One Approach to the Teaching Culture in English Education

Masato IKEGAMI
Graduate School, Hiroshima City University

Abstract

Culture teaching is one of the main purposes of language teaching, and the textbook is the most important material in classrooms; therefore, many researchers analyzed textbooks from the perspective of culture and international understanding. Many of them are the analyses focusing on the contents and its frequency; however, considering about the purpose of culture teaching in English education, it is not enough only to focus on them. We should focus on how to describe cultural materials. The aim of this paper is to discuss the purpose of teaching culture in present English education, and based on the purpose, to analyze junior high school English textbooks. As the perspective for analyzing textbooks, three main categories are shown, contents of cultures, represented regions, and types of treatment.

1. Introduction

The notion that language and culture are inseparable is widely recognized, and "English as a global language (or an international language)" is a catch phrase now we can see and hear so often. However, there are some discrepancies between the two notions. What is the background culture of English as an international language? Does English represent these cultures in which people speak English as a second language or a foreign language? Should English be separated from cultures to establish a position as a culturally neutral medium?

The relationship between English and culture and how to teach culture in English education have been argued. The overall objective of foreign language education is to deepen students' understanding of language and cultures, and the importance of intercultural understanding is widely recognized, but for the treatment of cultures in English education there is no clear guideline yet.

The aim of this paper is to consider the above questions and to discuss how to teach culture in English education through the analysis of textbooks.

This paper is divided into two sections. In the first section, the purpose of teaching
culture in present English education is discussed. Based on the purpose, in the second section, junior high school English textbooks are analyzed from the perspective of the treatment of cultural materials.

2. The Purposes of teaching culture in English education

Chastain (1976:383) points out two reasons why culture is such crucial component in second-language teaching. The first reason is “the ability to interact with speakers of another language depends not only on language skills but also on comprehension of cultural habits and expectations,” and the second is for “intercultural understanding.” In addition to this, according to The Courses of Study (Monbusho, 1998), the main purpose of foreign language teaching is to cultivate students’ communicative competence and international understanding. Therefore, we should consider the treatment of culture in English education from these two points of view, communication and intercultural understanding.

(1) Communication

To communicate with foreign language speakers in their language, it has been thought that knowledge of the culture is essential. Hammerly (1991:145) remarks:

Language students cannot be considered fully trained unless they have been imparted cultural [...] competence. It is not enough for second language speakers to be able to communicate messages with linguistically accurate sentences; they must also be able to exhibit the knowledge and behavior that the second culture demands.

This indication assumes that the target language has its own background culture such as Japanese and Japanese culture, and its purpose is to make students native-like speakers. However, focusing on English, such a notion cannot be applied. It is clear that English predominates global communication in politics, economics, and cultural activities; therefore, the opportunities to communicate between non-native speakers have greatly increased, and now students who learn English interact with not only speakers whose background is English culture but also those who have various cultural backgrounds. That is, English is now no longer monolithic and the various uses of English have been emerging from different cultural identities that do not necessarily correspond to those in a native language context (Iwai and Rinnert, 2001:157). The notion of the relationship between language and culture has also changed. As explained by Horibe’s words:

many researchers insist that English can or should be separated from the culture of traditionally English speaking countries or their people and elaborate the rationale for using local or international cultural contexts for effective teaching, especially in EFL or
EIL (English as an International Language) circumstances” (Horibe, 2000:334).iii

Then, what should we teach about cultures in English education?
Hofstede (1991) introduces two methods for learning intercultural communication. One is the traditional method that focuses on specific knowledge of the target culture, such as its geography, history, customs, and hygiene. The other is the “intercultural communication course that focuses on awareness of and general knowledge about cultural differences. Awareness training focuses on one’s own mental software and where it may differ from others. It is not specific to any given country of expatriation; the knowledge and skills taught apply in any foreign cultural environment” (Hofstede, 1991: 232). Of these between two methods, the latter can be adopted in the present English education. The purposes of this method are, as Hofstede points out above, to realize “one’s own mental software” and “where it may differ from others.” In other word, the purposes are to know one’s own culture and to cultivate one’s cultural awareness of the differences between own culture and other cultures.

(2) Intercultural understanding

Although many studies have investigating intercultural understanding, there appears to be fairly general agreement regarding its purposes. Considering the rapid growth of internationalization, The Central Council for Education (1996) formulates some policies for the education of international understanding. The points are to cultivate broad perspective and diversity of value, and to fix one’s personality and responsibility as Japanese, respecting other cultures. It is also emphasized that the importance of world peace and fundamental human rights. To summarize these points mentioned above, the purposes of intercultural understanding are 1) to cultivate broad perspective and various senses of value, 2) to raise the consciousness of Japanese regarding other cultures, and 3) to teach the importance of world peace and fundamental human rights.

(3) The integration of two components

Comparing the purposes of culture teaching for communication and for intercultural understanding, we can notice that they are similar. To integrate these two purposes, it can be said that the purposes of English education about culture in English classes are 1) to know both the students’ own culture and other cultures, 2) to cultivate cultural awareness, and 3) to broaden their perspective regarding the diversity of cultural values. To relate these purposes to English textbooks, in the next section I will consider how cultural materials should be treated and analyze the textbooks from the perspective.

3. The Study

(1) Pilot Survey

For the past two decades, a number of studies have been made, focusing the contents and
regions of cultural materials. Ito (1995) compared textbooks published in 1981 with those in 1993, and reports that the materials about 'culture' and global issues increased whereas treatment of social phenomena such as history, geography, nature, and climate had decreased. Regarding the inclusion of different regions, Morizumi (1995) observed that the frequency of non-English sphere representation had increased according to the results of comparison of junior high English textbooks published in 1974 with those in 1993.

As Aoki et al. (2000) points out, most studies and analyses focus exclusively on the contents and the frequency, that is to say, they merely identify what cultural components are presented, and which culture they belong to. It is true that to involve various cultures in textbooks is one of the fundamental components necessary to cultivate a mind that acknowledges a variety of views and thinking and a broad perspective; however, it isn't enough. If one textbook has materials about Korean, Thai, and American 'cultures', it can be said that students can learn more various culture than they learn only one culture. However, if students learn these three cultures, can they communicate with Arabs well? For the case to communicate with Arabs, do textbooks have to include Arabic 'culture'? It is impossible to involve every culture and every cultural component. We should notice that the intention to increase the variety of cultures is not to teach each culture but to teach about the diversity of cultures. Thus the way of describing cultures relating to others cultures is crucial.

The purpose of this study is to make up for these limitations and to analyze textbooks from the perspective of contents of cultures, represented regions, and types of treatment.

(2) Method and Procedure

The objects of this study are twenty-one junior high school English textbooks published by seven publishers, and the analysis units are the sections of each chapter including to "Unit," "Lesson" and reading material such as "Let's Read" and "Reading Lesson."

First, each section is judged as to whether it is relevant unit or not. The criterion of the judgment is whether the section includes cultural information or not; however, sections which have only the name of a country or an area without any cultural information, are judged irrelevant.

Second, I categorized the relevant units from three perspectives, Content, Region, and Treatment, as I mentioned above. The 'Content' has three subcategories, 'Global Issues (GI),' 'Culture(LC),' and 'culture;' moreover, 'culture' is divided into two types, 'Personal Relations(PR)' and 'Others(O).' Focusing on English teaching, 'Personal Relations(PR)' including behaviors to others, manners, and body language are crucial because they are the ways of communication. 'culture' is defined as the way people live (Chastain, 1976: 388-389), and as he mentioned "the students anticipate that they will "learn a people" as well as a language"(ibid. 383), that is, 'culture' includes foods, cloths and the styles of living. However, as I mentioned before, now English is spoken by various people in various cultural
identities in their own ways, and the words “people who speak English” do not mean “English Native speakers” or “people who live in English speaking countries.” In this circumstances, it is not so important to know whole components of ‘culture’ for understanding interlocutors’ intention, and in English education, we should focus on not the ways of living but the ways of communication. Hence, I divided ‘culture’ into the way of communication, labeled ‘Personal Relations(PR)’ and ‘Others(O).’

The ‘Region’ encompasses ‘English Speaking Countries(ESC),’ ‘Japan(J),’ and ‘All Others(AO).’ ‘English speaking countries’ means the countries in which people speak English as their first language or mother tongue, not including such countries as India and Singapore where English has an official status and is mainly a second language for most speakers. To put it concretely, in this analysis U.S.A., U.K., Canada, New Zealand, and Australia are encompassed in ‘English Speaking countries’.

The way of describing culture, ‘Treatment’, can be divided three main components, Comparison, Meaning, and Viewpoint with six subcategories. Comparison is the traditional way to describe cultural differences and similarities, in anthology and sociology. However, it is not enough to include only the comparison of people’s lives and social phenomena (CPS). The comparison of perspectives (CP) is more important because the cause of communication gaps is the existence of two or more perspectives on one thing. For example, holding one’s rice bowl is polite in Japan, but impolite in Korea. The same behavior can be estimated quite differently. ‘Meaning(M)’ is Lado’s term (Lado, 1957:113). It is the meaning underlying the form, that is, the reason for behaviors. For example, Japanese have the custom to eat raw-fish because in ancient time they needed to gain protein, but had no custom to eat meat. The form is “Japanese eat raw-fish” and the meaning is that they get protein by eating fish. By analogy, the meaning for the form “Inuit eat raw-meat of seal” can be inferred. Not knowing meanings sometimes causes prejudice, and it is important not to over-estimate or over-generalize other cultural values by one’s own cultural value. Viewpoint can be divided into three: ‘the viewpoint from inside of culture(VI),’ ‘the viewpoint from outside of culture(VO)’ and ‘description (VD).’ For instance, ‘the viewpoint from inside of the culture’ is the case when Japanese look at Japanese culture, and ‘the one from outside of the culture’ is the case when Japanese look at American culture. ‘Description’ means that it cannot be decided whether the perspective is from inside or outside, and also includes the cultural units just described.

The sections that can be included more than one category are counted in each category.

The reason why the viewpoint is emphasized is because we have to know others’ perspectives to cultivate appreciation for the diversity of values and cultural awareness. Foreign language learners should not be expected to behave like native speakers in present circumstances of English. In this communication, it is significant not to speak and behave like native speakers but to convey one’s own intent and to recognize an interlocutor’s intent.
correctly. To achieve these goals, speakers need to have sensibility toward the following two matters, 1) what the interlocutor takes from the one’s utterances and behaviors, 2) what the intents of the interlocutor’s are. For these reasons, to include the viewpoints from both inside and outside of the culture into cultural materials is crucial. Of all others, it is the most important the outsiders’ and insiders’ viewpoints toward Japanese culture and the viewpoint toward foreign cultures from inside of these cultures. Learners should regard the cultural components from a different perspective from their own. Toward Japanese culture, the reason to emphasize the inside perspective is to show the learners how to explain their own culture. The ‘meaning’ of Japanese forms is also emphasized because of the same reason.

4. Results and Discussion

The results indicated that the total relevant units are 284(39.2%) and non-relevant units are 440(60.8%).

The results of the Content analysis are shown in Table 1. ‘Culture(C)’ is far more often than any other Contents and ‘Personal Relations(PR)’ are very few. ‘Global Issues(GI)’ increases according to the grade going up. The amount of ‘Others in “culture”(O)’ of each grade is almost equal. The result also shows that in 7th grade ‘Others in “culture” (O)’ is the most frequent, and in 8th and 9th grade ‘Culture(C)’ is the most frequent.

Table 1: Summary of Content

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>GI</th>
<th>LC</th>
<th>PR</th>
<th>O</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7th Grade</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8th Grade</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9th Grade</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N.B.: GI = Global Issues, LC = ‘Culture’, PR = Personal Relations in ‘culture’, O = Others in ‘culture’

Table 2 shows the number of Regions represented in each grade. We can see that ‘Japan(J)’ and ‘English Speaking Countries(ESC)’ are the two big components overall. The number of ‘Japan(J)’ in 9th grade larger than 7th and 8th grade, and also the number of ‘English Speaking Countries(ESC)’ in 8th grade larger than the other two grades. To focus on grades, the amount of

Table 2: Summary of Region

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>J</th>
<th>ESC</th>
<th>AO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7th Grade</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8th Grade</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9th Grade</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N.B.: J = Japan, ESC = English Speaking Countries, AO = All Others
emphasis on Japan increases along with an increase in grade.

On the whole, the materials which carry ‘Meaning(M)’ and ‘Comparisons(CP and CPS)’ are very few (Table 3). Considering the total number of relevant units (284), the units with ‘Meaning(M)’ are 12.7 % and Comparison of Perspective(CP) and phenomena(CPS) are 7.4 % and 9.2 %, respectively. On the one hand, looking at the three Viewpoints, ‘the viewpoint of description(VD)’ is more frequent than the other two but there are no big differences.

Table 3: Summary of Treatment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>VI</th>
<th>VO</th>
<th>VD</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>CP</th>
<th>CPS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7th Grade</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8th Grade</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9th Grade</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N.B.: VI, VO = Viewpoint from Inside or Outside of culture, VD = Description, M = Meaning, CP, CPS = Comparison of Perspectives or Phenomena

Figure 1 reveals the relationship between Content and Treatment, and describes the proportion as a percentage. The results indicate that most of ‘Global Issues(GI)’ are the materials from ‘the Viewpoint of description(VD),’ and ‘Personal Relations(PR)’ are described mainly from ‘the Perspective of Outsider(VO)’. What has to be noticed is the relatively high ratio of ‘Comparison of Perspective(CP)’ in ‘Personal Relations(PR).’ As mentioned before, the number of ‘Personal Relations(PR)’ is few (e.g. Table 1), and also the number of ‘Comparison of Perspective(CP)’ is few, however, in ‘Personal Relations(PR),’ ‘Comparison of Perspective(CP)’ is the second position next to ‘Viewpoint from outsider(VO)’. That is to say, ‘Personal Relations(PR)’ tend to be described with ‘Comparison of Perspective(CP)’. On the other hand, ‘Comparison of Phenomena(CPS)’ is used in the materials of ‘Culture(C)’ and ‘Others in “culture”(O)’ other than for ‘Personal Relations(PR).’
Figure 2 graphically represents the relationship between Region and Content. Compared with other Regions, the ratio of ‘Personal Relations(PR)’ and ‘Others in “culture”(O)’ are larger in ‘Japan(J),’ and many of the materials of ‘English Speaking Counties(ESC)’ invoke ‘Culture(C).’

As shown in figure 3, the materials about ‘All other countries(AO)’ that means ‘non-English speaking countries,’ have few cultural perspectives. In addition, the cultural materials of Japan are described more frequently from ‘the Viewpoint of Outsider(VO)’ and ‘English speaking countries(ESC)’ are described more often from that of insider(VI). It is an acceptable result because almost all students belong to Japanese culture and students can learn their culture from an outsider perspective, and also can learn the foreign culture from a perspective inside these cultures. It is crucial to learn various cultural values.

5. Conclusion

To cultivate diversity of values and broad a perspective is often mentioned as the purpose of intercultural understanding and communication. However, to relate culture to the purpose, many studies insist on teaching ‘culture,’ behavior culture and Global Issues. This study focused on the treatment of cultural components as well as its contents, and analyzed junior high English textbooks from this perspective. The result shows while cultural materials are various, the Comparison of Perspective and Phenomena and ‘Meaning’ are few. That is, the way of treatment of cultural materials needs to develop and revise. Although this study suggested one possibility how to teach culture in English education, there is room for further investigation into the method of teaching culture in English education effectively.
Furthermore, focusing on cultural components and ideal way of treatment culture in textbooks, the materials become difficult and complicated; therefore, it is required in future study to develop cultural materials according to the stages of each grade and the grammatical knowledge that is taught in each stage.

Notes

i He also points out a third reason, that students should become aware of cultures including the target culture and their own culture.

ii Although ‘international understanding’ and ‘intercultural understanding’ are not exactly same concept, their purposes are similar. Therefore, in this paper, ‘intercultural understanding’ is used as the main term.

iii He cited the following articles related to this observation, Alptekin & Alptekin, 1984; Holliday, 1994; Kirkpatrick, 1998; Prodomou, 1992.

iv ‘Culture’ is “the sum total of a people’s achievement and contributions to civilization,” and ‘culture’ is “the behavioral patterns or life styles of the people.”(Allen and Valette, 1972: 325)

v After pointing out this problem, Aoki et al.(2000) focuses on the structure of each unit in order to lead to deeper understanding of cultural information.

References


文部省（Monbusho: The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology）(1998)『学習指導要領（The Courses of Study）』大蔵省印刷局


**Analyzed Textbooks**

*Columbus English Course* 1, 2, 3. 光村図書 1998

*Everyday English* 1, 2, 3. 中教出版 1997

*New Crown English Series* 1, 2, 3. 三省堂 1997

*New Horizon* 1, 2, 3. 東京書籍 1998

*One World English Course* 1, 2, 3. 教育出版 1998

*Sunshine English Course* 1, 2, 3. 開隆堂 1997

*Total English* 1, 2, 3. 秀文出版 1997