peers. Motivation as Ellis asserts*; is clearly a highly complex phenomenon*' (1997:76), so proceeding further, I will briefly outline SLA research in this area.

- Integrative Motivation, Gardner & MacIntyre (1991) or what Skehan (1989) calls the **'***Internal Cause Hypothesis***'**. Essentially, this hypothesis asserts that the learner will have a strong desire to learn if they have an interest in the people and culture of the L2 and as such, integrative motivation is strongly related to L2 learning.

- Instrumental Motivation or the *Carrot and Stick Hypothesis* (Skehan; 1989), sees motivation arising out of a need to learn the L2 for functional or external reasons; for example, to pass an exam which will open up educational opportunities or improve career prospects.

- *The Resultative Hypothesis* The concept of Integrative & Instrumental Motivation, has been criticized in many quarters for focusing too heavily on only the causal aspects of motivation, when in fact, it is also possible for motivation to be the result of learning. In the *Resultative*

Hypothesis Herman (1980) and Skehan (1989) contend that learners who do well, will then persevere, perceive success and maintain or increase motivation. A major problem is that it is difficult to know if motivation is the cause or the result of successful L2 learning! Does motivation produce successful learning or is it successful learning that enhances motivation….or is it a combination of both?

- *The Intrinsic Hypothesis* Skeins (1989). Finally, motivation may also derive from an inherent interest in the tasks themselves. Such intrinsic motivation;

'.....Involves the arousal and maintenance of curiosity and can ebb and flow as a result of such factors as learners' particular interests and the extent to which they feel personally involved in learning activities.'

(Ellis 1997; 76)

Such a hypothesis is particularly significant as it serves to remind us that motivation is not merely a given – you either have it or you don't – as Gardner et al (1991) would have us believe, but that motivation is dynamic in nature and can vary from moment to moment depending on the learning context or task.

Before proceeding further, one must bear in mind that classifying motivation into four separate areas can be an oversimplification and rather than being seen as distinct from one another, these different features of motivation should be regarded as complimentary and overlapping. However, even from this elementary segregation, it is possible to gauge what aspects of motivation were lacking in the students.

Firstly, it is quite clear that the majority of students displayed very little integrative motivation. Japan is, of course, an extremely homogeneous culture and for many young learners, their first contact with a foreigner is when they are confronted by their L2 teacher in the classroom. As for outside the academic domain? The possibility of a university student (with poor L2 communication skills) socializing with a member of the target language is, on the whole, quite remote. Additionally, in the world of popular culture; from fashion, to music-icons, to sport, most young Japanese are usually only interested in their own, indigenous culture and not that which emanates from foreign shores. Of course, there are students who enjoy foreign travel and show immense interest in western popular culture. Furthermore, there are young Japanese who love foreign sport and may, for example, support a European soccer team or enjoy watching American baseball (although ironically, this interest tends to originate from the fact that a Japanese player is in the local team!) However, for poor L2 learners to actually have the motivation to study English (or any foreign language), for the purpose of travel or for the pursuit of their hobbies, is extremely uncommon[4].

Secondly, instrumental motivation. Again, it would appear that the students saw few practical benefits in learning the L2. As the advantages of proficiency in the world's 'international language' would appear obvious, this should be an astonishing and somewhat alarming assumption. Perhaps being science and engineering majors, the students are content to just try and excel in their own field of study and since they never intend to work abroad after graduation, they don't feel English is necessary[5].

Thirdly, turning our attention to the Resultative Hypothesis. It can be argued

that the students' behavior did display features of motivation which could be defined as 'resultative'. Unfortunately, it wasn't the kind of results the instructor hoped for! As much as perceived success can increase motivation, sadly the converse is also possible and those who don't succeed become discouraged and gain less success! In such circumstances a vicious circle can evolve, with low motivation resulting in low achievement which translates into lower motivation and so on. Compounding this downward spiral was the learner's 'affective states'. The students obviously displayed very little linguistic self-confidence and in the case of some learners the prospect of being nominated appeared to fill them with fear![6] Scovell (1978) indicated that a certain degree of anxiety may actually facilitate the learning process. However, in most cases, it would appear that anxiety is a serious impediment to language acquisition. As Gardner and MacIntyre assert;

> *'...anxious students will have lower levels of verbal production, will have difficulty in basic learning and production, will be less likely to volunteer answers in class, and will be reluctant to express personally relevant information in a second language conversation.'*
>
> (Gardner & MacIntyre 1993; 6)

Finally, and most significantly for this teaching context, there is intrinsic motivation. With the observed lesson typical of the lecturer's teaching style, it can be argued that compounding all the issues was the simple truth that the students appeared quite bored! To motivate the students, it was essential to alter the present classroom structure which, in truth, was almost identical to the lessons taught in Middle and High schools. The students, for their part, adopted a passive stance in the classroom as this is what they were accustomed to. Therefore, the lecturer needed to break down this barrier to

learning and this entailed radically changing the students' perceptions to the learning process. The instructor's role wasn't to teach the students how to '*learn*' the L2 but help them to '*acquire*' it. This involved providing activities and materials the students themselves would find intrinsically interesting. These activities and materials, along with a number of suggestions will be discussed in the next chapter.

4. Proposals for Improvement

As the analysis in Chapter 3 reveals, there was major inter-cultural misunderstanding between the learners and their lecturer. As Oxford and Anderson (1995) assert;

> *'For optimal language progress, language instructors need to understand their student's learning styles and the cultural and cross-cultural influences that help shape those styles.'*
>
> (Oxford & Anderson 1995; 201)

As such, it would appear obvious; for the new instructor to the Japanese L2 classroom, any kind of inter-cultural training program, or even just an orientation, would be extremely beneficial[7]. Additionally, if possible, regular meetings amongst the staff where pedagogic issues could be discussed, would also prove useful. What was particularly salient in the opening exchanges of the lesson, was how the lecturer seemed overly keen to get feedback from his students. This gave the impression that he was 'rushing' the lesson along. Perhaps in the multi-cultural ESL setting which the instructor was more familiar with, such an approach works well. However in the Japanese L2 classroom, nominating low-level learners to give an answer based on a personal experience can very often backfire, with

the students left floundering to give a response!

Turning our attention to the *practice* and *production* stages of the lesson, it was clear that the students were doing very little communicating! They were, of course, speaking to each other but this generally involved no more than practicing dialogs from the core text or completing an information gap. These exercises were extremely repetitive, tedious and did little to arouse learner interest in acquiring the L2. Obviously, what the students really needed were facilitative tasks which they would find intrinsically interesting. Ellis (1994: 597) summarizes the main studies that have investigated task variables and Long's (1989) survey of such research drew three conclusions:

- '*Two-way tasks*' that require a two way exchange of information (i.e. 'information exchange' and 'jigsaw activities') produced more negotiation than '*one-way tasks*'.

- '*Closed tasks*' which require learners to reach a single correct answer, or one of a small set of correct answers (again information exchange and jigsaw activities), produced more negotiation than '*open tasks*' in which there is no predetermined answer (i.e. decision making / opinion exchange tasks.)

- '*Planned tasks*' were more successful than '*unplanned tasks*'.

Such facilitative tasks, involving pairs and small groups cooperating together would enable the learners to gradually develop their linguistic resources to such a level that the completion of these tasks was well within their means. More crucially, as Ames (1991) has argued, by completing such

tasks through collaboration, there would be no individual feeling of failure and only one of success, thus motivation will be enhanced. It is fundamentally important that the learners attribute this success not to external factors such as the ease of the task or pure luck, but on actions which are within the learners themselves, within their '*locus of control'*, for example; hard work, persistence and ability[8]. If the learners can associate their success to such factors as these, they will gain in self-confidence and attain a feeling of pride which will in turn, result in enhanced motivation.

During these activities, the lecturer's role should be no more than one of 'observer'. It is essential that the instructor allows the learners to complete the task with whatever linguistic means they have at their disposal. Regardless of the frequency of any structural errors, the teacher should not intervene. If the students manage to complete the activity, this alone will prove that communication has been successful. Any teacher feedback on errors pertaining to linguistic form should be postponed until completion of the task by all the students and obviously the feedback should be addressed to the entire class as singling out an individual would be disastrous for self-confidence.

Another feature of the instructor's role which merits consideration was his use of language. In chapter 2 we examined the students' responses but what about the lecturer's questions? Firstly, his delivery; in a pattern which was not only confined to the opening stages but was repeated throughout the lesson, was the instructor's tendency to rapidly fire questions at the students. From the learners' reactions they often appeared to give an answer ~ almost any answer, in panic! Taking into account the learner's level and the cultural

issues at play, a more 'diplomatic' approach would have achieved better results. Despite his good intentions, rapidly nominating students and addressing them by their first name can backfire, as it immediately puts them 'in the spotlight'[9]. As already noted, this is attention which low-level students don't particularly relish. A better approach, would have been to write the questions (or a number of questions on the board), place the students in pairs and let them have a short 'question / answer' session amongst themselves. They could make brief notes on their partner's answers and only then, after having processed the information, the teacher could ask for feedback. Compounding the problem of the speed and style of the instructor's delivery was also the content! On a number of occasions he uses phrasal verbs which the learners would have been unfamiliar with. For example; #7, #33 & 37 ~ '*get up to*'; #33 '*catch up*' and #39 '*move on'*. For smoother discourse the lecturer clearly needed to 'grade' his language and avoid all forms of idiomatic expressions.

Finally, let's turn our attention to the materials themselves. To maintain interest, it is important that the instructor reduces his reliance on the core text and whenever possible, supplements with his own materials and authentic sources. Little, Devitt and Singleton (1989), have argued that authentic texts bring learners closer to the culture of the target language, unfortunately this may not work with the students of this context. As they showed such little interest in the L2 culture, the lecturer would probably find more success exploiting authentic materials which the learners could associate with Japan's youth culture. Advertisements and classifieds, plucked from local English-language magazines / newspapers, online articles and short video clips which deal with topics the students can relate

to i.e. Japanese fashion, sport and entertainment, would probably have greater success in arousing and maintaining interest. A simple example of a task type which exploits authentic materials could be a '*jigsaw reading'* and a perfect time to exploit it in this teaching context, could be at the end of the lesson. As noted in section 1, the lesson concluded with an extremely fruitless activity ~ the students working alone (in silence), to complete a reading comprehension. Surely this textbook exercise could be completed for homework and the class time used more productively with a task which incorporates both reading skills and communication: The learners could have been placed in pairs or a small group and instructed to complete a jigsaw reading task on (for example) one of the following topics; a movie review, a major sports event, or a famous star presently making the local headlines.

Conclusion

In this paper I have discussed a number of issues which can impact on teacher-student interaction in the English language classroom. Cross-cultural issues, the complex phenomenon of motivation and the instructor's methodology have all been examined. Additionally, I have made a number of proposals which could alleviate inter-cultural misunderstanding and asserted that a change in task-type, materials and content, can provide lessons which the students will find intrinsically interesting and enjoyable. Such an intrinsic appeal will result in motivation, and it is hoped a gradual improvement in the learners' L2 acquisition.

Notes

1) *Interchange 1. Fourth Edition* Cambridge University Press (2013), Jack C. Richards.

2) Lo Castro's (ibid) '*Aizuchi*' not only referred to fixed expressions and sounds but also head movements and facial expressions which she also argued, aided smooth, relaxed conversational discourse.
3) Unfortunately, after witnessing such student behavior, defensive posturing amongst some inexperienced instructors is not uncommon. The 'superiority' of their own Western culture over the host culture can become a popular refrain!
4) It must be acknowledged that in later life, this attitude can drastically change. Many older Japanese who have the time and finances, often travel overseas in pursuit of their hobbies.
5) *Japan Today* (April 27, 2014.) *Why do so few young Japanese want to work overseas?* Casey Baseel. In the 2014 survey carried out by the Japan Management Association (JMA), 57.7% of the respondents said they had no desire to work overseas during their career. This was the highest figure ever recorded in the annual poll. Fifty two per cent (52%) of respondents cited concerns over language and the ability to communicate as the reason they would prefer to stay in Japan. A slightly higher figure (54.4%) gave concerns over safety, sanitation and diet as reasons for their reluctance to work abroad. These statistics do seem surprising. However, perhaps such figures are to be expected if we bear in mind that;
    a) most Japanese companies today are expanding in developing nations with poor health-care infrastructures
    b) the increasing threat of terrorism
    c) the capacity for the Japanese media to continually portray Japan as a 'safe' country, as opposed to overseas.
6) Another factor which may have impacted on student anxiety was the gender imbalance in the class. As noted in Chapter 1, male students outnumbered their female counterparts by almost four to one. Taking into account that a significant number of the students would have graduated from a single- sex high school, university would be their first experience in a co-ed environment since grade six. Considering how the classroom would always segregate by gender, it can be assumed that shyness was also powerful influence on student behavior.
7) There have been a myriad of frameworks created for inter-cultural training; (Millhouse 1996; Brislin and Yoshida 1994; Bennet 1986; 1993). Generally a

distinction is drawn between courses which encourage '*structured experiences*' and programs which involve '*reflective observation*'.

8) *Locus of Control* is a concept originally proposed by the American psychologist, Julian Rotter. First mentioned in *Social Learning and Clinical Psychology* (1954), Rotter argued that the expected effect (or outcome) of behavior, influences the motivation of people to engage in that behavior. If one expects a positive outcome, or thinks there is a high probability of a positive outcome, then they will be more likely to engage in the activity.

9) Using nameplates (or even class photographs), to remember students' names and thus ostensibly foster a familiar atmosphere in the low-level L2 classroom, divides many EFL instructors. Some lecturers who exploit such methods, even go a step further and like to be addressed by their first names. But do such attempts to decrease the social distance between the instructor and their Japanese students really create a classroom atmosphere more receptive to L2 acquisition? This is clearly open to debate.

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