外国語の授業における文化教育

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Teaching Culture in the Foreign Language Classroom

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最近，日本の大学で外国語を教える外国人教師が増加し，大学が授業のシラバスに比較文化学習を取り入れ始めている。これには少なくとも三つの理由が考えられる。一つは，学生に学びつつある言語スキルを使うチャンスを与えること。二番目は，学生に外国の生活に対する興味を引き起こすこと。三番目は，学生の自文化と異文化への理解を増強することである。

外国語の授業で文化理解を取り上げることはそれなりに興味深いことであるが，ある落し穴もあることも忘れてはならない。我々，外国人教師のほとんどは，文化面での文化人類学について正式の訓練を受けていない。大部分の我々にとって，自文化や日本文化についての知識は，教壇から正式に講義するほど充分なものではない。では，我々はいかにして学生に比較文化を教えられるのであろうか。

一つの方法は，任務を再定義することである。教師は，自文化や日本文化についての自分の限られた知識をもとに講義するのではなく，学生たちを資料の源として使うことができよう。教師と学生が一緒に自分たちの経験を共有し，両方の文化の知識のプールを創り出すのである。このようにして，教師と学生はお互いに学び合うことができる。

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More and more Americans teaching English in Japanese colleges and universities are beginning to incorporate comparative culture into their classroom teaching,[1] There are at least three reasons why we are doing so.

First, we hope to take advantage of our students' curiousity about life in America. We believe that students tend to learn more when they are interested in a subject than they learn when they are not. Very few students are interested in grammar drills and rote memorization of vocabulary. But many students are interested in learning about life in America. We hope that in the process of teaching students something about American life, we can make it easier for the students to absorb and retain grammar and vocabulary.

Second (and this is, of course, related to the first item), we hope to give our students something to talk about. Learning a language can be usefully compared with learning how to play a sport. Learning the grammar and vocabulary of a language can be compared with learning the rules of basketball and learning how to shoot baskets. No matter how well a person learns the rules, and no matter how proficient that person is at shooting

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baskets, he or she will never become a good basketball player untill he or she goes out and actually plays the game. The same is true of learning a language. No matter how well we learn the grammar, and no matter how proficient we are at memorizing vocabulary, we will never become good speakers until we actually talk about something. Comparative culture can be that something to talk about.

Third, by incorporating comparative culture into our classroom teaching, we hope to enhance our students' understanding of how people live in countries other than Japan. We hope that if Japanese students graduate from college with an enhanced understanding of how people live in other countries, this will contribute in a small way to international harmony.

All of the above are probably good reasons for teaching comparative literature in the foreign language classroom. However, we must approach such teaching with a certain amount of caution. If we are not careful, we can do more harm than good. Before explaining how this can happen, I would like to explain what I mean by teaching comparative culture.

For the purposes of this paper, I will use "culture" to mean the set of arts, customs, beliefs, and habits that are shared by members of a given society. Kabuki and ikebana would be included in Japanese culture, of course. But Japanese culture would also include such everyday activities as bowing when introduced to someone and taking off one's shoes when entering a house. Similarly, American culture would include jazz and the works of novelists such as Hemingway and Faulkner. But it would also include such everyday activities as shaking hands when introduced to someone and leaving one's shoes on when entering a house.

For the purposes of this paper, teaching *comparative* culture will mean teaching students about the similarities and differences between the arts, customs, beliefs, and habits of Japanese people and the arts, customs, beliefs and habits of people in another society. As a practical matter, for most American teachers this would mean teaching students about similarities and differences between Japanese culture and American culture.

Given the definition of culture outlined above, we can see one problem teachers face when they try to teach comparative culture. Culture encompasses such a vast range of beliefs and activities that we can't possibly teach our students everything. How, then, can we decide what to teach our students?

One way of dealing with this problem is to ask the students. One justification for teaching comparative culture is to make our courses more interesting for our students. So it makes sense to find out what our students are interested in. In one of my classes, for example, students have expressed an interest in education in America, procedures for getting a driver's license in America, and gun control in America. So all three of these will be topics that we will discuss in class.

Having decided what we will teach, we next need to decide how to go about teaching it. The decision we make at this point can go a long way toward determining whether we enhance our students' understanding of other cultures or contribute to greater cultural

misunderstanding.

We will probably be tempted to use a lecture format : i. e., to stand up in front of the class and tell our students about similarities and differences between Japanese and American culture. There are at least three reasons why we should resist this temptation.

First, one of the justifications for teaching comparative culture is that it gives the studentss something to talk about. Hence, if we do all of the talking, we defeat our own purpose.

Second, when we stand up in front of a class and give lectures, we give our students the impression that we are experts on the topic on which we are giving the lecture. But most of us are not experts on American culture. Hence, when we lecture our students about American culture, we run the risk of misleading them concerning the extent of our expertise.

Third, we are definitely *not* experts on Japanese culture; that is a subject that our students understand much better than we do. If we use a lecture format, we don't give ourselves a chance to learn from our students.

When teaching comparative culture in my own classes, I try to use a discussion format as much as possible. I know more about American culture (except for current movies and pop music) than my students do, and my students know more about Japanese culture than I do. So I try to answer their questions about American culture, and they try to answer my questions about Japanese culture. If all goes well, my students and I learn from each other.

Even when we use a discussion format, there are certain traps that American teachers can fall into if we are not careful. Based on my own classroom experiences, conversations with other American teachers, and presentations I have attended at JALT (Japan Association of Language Teachers) conferences, it seems to me that the two traps described immediately below are probably the most important.

First, we sometimes confuse American ideals with American practice. For example, at one of the presentations I attended at the 1993 JALT conference in Omiya, the lecturer showed a video clip of an American television commercial. In the commercial, a young man rides his bicycle across America. On his trip he meets many different people—old people and young people, rich people and poor people, White people and Black people, handicapped people, and healthy people. The lecturer gave the impression that life in America was very much like life in the television commercial—that is, American people from different social strata and different races routinely interact freely with one another.

It seem to me that the lecturer was confusing American ideals with actual practice. Yes, most Americans want our country to be a place where rich and poor, Black and White intermingle freely with one another. But this is a goal that we have not fully achieved. At present, it is still true that most Whites have few, if any, Black friends, and most Blacks have few, if any, White friends. It is also true that American professional people—doctors, lawyers, teachers—tend to associate mostly with other professional people, while American manual laborers—factory workers and construction workers—tend to associate mostly with

other manual laborers. If we forget the distinction between ideals and practice—for example, if we show our students the commercial mentioned above and talk as if it portrays American reality—we give our students a misleading picture of what life is like in America.

Second, we sometimes jump to conclusions about Japanese cultural traits on the basis of insufficient evidence. For example, an American who was giving a presentation at a local JALT meeting asked one of the Japanese teachers whether he would talk things over with his wife before buying a car. The American was very surprised when the Japanese teacher said that it was his *wife* who decided whether it was time for the family to buy a car.

In the above example, the American teacher knew that almost all Japanese husbands work full-time, while many Japanese wives work part-time or stay home to take care of their families. So she jumped to the conclusion that because the husband *makes* most of the money, he decides how to spend it. In reality, of course, in many Japanese households the husband *makes* most of the money, but the *wife* decides how to spend it. The American teacher had made the mistake of jumping to conclusions on the basis of insufficient evidence.

Japanese students are probably just as quick to jump to conclusions as American teachers are. So if American teachers make very many mistakes like the one mentioned above, there's a good chance that their students will decide that American teachers don't know very much. And this will do more harm than good to the cause of promoting international understanding.

How can American teachers avoid making mistakes such as the ones I have discussed above? That is, how can we avoid confusing American ideals with actual practice? And how can we avoid jumping to conclusions about Japanese culture? Just knowing about these traps can help: if we know that it is easy for us to make these mistakes, we will try very hard to avoid them. But there are other things we can do as well.

When talking about American culture, we can avoid speaking in generalities, and we can try to be as specific as possible. For example, instead of saying, "In America, Christmas is a holiday for the whole family," we can say, "My brother and his wife and children go to my mother's house for Christmas dinner." If we only talk about things that we know from firsthand experience, we are unlikely to confuse ideals with actual practice.

When the topic is Japanese culture, we can avoid making general statements. Instead, we can ask our students specific questions about what they and their families do. For example, instead of saying things like "Japanese people eat a lot of fish," we can ask our students: "How often do you eat meat? How often do you eat fish?" When I asked my students these questions, I learned that most of my students eat *meat* more often than they eat *fish*.

Some American teachers might object that if we limit ourselves to talking about the things we know from firsthand experience, we can't tell our students very much about the important aspects of American culture—such as race relations and the women's movement. Those teachers would be right in saying that we would not be able to say very much about

those things. But it seems to me that we have neither the time nor the expertise to give those topics the treatment they deserve. And if we cannot give them the treatment they deserve, we are probably better off not discussing them.

It seems to me that discussion of the ordinary, everyday aspects of American and Japanese life can serve the purposes enumerated at the beginning of this paper just as well as discussion of major cultural issues can. Those purposes were to make our classes more interesting, to give our students something to talk about, and to enhance our students understanding of how people live in other countries. If everyday life is something that interests the students and something they can talk about, then such discussion serves the first two purposes mentioned above. And discussion of the ordinary, everyday aspects of American and Japanese life can certainly enhance our students' understanding of how people live in America.

Notes

[1] What I say here applies equally well to other foreigners, of course. But throughout this paper I am drawing on my own experiences and observations—which are the experiences and observations of an American. I am not prepared to judge the extent to which those experiences and observations would apply to individuals of other nationalities who are teaching English or other foreign languages at Japanese colleges and universities.