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A Comparative Study of Anglophone and Japanese Language Teaching Approaches to Multicultural Students

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Abstract:

The increasing number of international students, whose teaching and learning practices are very different from the UK, is studying in the U.K. This study poses the question of whether Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is still the most effective and appropriate approach in today's multicultural society regardless of cultural differences. The Japanese teaching method (Japanisation) was presented as an alternative teaching method to CLT, and the study investigates any impacts on multicultural students in Japanese language teaching at a university in the south of England. The study was conducted for one semester using two groups (total of 34 students) in 2009/2010. Two teaching methods, Japanisation and CLT, were applied. The concept of Japanisation is drawn from the study of Japanese car manufacturing industries and transferred to the language teaching context. Three tests which provided quantitative data to generate data. The quantitative results showed that there was no statistically significant difference between the two teaching methods regarding the attainment in the first two tests. However, Japanisation was associated with significantly higher results in the final test, compared with CLT. The implication of this study is embedding elements of Japanisation and Japanese educational culture in the Japanese language teaching will possibly enhance students' learning of reading and writing skills. Those who develop the teaching curriculum are encouraged at a strategic level to examine other educational cultures and teaching practices from non-Anglophone countries and assess how they may be combined with CLT to reflect new international characteristics of teaching and learning environments.

Keywords: Culture, higher education, Japanese language teaching, multicultural

1. Introduction

In the current multicultural learning environment, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is considered as the most popular language teaching method and I taught Japanese using this. In a pilot study, less than half of the Japanese class that I taught was British and the remainder was Chinese, Egyptian, Latvian, Greek, French, Malaysian, Polish and Russian. I felt that CLT did not work well for all students as some non-British students appeared to show different reactions to the British students in response to CLT. The issues of applying CLT to non-British students were not addressed when I was studying CLT and made me formulate the hypothesis that CLT may only be appropriate and effective for Anglophone students (Anglophone refers to USA, UK, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand within this paper). It would seem that there is possibly a gap between the language theory (CLT) and the globalised language teaching and learning environment. As a result, language teachers may be teaching students whose educational culture is very different from that of Anglophone educational culture using the Anglophone-originated teaching theory, namely, CLT.

This study compares the efficacy of an Anglophone originated teaching approach (Communicative Language Teaching) with a non-Anglophone teaching approach (Japanisation), applies them to two groups containing multicultural students, evaluates the results and considers the implications of applying Anglophone originated teaching approach to the diverse cultural background of students from a cultural point of view.

2. Theoretical Framework for Analysing Educational Culture

In order to understand the educational culture and the two teaching approaches, Hofstede *et al.*'s cultural taxonomy was used. Their cultural taxonomy was chosen to be the framework of this study. Their model has been criticized as 'essentialism' (Godwin-Jones, 2013, p3) and the use of their categorisation may be too stereotypical and simplified as the reality is more complex and there are various types of people with various perspectives and belief regardless of where they live with globalisation. However, it is worth noting that the most recent GLOBE Cultural Taxonomy is still built on Hofstede *et al.*'s work (Lustig and Koester, 2010, p112) and the use of their categorisation is relevant for this study.

Hofstede *et al.* (2010) identifies culture in five dimensions: Power distance; individualism–collectivism; masculinity–femininity; uncertainty avoidance; and long-term–short-term. The first three dimensions are explained before explaining the educational culture in

the two teaching approaches. Each dimension consists of two opposing poles and this will help to position where Japan and the Anglophone countries stand in these dimensions.

Power Distance (PD) is defined as ‘the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organisations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally’ (Hofstede *et al.*, 2010, p. 61). According to Dimmock, ‘many Asian societies are high PD cultures, while many Western societies have low PD values’ (Dimmock, 2000, p. 47).

Individualist and collectivist are ‘the interests of the individual prevail over the interests of the group’ (Hofstede *et al.*, 2010, p. 91) and ‘the interest of the group prevails over the interest of individual’ (Hofstede *et al.*, 2010, p. 90) respectively. Generally speaking, Anglophone countries have an individualist society and Asian countries have a collectivist one (Dimmock, 2000).

Uncertainty avoidance is defined as ‘the extent to which the members of a culture feel threatened by ambiguous or unknown situations’ (Hofstede *et al.*, 2010, p. 191). High Uncertainty Avoidance Index (UAI) scoring nations try to avoid ambiguous situations whenever possible, whereas low UAI scoring nations are not concerned about unknown situations. Generally, Anglophone countries appear to be labelled as weak uncertainty avoidance countries whereas Asian countries appear to be labelled as strong uncertainty avoidance countries.

Although Hofstede *et al.*’s categorisation was used as a framework for characterisation, great caution is needed for generalization. There are variations in educational cultural preferences within British students brought up in Britain. Furthermore, even among students who were brought up in Britain, their educational cultural preferences vary depending on their heritage and whether or not they were brought up in a mono-cultural environment. Given that today’s society consists of people with different heritages and preferences with globalisation, it is difficult to generalise the cultural preferences of a particular nationality or heritage.

2.1. Anglophone Approaches – CLT

CLT is a language teaching approach that has been used for more than four decades. It started in the late 1970s in Europe and gained momentum in the early 1980s. Since then it has taken hold and acquired the status of ‘new dogma’ (Hu, 2002, p. 94). Although CLT has evolved in its theory during the last four decades, the learning environment has changed considerably for the last four decades.

CLT adopts the following three of Hofstede *et al.*’s educational cultural dimensions: Small power distance, weak uncertainty avoidance, and individualism. Firstly, with regards to the power distance dimensions, CLT adopts small power distance as it takes ‘less teacher-centered’ (Brumfit, 1985, p. 7) and ‘CLT is firmly opposed to teacher dominance in the classroom’ (Hu, 2002, p. 95). Secondly, with regards to uncertainty avoidance dimensions, CLT adopts weak uncertainty avoidance as ‘learners are not being constantly corrected. Errors are regarded with greater tolerance,’ (Littlewood, 1981, p. 94), and CLT ‘avoid(s) linguistic correction entirely’ (Brumfit and Johnson, 1979, p. 173). Thirdly, with regard to the individualism *versus* collectivism dimension, CLT adheres individualism as it focuses on the individual student as mentioned in Piaget’s (1952) theory of cognitive development.

Typical CLT used in this study. The CLT class was achieved by exposing the sample students to a combination of small power distance, weak uncertainty avoidance, and individualism: The small power distance was established by creating student centred class. An uncertainty avoidance was achieved by encouraging students’ creativity and avoiding linguistic correction. Individualism was demonstrated through speaking activities with pair work such as a real life related information gap task and problem-solving tasks using a combination of a topic of theme (e.g. time, shopping, etc.).

2.2. Japanese Approaches – Japanisation

‘The term Japanisation came into vogue in the mid-1980s to describe attempts in other countries to make practical use of “Japanese” ideas and practices’ (Price, 2006, p.19). Japanisation in this study was also taken from the study of Japanese car manufacturing industry in 1980s, adapted to apply for a language teaching context. Although it is a concept originated in the manufacturing industry, it has wider ramifications that go beyond the manufacturing industry. A significant relationship between schools and factories has been pointed out as early as 1960s that ‘schools can be viewed as organisations in some ways akin to factories’ (Musgrave, 1968, p. 67). The possibility of application to the educational context as is also suggested that ‘workers’ behaviour is an extension of behaviour acquired at school’ (Hofstede, 1991, p.235). However, the concept of Japanisation seems to have been previously applied to organisational management and not to a teaching context.

One of the key words in Japanisation is Quality Control (QC) groups. QC groups are used to make use of all staff of very different experience and skills over an extended period of time in order to improve quality. QC groups are also known as Han groups at school as Benjamin maintains: ‘The values and interaction patterns fostered in Han groups in the classroom are among those carried over into adult situations’ (Benjamin, 1997, p. 64).

Han groups are regular working groups used in Japanese classrooms (Fukuzawa & LeTendre, 2001, p. 21; Dimmock & Walker, 2002, p. 114; Tsuneyoshi, 2001; Okano & Tsuchiya, 1999, p. 59; Rohlen & LeTendre, 1996, p. 75). ‘Each Han [group] includes five to eight children’ (Benjamin, 1997, p. 53) and Han groups only ‘change the groupings at the beginning of each term of the school year’ (Benjamin, 1997, p. 53).

There are a few characteristic of Han groups. Firstly, Han groups are ‘family-like’ (Rohlen & LeTendre, 1996, p. 88). Han groups ‘only change the grouping at the beginning of each term’ (Benjamin, 1997, p. 53) which resembles QC group’s ‘extended period of time’. Han groups are ‘formal groups’, which is defined as ‘either more or less permanent with defined roles over a long period’ (Brumfit, 1985, p. 72). In contrast, Anglophone group formations are ‘factory-like’ (Rohlen & LeTendre, 1996, p. 88) and they are ‘informal groups’. Informal groups are usually of *ad hoc* formation and ‘occur primarily for social purposes whenever people interact’ (Brumfit, 1985, p.72). Secondly, Han groups, ‘comprises a mixture of different academic abilities’ (Okano & Tsuchiya, 1999, p. 59),

which resembled QC groups 'very different experience and skills'. In contrast, Anglophone group formations tend to form with those of similar academic abilities.

Typical Japanisation used in this study. The Japanisation class was achieved by exposing the sample students to a combination of large power distance, strong uncertainty avoidance, and collectivism: Large power distance was established by creating a teacher-centred class where students played a passive role. The opportunity of speaking practice in pairs was hardly provided. Strong uncertainty avoidance culture was achieved by stressing on one correct answer and elimination of errors. Specifically, grammar exercises focusing on one correct answer was used. Collectivism was demonstrated through turn-taking and Han groups.

3. Methods

This study used both quantitative and qualitative methods. For qualitative methods, two types of questionnaire (Researcher Questionnaire and University Questionnaire) and observation were used to generate the data. The Part-time Programme of the Modern Languages Department in the University stipulates that students undertake the assessment tasks by two main assessment schemes: 'heavily based on home assignments' and 'timed and supervised assessment tasks' (Modern languages Part-time Programme: 2009: 7). The former consists of two pieces of assessed home assignments weighted at 10% each (20% of the total) that are submitted on certain deadlines (submission in week 6 and week 9 of 12, respectively). For simplicity, these are referred to as Assignment 1 and Assignment 2 in this study. The timed and supervised assessment task, known as the Reading and Written Test, is normally assessed on a Saturday by invigilators and consists of one, timed, task-based written examination lasting 90 minutes weighted at 40% (Teaching and Assessment Guide: 2009/2010: 7–8). The Reading and Written Test needs to be inspected and approved by either the Part-time Programme Co-ordinator or the Deputy Director of the Centre for Language Study before the exam is administered. The remaining 40% consists of communicative skills (listening skills 20% and oral skills 20%). Both listening skills and oral tests are administered within the class (Class 9). Listening skills are assessed by listening tests which consist of a '30 minute in-class assessment' (Modern languages Part-time Programme: 2009: 8). Oral skills are 'based on ongoing evaluation of students' general performance or specific tasks and marked using the feedback sheet on page 34' (Modern languages Part-time Programme: 2009: 8). The details on data analysis are explained in 3.3.

3.1. Research Questions

This study addresses the two specific research questions given below. Research question 2 has a further three sub-questions:

- RQ1. What are the educational values associated with Japanese teaching and learning?

This is imperative to the understanding of the downstream empirical study. In the study, data were obtained through literature reviews. The literature review discusses Anglophone and Japanese educational culture as well as Hofstede's three dimensions of culture as the framework of this study.

- RQ2. Do Japanese teaching methods enhance students' learning when applied in a British language learning context?

The second research question was investigated through following three further sub-questions:

- Do students in the Japanese language classes taught using CLT or Japanisation methods show any differences in the performance of reading and written tests and assignments?
- Do students show any preferences to any language teaching approaches influenced by their previous educational culture?
- How do students respond to being taught by Japanisation methods compared with being taught by CLT?

Quantitative data was used to investigate the first sub-question. However, quantitative data cannot answer the second and third sub-question which relate to students' perceptions and feelings. Therefore, questionnaires which provide qualitative data and observation were used along with student observation. The questionnaire was primarily used in answering the second sub-question which provided quantitative and qualitative data. The questionnaire adopted multiple type questions and these options may have limited students' other answers. However, a full understanding of students' perceptions and feelings may not necessarily be gained from the questionnaire. Observation was used to compensate for this potential limitation. Observational data were used to answer the third sub-question. However, it should be noted that the opportunity to observe students might not happen at the right time and the right place during the research within the assigned timescale. Moreover, the interpretation of the observational data might be culturally biased and the use of qualitative methods always embraces possibilities in obtaining a unanimous interpretation.

3.2. Sample

The sample populations comprise a mixture of undergraduate and postgraduate students who were studying Stage 1 Japanese at a university in the South of England in 2009/2010. Students were randomly assigned. This study used two groups, Group 2 and 3 (total is 34 students). CLT was applied to Group 2 and Japanisation was applied to Group 3. The breakdown of the participants are: one Australian, eleven British, three British-Chinese, one British Indian, one Bulgarian, seven Chinese, one Egyptian, two Greek, one Hong Kong-Chinese, one Indonesian, one Korean, three Malaysian-Chinese and one New Zealand Chinese.

3.3. Analysis

3.3.1. Quantitative

Five sets of data were described using descriptive statistics and statistical analysis. Using three tests (Assignment 1, Assignment 2, and Reading and Written Test results) the mean, Standard Deviation (SD), minimum and maximum score, skewness and kurtosis of Groups 2 and 3 were compared using SPSS. A *t*-test was used to compare the two groups for three sets of data, namely, Assignment 1,

Assignment 2 and the Reading and Written Test results. The *t*-test demonstrates whether the mean values in each group are statistically significantly different from each other. The skewness and kurtosis of the data are examined to ensure their suitability for parametric tests (e.g. *t*-tests and analysis of variance) (Pallant, 2010, p. 213). For all tests, the level of confidence is set at 0.05.

3.3.2. Questionnaires

In analysing the Researcher Questionnaire, firstly, results of the two groups (Japanisation and CLT) were compared with reference to the four dimensions (analysis i). Then the students were grouped by ethnicity and compared in each group in depth. This enabled the examination of which end of the spectrum in the collectivist - individualist dimension the student prefers by ethnicity. It should be noted that results for the Chinese and British students in each group (analysis ii) for CLT and iii) for Japanisation) as well as findings from other nationalities were compared in each group (analysis iv) for CLT and v) for Japanisation). The Chinese and British students were highlighted in particular in this study as Dimmock and Walker (2005) claim that they have contrasting perceptions and expectations in teaching and learning regarding good teachers and good students. In the University questionnaire, students' comments were analysed around turn-taking, the Han group and collectivism.

3.3.3. Observation

Observational notes are the researcher's diary entries on four occasions (Week 3, Week 5, Week 6 and Week 8) in the duration of this study. Week 8 is a reflection of four weeks' observation. Observational notes were taken during every class by the researcher to monitor two points in students' behavioural changes: Firstly, if they change their behaviours as a result of the use of the *Han* group, Japanisation; secondly, if the behaviours of the non-British students show any similarity to those of British students.

4. Results and Discussion

This section presents the results of RQ1 and RQ2.

4.1 Result of RQ1

Research question 1 asked what the educational values associated with Japanese teaching and learning is. The Han group is a pedagogical value used in this study as an influence of collectivist educational culture. Turn-taking is another preferred pedagogy of collectivist cultures. In the empirical study, Han group is combined with other characteristics of Japanese teaching and learning, that is, strong uncertainty avoidance and large power distance: Preference for one correct answer, error elimination and control of errors are the preferred pedagogy of strong uncertainty avoidance cultures; Teacher-centred class is the main preferred pedagogy of large power distance cultures

4.2. Result of RQ2

Research question 2 has three further sub-questions whose results are presented under three headings below:

4.2.1. Sub-Question 1: Do Students in the Japanese Language Classes Taught Using CLT and Japanisation Methods Show Any Differences in the Performance of the Reading and Written Tests and Assignments?

This sub-question was investigated through the three tests (Assignments 1, 2 and Reading and Written Test) between the two groups. There was no statistically significant difference in the first two Assignments. However, there was a statistically significant difference in the Reading and Written Test, where the Japanisation class obtained higher average marks (the mean score of Group 3 was 6.97 points higher than that of Group 2) than the CLT class. [Group 2 ($M = 68.95, SD = 7.98$); Group 3 [$M = 75.92, SD = 7.69; t(29) = -2.40, p = 0.02$]. The difference between the mean scores of the two groups for the Reading and Written test was very large (eta squared = 0.17) (Pallant, 2005, p. 209). Furthermore, the distribution of kurtosis of Group 3 (Japanisation) was almost twice as that of Group 2 (CLT), meaning that the marks in Group 3 were more clustered around the average than the marks in Group 2. Since Japanisation aims teaching around the average students, this may have been one of the factors contributing to the observed distribution of Group 3 where more students in Reading and Written tests were clustered around the average.

4.2.2. Sub-Question2: Do Students Show Any Preferences to Any Language Teaching Approaches Influenced by Their Previous Educational Culture?

The results of Researcher Questionnaire showed that the majority of students showed preference to the Anglophone originated language teaching approach, CLT, than Japanisation regardless of their previous educational culture. Some international students' preference for CLT was not reflected on their previous educational culture. It seems that their preference for CLT may be modified by the British university learning environment where they are currently studying. International students who were brought up outside the UK seemed to conform to the British educational culture in which they were currently studying, as 'a framework of cultural expectations about learning will probably be modified or supplemented in relation to the expectation of teachers and students in the host culture' (Jin & Cortazzi, 2006, p. 9).

4.2.3. Sub-question3: How do Students Respond to being Taught by Japanisation?

The results of questionnaires showed students' two reactions in response to Japanisation: either rejection or acceptance. The university questionnaire results showed that students who could not accept the different educational culture conveyed their opinion by low university quantitative rating, critical comments, and wishing to change to the CLT class. The observation confirmed that students

showed difficulty in understanding the notion of the Han group in both observation and students' comments in the questionnaires. Three out of four observational notes showed that the Han group did not function at all. However, the last observational notes (Week 8) indicated Group 3 which experienced Japanisation seemed 'more united as a group than Group 2'.

4.3. Discussions

The implications of the study for wider teaching practice are as important as the data themselves. It appears to have two emerging themes. The first implication raises the question of whether CLT is universally effective for all language students regardless of their educational cultural background. Meeting students' requirement by one teaching method was difficult. The data collected in this study also suggest that using Japanisation only or CLT only did not work well for every student in both groups, which may be a consequence of cultural-cognitive differences between Asian and Western learners (Dimmock and Walker, 2005, p. 109). This could be explained by the consequence of cultural cognitive differences between Asians and Western learners (Dimmock and Walker, 2005, p. 109). Previous studies describe the cultural inappropriateness of CLT as follows: "a teaching or learning approach that is taken for granted and regarded as universal and common sense by people from one culture may be seen as idiosyncratic and ineffective in the eyes of people from a different culture" (Gu and Schweisfurth, 2006, p. 75). Sonaiya also points out that "while shared human values may make certain methods (or certain aspects of specific methods) universally applicable, this should not always be assumed to be the case" (Sonaiya, 2002, p. 107).

The second implication of the study concerns whether teaching should be focused on the minority of the high-ability and low-ability students or the majority of students who operate at an average level. According to Stevenson and Stiger (1994), individualist educational culture produces "educationally advantaged minority and disadvantaged majority" (Stevenson and Stigler, 1994, p. 223). CLT is an ideal teaching method for educational culture which prioritises one-to-one interaction and paying attention to the needs of individual students. However, paying attention to individual student's needs may not necessarily meet the needs of all students as a class or the majority students. CLT has been claimed to be associated with the enhanced students' communicative skills. The findings of this study suggested that the students in the CLT class struggled to read and write in Japanese, which became apparent when they took the Reading and Written Test. Reviewing what CLT has brought to today's students, perhaps the area of grammar, reading and writing need more attention in using this method.

5. Conclusions

Teaching and the learning environment has become more multicultural compared with forty years ago when language classrooms contained significantly fewer international students at the inception of CLT. Current Anglophone originated language teaching approach places an emphasis on individuals which is ideal for Anglophone educational culture. However, the universal effectiveness and applicability of the Anglophone originated language teaching approach regardless of their educational culture is questioned due to the current globalised educational climate. It may be 'conflict' (Hu, 2002, p. 102) or be 'incompatible' (Hu, 2002, p. 102) with some students, and thus may not offer a universal optimum language-teaching theory. In contrast, Japanisation focuses teaching on the majority students. However, this approach may not necessarily meet the higher and lower end of student's requirements, either. If CLT were incorporated with the teaching approaches from non-Anglophone countries, students' diverse preferences and expectations from both ends of the three dimensions of culture could be captured.

This study contributes not only language teaching practitioners but also any teaching professionals who involve in multicultural learning environment to highlight the international students' different educational cultural expectations and requirements in teaching and learning. For theory developers, it is hoped that this study contributes for the development of one new teaching theory which integrates non-Anglophone countries' teaching and learning approaches reflecting the new multicultural teaching and learning environment. The example of Japanisation suggests that other teaching practices from non-Anglophone countries may also valid and potential to complement CLT.

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