Instructor Knowledge of Student Socialization, Classroom Culture and Social Mechanisms

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ABSTRACT

The process of culture and language learning consists of a constant back-and-forth process between the learner's culture and the culture they are attempting to learn. This critical relationship results in tacit and explicit cultural understanding, having a distinct effect on both instructors and students. In this article, we explain reasons for foreign instructors to model effective learning strategies that are appropriate to both the target language and culture while also showing knowledge, sensitivity, and acumen toward the students' cultural capital, social mechanisms, and set-social-practices. We investigate teacher knowledge of student classroom culture in the formation of groups. Classroom observations and interviews with both instructors and students reveal three foreign language instructors knowledge of Japanese student social mechanisms and the effects that this knowledge has on student group formation. The findings highlight how instructors can use knowledge of different social mechanisms for planning and implementation of group formation techniques.

Key words: *cultural capital, classroom culture, student affect, social mechanisms, set-social-practices, EFL,* group formation

INTRODUCTION

The Japanese classroom is one that has prepared students to function in accordance with the virtues of Japanese society and the educational system, which propagates that society (Horio, 1988). Some of these virtues include duty, devotion, conformity, restraint, humility, and group decision-making (Lebra, 1976). It is important to note, however, that each society may value different virtues. For example, certain virtues focused upon in Japanese educational systems run contrary to those in Western-based classrooms. In Western-based classrooms, individual expression, opinion, inquiry, argument, and reflection are customarily reinforced. On a positive note, such differences add to the variety of instructor and learner expectations; At the other end of the spectrum, these differences in expectations can lead to difficulties and setbacks in the Japanese classroom for foreign instructors (i.e., participation in discussions, homework, classroom rules, and other teacher/student interactions). While many of these setbacks exist, we centralize our analysis on one: expectations of the formation of groups by foreign and Japanese instructors. The purpose of this paper

is to provide evidence for how teacher understanding of student socialization and social mechanisms allows for improved classroom practices in the EFL classroom.

In this article, we first introduce the three interconnected socialization concepts of (a) classroom culture, (b) social mechanisms, and (c) set-social-practices. Second, we explain the issue of differences in teacher and student viewpoints and expectations in the classroom (i.e., the role of the learner). Third, we highlight some of the issues and concerns that EFL instructors will likely encounter in Japan. Fourth, we highlight challenges that arise without instructor knowledge of Japanese university learner's classroom culture. Last, we present data from three case studies based upon group formation within the EFL classroom.

CULTURAL CAPITAL, CLASSROOM CULTURE, SOCIAL MECHANISMS AND SET-SOCIAL-PRACTICES

Every society propagates its own learning culture and this learning culture is transmitted through social interaction in educational institutions. Classroom culture, social mechanisms and set-social-practices are each an essential consideration when investigating student social patterns of behavior. All three (classroom culture, social mechanisms, and set-social-practices) are central and interconnected elements that can vary greatly from individual classroom to classroom. This can be hyper-intensified when instructor-student learning culture expectations are different. This often occurs in the EFL classroom. This is especially the case when a foreign teacher enters a homogeneous cultural context that requires an understanding of past and present student socialization. This socialization is generally termed cultural capital.

For the purposes of this paper, we will use the term cultural capital (objectified culture) to mean knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, networks, and norms that allow individuals to interact within the general cultural milieu and to interact within societal institutions (i.e., school, classroom). Hence with cultural capital, individuals are able to gain success that can lead to fluidity in a society by developing cultural capital. Following this line of logic, families generally transmit cultural capital to their children in order to enact success within the modern educational system.

Extending into the classroom, children bring their previously procured cultural capital (skillset) into their educational experiences. This includes actions, language, and instructor-student role expectations. Overall, cultural capital functions as a collective thought and activity system that creates a classroom culture and is underpinned by a consolidated set of values. We term these values as Social Mechanisms (SM). For clarity, Gross' (2009) defines social mechanisms as "a more or less general sequence or set of social events or processes analyzed at a lower order of complexity or aggregation" (p. 364). Put another way, SM are individual social principles, seen or unseen, as structural elements of both cultural capital and classroom culture (i.e., silence, respect, responsibility).

Unfortunately, these SM and the corresponding classroom culture are both often difficult to see but are representative as both individual and collective student affect. Popham (2009) defines affect as "the attitudes, interests, and values that students exhibit and acquire in school" (p. 85). Identifying student affect and connecting SM can be difficult but with time, awareness and analysis they are observable in language and action. Specifically, SM often habitually manifest as Set-Social-Practices (SSP) in specific public settings (i.e., traditional ceremonies, business meetings, family-gatherings), and in particular in classrooms. Simply stated, SSP are habitual behaviors that express traditions, values, and expectations through language and action discourse. To use language as a comparable example, language systems are set up with specific mechanisms (i.e., grammar, punctuation) that allow speakers to express themselves in a particular way and ultimately create cultural capital within communities that use any particular language.

Taken in the aggregate, classroom habits and the corresponding classroom culture function based upon SM, cultural capital and classroom expectations. It is important to also recognize that both instructors and student bring each of these to the learning environment. However, what happens when different SM, class-

room culture, and classroom expectations exist between the instructor and the students? Put another way, what occurs when experience-based cultural capital of students is incongruent to that of the instructor? Both instructor and student need to work together to understand one another's classroom expectations in order create a productive and respectful learning environment.

Essentially, if an effective learning culture is to be created, instructors and students cannot operate in a "taken for granted" manner, relying solely on past experiences and past cultural capital. Jarvis (1987) describes the state of not being able to rely on past knowledge as *disjuncture* (See Jarvis 1999 for further inquiry). Moving beyond disjuncture requires both the instructor and the learner to build reciprocal understanding of SM and to create a co-negotiated cultural capital and classroom culture. This falls in line with Gross' (2009) contention that "study of social mechanisms must be undertaken along-side a project of cultural interpretation" (p. 369) and requires individuals to be "knowledgeable cultural agents" (366). Both the instructor and the student must be equally involved in the process of learning through effective social interaction in the classroom. Overall, the end goal is communication and socialization through mutual understanding.

Underlying student SSP, SM impact how students approach and behave in the classrooms. To that end, SM create habit-bound culturally mediated mechanism chains of behaviors that affect instructor-student social interactions in the classroom. These chains also significantly affect student-student interactions. A lack of familiarity impacts the student-instructor relationship and can make it difficult for instructors to accomplish his/her curricular goals.

THE ISSUE OF TEACHER AND STUDENT VIEWPOINT AND EXPECTATION

It can be difficult for foreign instructors to understand students without experience and knowledge of the students' native language and culture and without an understanding of SM. Further, lack of understanding can be compounded when instructor-learner viewpoints and expectations are (a) different and (b) misunderstood. For example, in Japan, there is a widespread use of the term learner-centered classroom. The learner-centered classroom in EFL teaching generally revolves around pair or group work. However, Holliday (2003) argues that it is impossible for foreign teachers to be learner-centered if he/she does not understand the students' culture. He explains, "It is not possible for teachers who are not themselves learners, and who do not therefore belong to, and cannot easily understand the world of learners, to be learner-centered" (p. 115). Put another way, teachers often attempt to have students cater to the instructor's view of the learning environment.

Holliday (2003) extends this line of thought to state "the outcome is a control of learning through planned tasks which serve the technical needs of the discourse rather than the real needs of the students" (p. 115). He contends that teachers who perceive an us-and-them mentality "certainly promotes the self of the teacher as unproblematic. Students are considered autonomous when they behave in ways which conform to an image of the native speaker and his/her native culture" (p. 115). In short, in order for the teachers to best serve their students, they themselves need to balance the viewpoints and expectations of the students in relation to their language-based curricular needs.

Hayagoshi (1996) echoes this conclusion. Her (1996) qualitative study of Japanese students shows that the teacher has a significant role in the behavior of students in the class. In particular, she contends that there are "external walls" placed upon students by teachers. With respect to these external walls in the classroom, she places responsibility for Japanese students feeling confined by walls on the teacher as opposed to the attitudes of the students. Both Holliday (2003) and Hayagoshi (1996) consider the importance of the instructor's understanding of the student's SM, cultural capital and SSP as paramount. She argues that it is invaluable for the foreign instructor to invest time in understanding student cultural capital, SM

and SSP. We agree that this requires instructors to engage in a process of learning themselves that involves a back-and-forth process between the students' native culture and the instructor's own culture. Overall, the back-and-forth process serves two purposes, (a) to demonstrate the cultural learning process for the students, and (b) to better understand the students' classroom culture, expectations, and viewpoints.

THE BACK-AND-FORTH PROCESS OF CULTURAL LEARNING

Attempting to clearly understand student SM and SSP are important to being an effective EFL instructor. According to Moran (2001) teachers can foster cultural learning as a process involving a "constant back-and-forth between the learner's culture and the culture they are learning" (p. 125). A teacher's investment in learning student culture (SM, SSP, classroom culture) while teaching language speaks to the connected nature of language and culture: It is difficult to teach one without the other. In support of this, Moran (2001) specifically identifies that "language and culture are clearly fused; one reflects the other" (p. 35). Unfortunately, language and culture are often taught separately, or are considered to be independent of one another. Along this vein, Brody (2003) laments that in terms of cultural differences and cultural relativity, "language teachers are not prepared to deal with them in any but the most superficial fashion" (p. 47).

In support of this issue, Roberts et al. (2001) believe that "language specialists, with some additional training, are best placed to develop the language learner as ethnographer" (p. 35). Correspondingly, Watson and Agawa (2012) believe that "teachers are in the best position to have an impact on the students as guides helping them view cultural learning opportunites" (p. 113) in new ways but this assistance does not come without mutual understanding of cultural capital, SM and classroom culture. Specifically to this point, Kramsch (1993) states, "the link between linguistic forms and social structure is not given, it has to be established" (p. 205), and this is the major impetus for instructors to be actively part of establishing this link. Instructors need to factor in student awareness and readiness to accept cultural learning opportunities
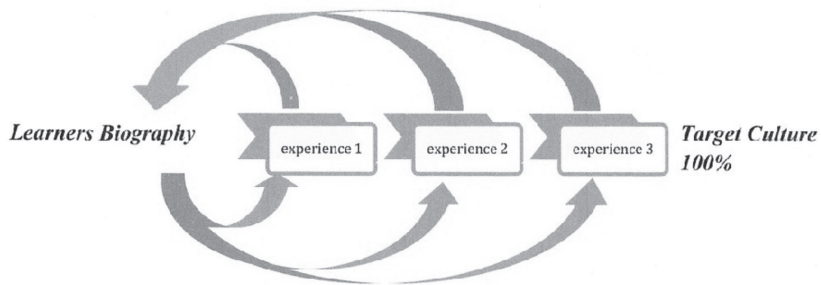

Figure 1. Episode, reflection and synthesis cycle

(back-and-forth).

As seen in figure 1, individual learners engage in back-and-forth experiences in varying degrees. Specifically, learners immerse him/herself in an experience and then return back to his/her own collection of learning experiences (biography). This process, termed by Kramsch (1993) as entering a "sphere of interculturality" (p. 205), creates a foundation for engaging in subsequent cultural experiences. Once initiated for students, the process of cultural episode, reflection and synthesis should enable learners to take greater agency within this process. Unfortunately, prior to university in the compulsory education classroom, many Japanese learners have rarely had conditions conducive to creating a "sphere of interculturality"

through this back-and-forth process.

Taken in the aggregate, Moran (2001) identifies that learners need (a) self-awareness (agency), (b) recognition of the cultural learning process, and (c) the need to purposefully take action. While these are not staples of the Japanese taught language-learning classroom culture, it is possible to work in conjunction with Japanese students by offering appropriately tiered levels of cultural experience in moderation (i.e., group work roles, guided discussions, intervals for cognitive processing variation, reflective tasks). However, despite the diversity of individual Japanese learners, SM (i.e., responsibility, humility) and the SSP that dominate Japanese classroom culture tend to promote a specific set of language and action expectations that run contrary to TESOL group work teaching practices (i.e., quietness, apathy, lack of agency). This may surprise foreign teachers who have never taught homogeneous classes of Japanese learners and who are used to using group dynamics as a staple within their classrooms. Therefore, foreign instructors need to be aware of the need to support each type of learner through diverse experiences in the classroom. By considering Japanese classroom culture and scaffolding manageable chunks of the target culture and language, instructors can successfully model this process and ultimately guide students through the back-and-forth process of cultural learning.

THE ROLE OF THE INSTRUCTOR

The role of the instructor is extremely important when teaching language, and is deeply rooted in a complicated and delicate synergy with the role of the learner. These roles depend prominently upon the dynamics of the classroom (termed classroom culture above). These dynamics are formed, as illustrated above, by the cultural capital, SM, SSP, and expectations of both the instructor and the students. Understanding the role of the instructor, not only as a one-way disseminator of stable knowledge, but also as a mentor/facilitator helps to co-create shared viewpoints and expectations in the classrooms. This intimates that the instructor's role goes beyond the general development of curricular materials and classroom management. For example, it is essential for the language instructor to view him/herself as a model learner (i.e., enhancing their culture awareness and practical culture learning skills) for the students to use as a guide. This can be more challenging than it appears, especially for the foreign language instructor for two main reasons: (a) an attitude of English linguistic imperialism (Pennycook, 1994), and (b) teaching homogeneous groups with strong SM.

In order to manage and negotiate both issues, Swain, Kinnear and Steinman (2011) contend that to make better choices, instructors need to better understand his/her students. They believe that these better choices will shift instructors away from direct one-way instruction towards interactive instructor-led discussions and learner-centered tasks. This corresponds to Holliday's (2003) contention that being learner-centered is impossible without understanding the context of the learners. Along this vein, in response to expectations and outcomes that instructors require their students to consider, it is often overlooked that the language instructor must also adjust him/herself in order to mentor effective cultural learning strategies that work within his/her context and to consider SM that are commonplace within that culture. We characterize this as negotiating the roles of the classrooms and negotiating the learning environment through shared development of expectations and overall co-building learning relationships.

In response to this, the instructor must consider his/her role: (a) As a reflective practitioner in contrast to simply a classroom manager, (b) a mentor learning culture as a process of experiences, and (c) as willing and able to accept reciprocal feedback (i.e., feedback loop). In support of this contention, Moran (2001), states that it is central to the role of the instructor "to be versatile… learners of culture… to be able to enter the learners' worlds by empathizing and sharing their own experiences as culture learners, so as to help learners step out of their worlds into another language, another culture" (p. 138). Overall, he believes

that instructors "need to go through the cultural experience that they propose for learners in their language classes. Such experiences will help the instructor learn the culture of the learners" (p. 138). Since it is impossible for foreign instructors in Japan to experience the Japanese educational socialization process, they must actively engage in exactly the type of experiences that they want to encourage in their students.

To this point, Moran (2001) identifies the foreign language context as having a strong effect on language learning and the corresponding learning of culture. He states, "in a second language context, learning a culture in the culture, is significantly different from a foreign language context" (p. 127). Toth (2011) supports this contention and adds, "in instructed contexts for which the second language is not widely used outside the classroom instructors and peers serve as a primary resource for this process," (p. 1) and he further argues that peer and teacher interaction quality will determine the effectiveness of language classes. Therefore, students who have the target language outside will develop a different perspective with that culture than a student who has limited contact with the target language outside of the classroom.

Contexts, such as this (i.e., Japan), point to the importance of instructors and students understanding one another's motives, roles and expectations in the classroom and within the learning process. From the researchers' perspective, this stresses a relationship between the learners' culture and the target culture, and how they interact together. As such, each sociological context creates its own frame of reference. Overall, the Japanese context is no more or less unique than another context but has SM that manifest into a strong classroom culture. In particular, as with any homogenous group of learners, in Japan students have a unique set of instructor and student role expectations and thus, have particular classroom affect needs.

On the whole, the role of the instructor is far more complex than is often perceived and requires a constant give-and-take the part of the instructor and the student. This often includes endeavoring to understand each other's classroom culture, SM and SSP, and in many cases adopting the learner's perspective for a period of time. This is particularly true when teaching language in a foreign context and dealing with different cultures. The learning context and the relationship between the learner's culture and the target culture have a dramatic impact on the relationship development between instructors and learners. For example from a homogeneous perspective, students in a Middle Eastern context have distinctly different needs than students in a Japanese context. This is especially relevant with respect to perceptions of English language and culture and the practicality of English usage in society. These needs influence classroom culture and strongly affect the instructor-student relationship. In contrast, students studying in heterogeneous multi-cultural societies such as in Australia, Canada or the USA have different needs and goal orientations that will ultimately impact classroom culture and instructor-student relationships. Overall each cultural context distinctly impacts the relationship between the students and the language of study.

THE INSTRUCTOR-STUDENT RELATIONSHIP IN JAPAN AND SM

Heine (2012) identifies that cultural socialization is inculcated through cultural practices and institutions. As discussed in the previous section, in educational settings SM produce observable SSP (i.e., group dynamics, silence during lectures). Together they contribute to a classroom culture and cultural capital that is strongly influenced by a group's attachment to his/her larger cultural identity. In the case of Japanese students functioning in a school-centered egalitarian society, this larger cultural identity is dominant. According to Watson (2007), Japanese SM producing observable SSP are "all dependant on the universal moral value of 'caring for others' as a fundamental consideration," (p. 1). This applies to all educational contexts in Japan (i.e., elementary schools, universities).

We contend that in Japan, the accepted relationship between Japanese instructors and Japanese students is to function within a complicated framework of SM that impact how students view (a) the classroom, (b) foreign instructors, and (c) their role in learning. We further contend that these complex SM produce

shared values and relationships that create nurturing bonds between Japanese learners, representing social expectations (i.e., humility, respect, low-tension-environment). Specific to the case studies below, these SM impact how students respond to foreign instructor expectations, and also impact how instructors respond to Japanese student classroom behaviors. While there are several SM that co-function in Japan, we consider them all to be guided in all contexts by the concept of responsibility.

JAPANESE SOCIAL MECHANISM OF *GIRI* (RESPONSIBILITY, DUTY, OBLIGATION)

Barkley et al. (2004) state, "the instructor and the students are mutually responsible for the learning that occurs in the classroom" (p. 71). Responsibility (duty, obligation), termed *giri* in Japanese, is more than just a casual term. It is codified into the language as part of a greater framework of Japanese SM related to duty and conformity. *Giri* carries with it a specific set of language and action discourse, and it is extremely evident in the classroom (i.e., students rarely questioning the instructor, Japanese instructors rarely placing students in awkward social positions). As with many individual SM, (Gross, 2009) these concepts can be invisible to the untrained eye, and this is specifically why, in Japan, building a foreign instructor-student relationship with SM, and specifically *giri* in mind is critical to the functioning of the classroom culture itself. For example, foreign teachers who teach freshman university students will encounter students whose secondary socialization has included teachers who mentor and care for the social, emotional and physical well being of students and also the collective classroom culture. This is part of the Japanese collective system that includes responsibility. While the concept of responsibility is not limited to Japanese society, compared with Western notions of responsibility that are often self-driven, Japanese *giri* is obligation-based with minimal perceived variability within social situations (Ogasawara, 1998, Horio, 1988, Davies and Ikeno, 2002).

In addition, there are also social expectations that permeate society with respect to *giri*. To this point, *giri* includes (a) moral principles or duties, (b) rules in social relationships, and (c) behaviour that is obliged to be followed. For example in the classroom, students are expected to behave according to Japanese instructor expectations and show *giri* by following SM through SSP. Hayagoshi's (1996) study placed the responsibility on the instructor for student perceived "external walls" caused by several Japanese SM, including *giri*. While we agree that the instructor must accept a portion of responsibility for the student affect that is created, we contend that both the instructor and the student, in varying and ever-changing degrees, must accept responsibility. However, with Japanese students, we agree that the foreign instructor must take the initiative to understand the context (i.e., student expectations and behaviours) as they are outsiders to the culture. Specifically, comprehending *giri* is one of the strongest methods for foreign instructors to recognize students' expectations and also to understand how they will respond to foreign teacher expectations.

Similarly, but one step further, in Japan the concept of *giri* carries a sense of liability or obstacles that result from not completing what is expected of you within a social role. In schools, it is critical to the classroom culture for students and instructors to understand each other's role responsibilities. This can often become blurred when dealing with language and culture. Stated simply, in Japan following the rules and meeting the expectation of one's moral and social responsibilities (*giri*) creates smooth and stable relationships. This is a staple concept of the Japanese SM framework that is strongly routed in a blend of Confucian values, intertwined with Japanese Bushido values. These values center on humility, acceptance, and role understanding/clarity (Davies and Ikeno, 2002). In Japan, it is tantamount to meet expectations while avoiding liability that are outside of a person's specific role. Therefore, when a foreign instructor wishes to deviate from strong Japanese SM, there is a process of acclimatization that requires adjustment by instructor and student. This adjustment consists of three interlinked processes that begin with the instructors (see figure 2 and 3).

THE FRAMEWORK FOR INITIATING STUDENT-INSTRUCTOR FEEDBACK LOOP

As displayed in figure 2, this adjustment must begin with a teacher-initiated process, which is based on Moran's (2001) cultural knowings framework. First, the instructor should make an attempt to (a) understand the native culture and language as it relates to classroom culture and learner profile. In fact, we argue that the instructor must learn to understand how students view *giri* (i.e., responsibility, duty, obligation) with respect to expectations in the classroom. This understanding will help foreign instructors realize how much of what Japanese students do is an automated response to the instructor. Instructors who do not ever attempt to understand a homogeneous classroom culture may miss valuable context identifiers that will help make decisions most relevant to the students. Second, instructors can then attempt to (b) mentor the students to be proficient learners of culture. Purposefully, the instructor can teach students how to recognize, approach, and initiate the back-and-forth process of experiences (see figure 1) that will help to create a sphere of interculturality (Kramsch, 2003) for the students. This is done only through instructors showing students how to respond and adapt to difference and change (i.e., exposing them to new experiences).

Cautiously, the instructor must scaffold modeling opportunties to account for the Japanese students' minimal exposure to difference in a classroom setting. Instructors can accomplish this by expressing sensitivity to the classroom culture (i.e., allowing students to synthesize in their native language and exhibiting knowledge of the students' culture). Finally, the teacher can then (c) provide language and culture applications within the classroom through tiered and differentiated tasks that create relevant and practical output opportunities for students to apply what the instructor has shown. Overall, figure 2 (below) illustrates the process instructors can undertake to facilitate an understanding of student classroom culture and expectations.
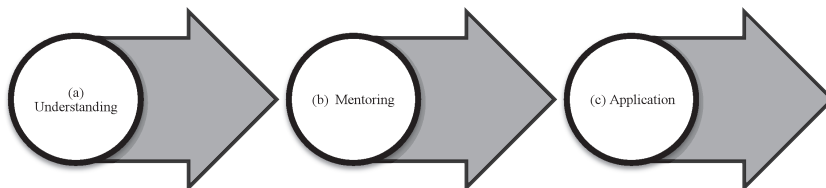

Figure 2. Instructor initiated classroom acclimatization process

Referring back to figure 2, during the application stage of the instructor initiated process, the instructor must structure practical experiences for students (refer back to figure 1). This can subsequently foster students identifying, approaching, and interacting with a target culture and language. This can thereby create opportunities for a sphere of interculturality (Kramsch, 2003) between the student's native language and culture and the target language and culture. However, this is not the end of the process. It is essential to create a feedback loop. This is shown in figure 3. Concomitantly, as students are having experience(s) within the classroom, the instructor needs to continually reflect and hypothesis test on classroom observations (see figure 3).

Figure 3 highlights the important process of observation within the classroom, and shows the link between teacher's observing their students and critical analysis of those observations. In other words, it is important to reflect on and hypothesis test new classroom methods in order to have a significant impact on students. In support of this, Barkley et al. (2004) identify that observation "provides information when things are going well" and "creates opportunities to redirect students" (p. 70), promoting deeper learning.

This is specifically pertinent to a review of group formation as Barkley et al. (2004) also advise that un-
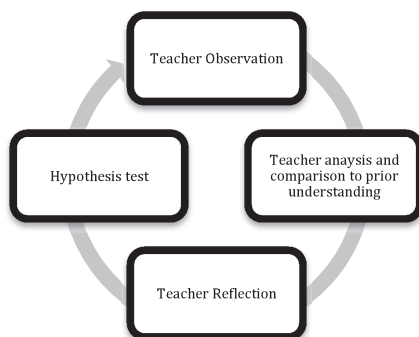
Figure 3. Reflective practitioner observation feedback loop

derstanding student information "can help teachers organize groups or modify tasks for future collaborative activities" (p. 71). Specifically, figure 3 shows stages that instructors can undertake that will create a feedback loop between instructors and students; thereby, providing opportunities to broaden his/her understanding of (see "understanding" in figure 2) the students classroom culture.

GROUP FORMATION AND JAPAN

In most societies, groups are basic social structures formed in many ways. Applied specifically to the classroom, group formation is one element that is often overlooked or taken for granted as a simple task for students. However, we contend that group formation is more than instructors simply asking students to "pair-up", or "find a partner"; rather it is a component of the classroom culture that involves the dynamics of the entire lesson. In fact, group formation needs to be a component of an instructor's entire planning process and ultimately needs to be a component of the structuring of classroom tasks or activities. Barkley (2010) considers "ensuring that group work is effective, requires careful planning by the teacher" and that "thoughtful decisions must be made regarding how to form groups" (p. 124). Barkley et al. (2004) further support this by stating, "how groups are constituted depends on the goals of the course and the learning tasks that are assigned" (p. 45).

While many techniques of group formation exist (i.e., numbering, rotations), it is common to allow students to choose their own groups. This is particularly the case in ESL/EFL classes where group work is promoted, and it is commonplace for students to be placed in pairs or groups. It is integral to think of group formation as an essential consideration for the teacher. Allowing students to choose their own groups is commonly mistaken for autonomy supporting behavior. However, it is important to consider that providing students with freedom during group formation does not always produce dynamics conducive to learning goals that the instructor has planned. To this end, Barkley et al. (2004) point out student choice "tends to create groups based on friendships" and leaves "some students feeling like outsiders" (p. 47). This technique, while popular, "tends to reinforce homogeneity and may fail to expose students to a rich diversity of ideas, values and perspectives" (p. 47). Further, the researchers highlight that unless there is a specific reason for allowing students to choose their own groups, it is probably better to assign students to groups. This points to the importance of structure within tasks and also to the significance of including the group formation process within instructors' conceptualization, implementation and evaluation of group-based tasks in the classroom.

Resistance to group formation and ineffective group formation can be caused by several reasons (i.e., gender, age, affiliation). However, this can be much more complicated when dealing with cultural groups

that have different expectations and roles within the classroom. Overall, group formation can be a source of tension and anxiety within specific culture groups (i.e., pairing men with women in Muslim cultures). In many cases, student chosen partners can run contrary to expectations of classroom roles. For example, Japanese SM create SSP implications for classroom tasks that involve group formation. The process of group formation is very complicated in Japan due to classroom expectations and classroom culture. Therefore, three main factors impact group formation in Japanese classes requiring group formation. These are (a) expectations of the classroom, (b) SM, and (c) role considerations.

METHODOLOGY

The major impetus for this paper was to investigate how awareness of student cultural capital, SM, and classroom culture affect teacher decision and student response with respect to group formation techniques in the Japanese EFL classroom. For this inquiry, behaviour identification focused on those related to group formation with Japanese students (i.e., wait time for group formation, student affect and SSP). Behaviour elicitation involved nonparticipant observation of three EFL instructors (American, Japanese, and Canadian) at a Japanese university. Specifically, for each group formation technique, the researchers recorded student wait time before all class members had found a group and commenced their language task. Note taking and observation records during observations were utilized for data collection of these behaviours. For greater understanding of student behaviour, once in groups, the researchers performed structured interviews with student group members to ascertain (a) why they chose that partner, (b) how they felt during the group formation process (affect), and (c) whether they preferred the onus of group formation to be on the teacher or students. Instructors were also asked the question "Why did you use this technique for group formation? Data was then analyzed through comparison with concepts relevant to student behaviours (i.e., SM and SSP).

CASE STUDIES

Table 1 displays data for three instructors and their five observed classes. Instructor A holds a MA in TESOL and has worked in university as well as general ESL/EFL programs in America and Japan for twelve years. Instructor B is Japanese and holds a PhD in applied linguistics from a state university in the U.S. Instructor C has a MSc. in lifelong learning and has been teaching for seventeen years. He has had experience as a high school instructor in Canada, and has worked in numerous EFL university settings in Dubai and Japan.

Case Study 1
The observed lesson for Instructor A was an English grammar and writing course for second-year students. Instructor A utilized a numbering system when forming dyads. In the class of twelve, the instructor randomly assigned students numbers from one through six, creating a first group (group one). He subsequently instructed group one to stand and move into a line at the front of the class. Wait time (see table 1) was 18 seconds for group one to gather the required materials and walk to their assigned location. Once these first six students were standing in position, the instructor numbered off the remaining students from one to six (group two). Group two gathered materials, stood, and walked towards their corresponding partner from group one. Wait time for group two was 19 seconds. Upon completion of a pair-work-language task, student six (in group two) rotated to student one's location (in group two) while the other students from group two shifted one place to the right (see figure 4), resulting in new dyads. This technique is based on the Pollard and Hess (1997) suggestion of interaction lines or Richards, Hull, and Proctor (2005)

Table 1. Formation techniques and student wait time

| Instructor	Course	N	Year	Formation Technique	Wait time
A (American)	Grammar and Writing	12	2	Instructor A makes two groups Instructor A numbers each student	Group 1 18 sec Group 2 19 sec
B (Japanese)	Teaching EFL	10	Mixed 3, 4	Instructor B allows students to choose own partners	3 min 2 sec
C (Canadian)	Presentation Skills	16	1	Instructor C allows students to choose own partners	58 sec
	Listening	23	2	Instructor C chooses partners in a CALL environment	30 sec (Student partner allocation) 10 sec Partner awareness/task commencement
	Communication	14	1	Instructor C allows students to choose own partners	2 min 27 sec
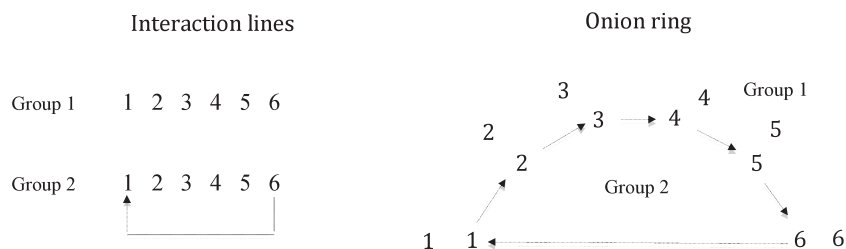
Figure 4: Interaction lines (Pollard & Hess, 1997) and Onion Ring (Richards, Hull, & Proctor, 2005).

onion ring.

Three benefits of these group formations and other akin to them are discussed below. During the observed group formation process, students were told precisely where to stand and responsibility for group formation was placed fully on the instructor. Thus, the first positive outcome was lower levels of student affect during task performance. For instance, when asked about how they felt when the teacher initiated the group formation process, all twelve students responded that they were comfortable. The students did not need to worry about what others would think about them working with a particular person in the class. This type of task corresponds with traditional Japanese SM and the corresponding SSP. For instance, they were completing a student role and expectation of following the teacher's command of going to a particular location. Subsequently, they were working with a specific person under specific and predictable parameters. This technique allows students to use their current level of social capital as it reinforces instructor-student roles that they are familiar with from junior and senior high school.

A second benefit is the variation of partners for task completion. With respect to the onus of responsibility during group formation, all six groups (12 students) responded that they preferred the teacher to choose. One student explained, "If I choose, I work with same partner (each time)." By this, the student meant that his friend, or the person who regularly sits near him, would consistently be his partner unless the teacher assigns him a different partner. Having the same partner restricts the level of interaction be-

tween students within the class, sharing of knowledge, and mixing of student experiences with differentiated levels of student ability. Once again common Japanese SM correspond to predictability and caring for classroom perception and culture.

A third benefit was brought to light during the interview with Instructor A with respect to responsibility (*giri*) within the classroom culture. In Instructor A's experience of working with Japanese students, he stated that partner choices made randomly give the impression of fairness to the students. Fairness is a strong Japanese student expectation reflects SM and SSP in the classroom. Instructor A described:

> In one of my classes, there is a student (student one) who other class members don't feel comfortable working with. If I assign another student to work with him (student one) in groups, I often feel some resentment towards me (the instructor). Sometimes I also notice hurt feelings between students. I see this through body language and expressions. But when I assign groups randomly, it seems fair to the students that I've worked with.

With such group formation techniques, students do not need to worry about being held socially responsible for the choice of the partner they will be working with. For this reason, the thought of, "the instructor told me to work with you, so I am working with you," acts as a safety net for sensitive students who are fulfilling what they believe to be the expectations of the instructor. This is an example of the teacher understanding student social capital. Instructor A's choice of technique and reasoning evince that he was aware of students' expectations of his role as a teacher, resulting in effective group formation measured by both class time, student anxiety levels, and variation of partners during the observed task.

Case study 2

The observed lesson for Instructor B was a TESOL training course for EFL students. This introductory course consisted of third and fourth year students (n = 10). The instructor used a simple autonomous style of group formation in the creation of dyads for her class project. Instructor B instructed students to, "please get a partner" as is common in many ESL/EFL contexts. The students exhibited apathy and a lack of motivation to stand up and create groups. For example, this was obvious through the long wait time for the instructor of three minutes and two seconds (shown in Table 1). This was also accompanied by the instructor stating "get a partner" a total of three times in English and one time in Japanese for the students. Of the five dyads that were created, only student four stood up and crossed the room in an attempt to work with student ten. On point, student four was rejected by student ten, creating increased tension during the group formation process. Student four ended up working with student three, who was seated in the adjacent seat. It is important to state that prior to her instructions, the instructor used Powerpoint to explain the rationale for group work.

Upon further analysis, through interviews, the students identified that they preferred the instructor choose partners for them. This was a consistent result with every interviewed student. Further, in nine out of ten cases, students one through ten chose their partner based simply through automated response. Eight out of ten students specifically stated, "I chose the person because they were next to me". Three students proceeded to state that they did not feel as though getting into groups was their responsibility as students and opted to avoid seeming outwardly selfish. This student response demonstrates two important issues. First, on the positive side choosing the partner directly beside oneself, Japanese learners limit individual responsibility within the process of group formation. However, from a critical perspective this also eliminates students choosing partners based upon ability or suitability for the task and its outcome. Interestingly, 4 out of 5 dyads were gender-normed. Student four, who was rejected by student ten, had to work with a female student. All interviewed students from one to ten indicated that they felt a level of insecurity

in choosing their own groups, as this may lead to an uncomfortable classroom culture.

With respect to the teacher role within group formation, Instructor B stated that she wanted to steer clear of a negative Japanese SM; specifically, responsibility. *Giri* and its related Japanese cultural outcome impact forming groups. Instructor B explicated that she did not want to take responsibility for Japanese student sensitivities within their SM. She stated, "I did it on purpose, because I didn't want to be responsible." Ergo, she indicated that if students were unhappy with working with a particular group member, the student would blame the instructor. For this reason, she instructed the students to choose a partner by him/herself. To the researchers, Instructor B's use of autonomous group formation techniques, that a foreign teacher would use, was somewhat puzzling because, being Japanese herself, she had full awareness of the Japanese SM and SSP that would result.

Overall, blame is one of many Japanese social outcomes that this teacher avoided. Instructor B surmised that the blame would ultimately cause higher levels of tension in the class. Further she believed it would impact the intended teacher aim and student outcome of the class. Instructor B foresaw that students would have a difficult time choosing a partner. However, she did not want to be blamed by students if there was an uncomfortable matching of students in the group project. This eschewing was accomplished by frequently taking actions that a Western EFL instructor would take during not only group formation, but also in other aspects of the course (i.e., instructional approaches and classroom management). In other words, this teacher adopted a Western persona in the EFL classroom and thereby used Western expectations to avoid a negative student response to group formation. The instructor displayed a similar process to the framework presented in Figure 1, 2 and 3. Despite her motives being slightly different, it is clear that Instructor B's understanding of student expectation led her to mentor the students on formation of groups. This mentoring took the form of a simple Powerpoint graphic of students in groups combined with the purpose of why they were getting into groups. However, she then proceeded to use a Western application method to avoid her own implication in the Japanese classroom culture that revolves around responsibility. She planned and implemented her entire lesson by understanding Japanese SM and considering them when making decisions. In sum, her rationale to mentor a face-to-face group oriented language task by using Powerpoint rendered the group formation process relatively unproductive. The long wait time and also one student being rejected during the process provide evidence that this technique was ineffective. We also consider it essential to reemphasize that the instructor had to repeat herself three times. This is not successful mentoring.

Case study 3

Observation 1

Three of Instructor C's courses were observed (see table 1), of which we illustrate two. In Instructor C's Presentation Skills course for first-year students (n = 16), he allowed students to choose a partner, mentoring a Western approach to group formation. He deliberately stated his motives for doing this during subsequent interviews. Instructor C gave the following instructions to students: "You have ten minutes to practice before your presentations. Please do not waste time. Everyone please stand up. Please get a partner." During the group formation process student wait time resulted in 58 seconds. This is a significantly lower when compared with Instructor B's wait time of 3 minutes and 2 seconds. As this was a course of only first-year students (unlike Instructor B's mixed-year course) this could point to reasons for the decrease of group formation time. However, in contrast to instructor B's simple instructions with minimal parameters, Instructor C provided more structured scaffolding to the instructions. To this point, Instructor C gave specific instructions, formation task goals (language goals of why group-formation is necessary), and specific deadlines for the task. Instructor C also stated that he had in previous weeks considered classroom culture by providing scaffolded group formation techniques in several ways. This was also lesson number 10 of 14

and it was clear that the instructor had an understanding of the classroom culture.

Further analysis from interviews of the reasons given by students for their partner choice shows, three groups were chosen based upon friendship, and four groups were chosen based upon proximity. It is key to note, the three groups who choose their partner based upon friendship, were also sitting within close proximity of one another. These three groups, combined with the previously aforementioned groups, resulting in seven groups out of eight choosing someone near to them. All but one student stated, "We want the teacher to choose." Researcher then asked students how they felt about the process of getting a partner. Corresponding to the actual group dynamics that the students chose based on proximity and affinity, five out of eight groups stated that they felt nervous (three groups were comfortable). Similar to Instructor B (case study 2), this shows how not applying knowledge of Japanese students' culture can cause potential issues (i.e., non variation in group members and higher affect). However, this is unlike instructor B who chose to avoid responsibility through Western style group formation techniques. Essentially, the instructor stated, "Through tired experiences, I am guiding students from dependency to autonomy as language learners." Below we offer one example of group formation experiences explained by Instructor C. These experiences are listed below:

Step one. Instructor allocates students into dyads (based on gender, social dynamics, level etc.)
Step two. Instructor asks students to then independently choose a group of four
Step three. Instructor gives a number from one to four to each student within his/her group
Step four. Students complete the assigned language-learning task
Step five. After the task is completed, students then are asked to create groups based upon their common number (i.e., 1s with 1s, 2s with 2s)

These steps illustrate how Instructor C scaffolded group formation and clearly avoided the extended wait time encountered by Instructor B. It is clear from this simple list of steps that the students are exposed to several forms of group formation. These steps connected directly to the language learning goals, and are made explicit to the students.

Observation 2

In contrast to observation 1, we also explain Instructor C's group formation in a Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) listening course (n = 23). This course was a second-year listening course for English majors. During the observation, the instructor explicitly chose group members using the CALL software, and students communicated with each other through the CALL system. Further, students used headphones with microphones and instructor control over the grouping of dyads. Based upon the fact that the students were using a CALL system, we measured the time from when the Instructor stated, "put your headphones on and communicate with a partner" until the students began the task. The wait time for all students to begin the task was 10 seconds after the instruction for the class to begin the task. When interviewed, 18 of 23 students responded that they were comfortable because they didn't have to move. Students also indicated that they preferred that the instructor chose the groups. While the formation of groups did not include physical moving due to the use the CALL system, considering the students' comfort and relationships appeared to be key considerations to Instructor C. Specifically, when interviewed about grouping students in the way he did, the instructor explained:

I make a strong effort to use flexible grouping strategies (grouping based differentiation individual needs) every week. A benefit is that shy students can work with more outgoing students, or students of differing levels may have potential to work with each other. This may not happen with classes that

do not consider the students and their cultural values. Another thing to think about is that the students are sharing information with each other in pairs or groups. Following student group work we share even greater information as a large class group. We are building a community of practice by validating each student's level and their contribution to unified classroom knowledge.

These statements clearly demonstrate the subtle intricacies of dealing with Japanese students' emotions, needs and expectations of both themselves and the instructor toward the effective functioning of classroom dynamics, including group formation. Another reason for the quick task commencement time could be that students did not know who other students were paired with. Due to the headphones and microphones, students were only aware of who their own partner was. Male students could speak to female students without concern of what other members would think about their actions.

Overall, Instructor C concluded that in order to maintain a positive classroom culture Japanese students rely on the instructor to make adjustments. Related to this contention is McVeigh's (2002) explanation that students are not encouraged to be individuals in the Japanese primary and secondary system (p. 9). Instructor C recounted a past experience, which demonstrates this also at the university level:

A student asked me 'Can I change seats,' even though there were multiple open seats. On another day, a different student did not want to initiate changing seats because it might upset the person sitting next to him. The two did not exactly get along very well. So, in private, the student asked me (the instructor) if I would move him. He didn't want to move by himself because he did not want his peers to perceive him as being selfish and willful.

So as not to cause undue student anxiety for other students, the instructor moved every student in the class and, in this way, the other students were not aware of the personal relationship problem between two individual students. In this case negative emotions within the class were prevented because the instructor showed sensitivity toward Japanese classroom expectations, classroom culture and also SSP.

DISCUSSIONS

Based on interviews with Instructors A, B, and C regarding group formation, Japanese university students are often concerned about the classroom culture as related to the common Japanese SM of *giri* (responsibility, duty and obligation). Group formation is simply one element of that classroom culture that many instructors tend to overlook. This is often a result of instructors being supremely focused on completing their lecture, task, and outcome material. It is clear from the three case study interviews and observations that Japanese students consider very greatly the role of responsibility (*giri*) during group formation both for students as a group and the instructor as the leader of the class. Thus, the formation of groups and other classroom culture dynamics should not be overlooked when analyzing student SSP. This once again harkens back to the importance of expectations of both the students and the instructor and their mutual understanding of one another.

Along this line of thinking, we consider the following as important for instructors. They need to understand and consider classroom culture and cultural capital issues that may arise from the simple statement "find a partner." Due to Japanese SM, below are examples of what Japanese students may be thinking during group formation. These questions come from the case study observations:

1. What if I ask someone, but they do not want to work with me? (see case study two)
2. What will my friends or other classmates think if I work with this person? (i.e., gender norming in

case study two)

3. In a mixed-year course: What will happen if a younger student's level of English is much higher than mine? (see case study two)

4. Am I considered willful (see case study two) if I express my intention to work with someone else?

5. If there are three friends, but they must make a dyad, what will happen to the third friend? (see case study three)

While these questions may arise in non-Japanese classes as well, the SM present in the structure of Japanese classroom culture makes these questions particularly pertinent to instructors in Japan. This is specifically because of Japanese student sensitivity to expectations and roles as they pertain to responsibility in the classroom.

IMPLICATIONS

It is important for foreign instructors to understand the subtle variances present within contexts different from their own. Specifically, they need to be sensitive to students' cultural capital, and SM that are components in their classroom. Further, instructors need to show hyper-vigilance and carefully observe student SSP, in order to gain feedback and information regarding the classroom culture and classroom expectations. Drawing back on Holliday's (2003) two contentions that (a) it is difficult to be learner-centered without understanding what the learners think, or expect, and (b) it is equally difficult to be learner-centered with minimal perceptions of the target language used by students outside of the classroom environment, instructors need to ascertain knowledge gaps not only in language (common) but also in culture (not as common). Correspondingly, Brown (1994) recognizes "the perceptions of similarity or difference that the learner has of the target culture-as an influential factor" (p. 127). Brown believes instructor-student gaps can be minimized with the development of the instructor-student relationship through mutual understanding of one another's culture. This mutual understanding (highlighted above in figure 2) assists instructors in determining how best to mentor and serve their students interests in the classroom by being able to predict their reactions and expectations.

Specifically as it relates to group formation, instructors mentoring students as to their expectations of group formation are particularly necessary, yet this mentoring must be mutually respectful to the student's native SM. Japanese students expect instructors to make decisions and to manage the students. However, foreign instructors also have role and classroom culture expectations, and these can sometimes run along contradictory veins. This requires sensitivity for both instructor and student. Particularly in Japan, the instructor will be counted on to initiate this process, as they are entering into a classroom culture that is not native to them and often times students are not aware of how and why they need to change. Unfortunately, intended teacher aims, which are often language based, can unintentionally run into barriers stemming from lack of student-instructor expectation/role understanding.

Japanese students come to the foreign classroom with cultural capital they have developed though interactions with Japanese instructors throughout their secondary education. Japanese students are often unaware that this social capital will not necessarily translate to the foreign instructor classroom. On the other hand, foreign teachers new to Japan often believe that learner-centered group and pair work, in addition to inquiry-based information sharing activities, will be well-received by Japanese homogeneous groups. This is where the incongruence becomes apparent, and where several misconceptions on both sides of the instructor-learner relationship take place. Due to the strength of Japanese student secondary socialization (resulting from strong SM), and minimal exposure to difference in the classroom, Japanese students strongly rely on their native cultural reference to guide them within the EFL classroom. As a result, the students

show some difficulty in a foreign language environment without significant instructor scaffolding of expectations and tasks. While the instructor may have carefully planned aims (language-based) and also have clear coordinated student-learning outcomes in the form of output tasks, the challenge of co-negotiating cultural capital, expectations, SM and classroom culture still exists.

For Japanese learners, approaching new cultural learning experiences as a process is difficult to conceptualize. This is due to Japanese learner socialization focused on conformity and to simply to follow instructions. As a result, instructor statements such as "get a partner" or "find a friend" while seemingly simple to foreign instructors can often be uncomfortable and unfamiliar to Japanese students. This is because with instructor explanations requiring autonomy and independent decision-making comes the responsibility and liability that accompany Japanese social interaction. The student will always rely on his/her own SM and cultural capital resulting in SSP that are unfamiliar to foreign teachers. This issue can be easily misunderstood and is commonly misinterpreted by Western language instructors, as hesitation, resistance, or an inability to understand. However, Japanese SSP responses to tasks requiring individual choice in a social setting conflicts with Japanese SM, cultural capital and classroom culture. This is why the process of (a) understanding, (b) mentoring, and (c) applying cultural sensitivities (see figure 2) that impact student affect is essential for learners to bridge differences in expectations. In order to do this effectively instructors are recommended to give students smaller chunks of structured scaffolded information and provide reasons why tasks are being done. In order to successfully be able to appropriately scaffold learning, the basic task of attempting to understand root causes of student behaviors is critical.

Within Japan where students have been socialized towards a dependence on the instructor and the textbook, it is clear that the manor, depth and quality of instructor and student interaction are of critical importance. Therefore, understanding the attitude and mindset of the Japanese student is a crucial consideration for instructors who come from other countries to live and teach in Japan, because it is a means to understanding student behavior both inside and outside the classroom. The processes in figures 1−3 highlight possible guidelines to success in several areas of instruction and classroom management in Japan; including, group formation. Thus, teaching and learning must be directed towards building co-negotiated cultural capital that considers dominant Japanese SM and the corresponding SSPs.

CONCLUSION

In this article, we used group formation case studies to show that working with any particular cultural group requires understanding of which instructional methods may be counterintuitive to student cultural capital, classroom culture and underlying SM. As it pertains specifically to group formation, the data shows that Japanese students prefer teachers to choose group members for them. It furthers shows that if a teacher does so, they will effectively form groups (shorter wait times when onus is on teacher). Further, it shows that Japanese students feel nervous or tension when the onus in on them (see case studies). Effective group formation with Japanese learners via understanding of their culture is just one example of the importance of instructor knowledge of learners' SM, SSP, and past educational experiences. Knowledge of cultural capital and educational expectations (i.e., background socialization and SM) can provide the foreign instructor with the ability to guide students toward greater autonomy in the classroom and to mediate unfamiliar learning scenarios (i.e., time on task in group work, student engagement during discussions, and homework completion). Specifically with Japanese students, instructors of all experience levels would benefit from investing time to understand Japanese student SM. Instructors who do not, may experience superficial relationships with students and could encounter less long-term learning success than an instructor who validates the students' cultural capital and fosters the back-and-forth process for culture and language learning. In the end, understanding teacher and student learning culture can only serve to strengthen

communication channels and improve classroom dynamics.

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