

All the Native Speakers
A Culture Course Syllabus within the Context of the Directives of
Monbusho
(Part II)

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Overview

English language teacher training programs, as directed by the Japanese Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture (*Monbusho*), are to include a university-level course on the cultural background of English. In this way, a cultural context can be given the students studying to become English language teachers, and they may thus see how and why English is used by native speakers. It is assumed that when these students become teachers themselves, they can convey a cultural understanding to their own English classes. The reasons for such a course are certainly in the best interest of the student of English and there is an undeniable need for this cultural insight, but there remain few examples of such a syllabus actually in place.

With an eye toward providing some ideas to those who wish to develop their own culture course syllabus, this two-part article presents a course description, procedure, various teaching methods, student and course evaluation, and a class-by-class set of lesson topics and ideas, for a semester course that was developed as part of the language education program, in the Department of English, Faculty of Education at Iwate University. Part (I), which appeared in the previous issue of this *Bulletin*, focused on some lesson topics and ideas taught as part of the course syllabus. This part will deal with additional topics that are often included in the course syllabus.

Introduction

It is an all-too-common situation one finds, where a student of a spoken language has studied in a location far-removed from where the target language is actually used. Without spending a great deal of time “within” the target language’s domain—where it is used in a day-to-day context—this student can never really penetrate the language

beyond its rules of grammar and lists of lexical items. In the end, as the student can not acquire the full value of the language without contact with its speakers, the student remains an “outsider” by lacking any insight into the cultural basis for the language usage.

However, often there are strong reasons why the student cannot have this desirable face-to-face contact. Factors such as cost and distance, as well as time in the form of a student’s course load, can preclude the student from “living amongst the natives”. The responsibility then falls to the language teacher to provide the student with examples of “realistic” cultural settings where the language is being used. These materials should also present a variety of cultural contexts, so that the student can be exposed to a variety of speakers and their cultural settings.

There remains the question among many language teachers of what to teach. Several teachers and program administrators at other universities in Japan have expressed interest in what those teaching such a course might be including in their syllabuses. It is for this reason that we present the following syllabus topics, with the intention of offering some ideas in helping other teachers meet the goals of a background course on culture.

Course Overview

The course, *Understanding Different Cultures: A Comparative Cultural Background of English*, was developed here at Iwate University as part of the English Education program in the Faculty of Education. It seeks to fulfill the directives of *Monbusho* by providing the students with a chance to compare aspects of their own Japanese culture with those in which English is being used as a native language (in our case, various aspects of U.S. society are examined).

The course is comprised primarily of 2nd-year students, majoring either in English education, or in elementary education with a minor in English. The classes are conducted by an American native English speaker who, for the benefit of providing an English atmosphere to the students, uses only English (although some of the video programs are in Japanese). The 90-minute class meets once a week, for about 12 classes per semester.

Procedure

The course is conducted as a seminar, rather than as a “straight lecture.” Students are expected to take an active part in discussions, using English as their foundation language, contributing their own personal views and ideas. Students keep a weekly journal (in English) of events occurring in the U.S. and in other English-speaking countries. They focus on points that seem culturally important or odd when compared to their own culture. Topics might range from news items to movies or music, as well as their own observations. They might also choose to write about their own experiences abroad in an English-speaking country, or those of acquaintances. Many also write about their own impressions of a particular class. This is encouraged, as it provides the teacher with feedback as to the value the lesson might have had for the students. They spend the first part of each class in small groups discussing their journals (often using English. But as this is not a “conversation class”, they may use Japanese when their English-speaking skills fall short of their ability to express their thoughts. The teacher, on the other hand, uses only English).

Lesson Topics

Following is an outline of lesson ideas categorized by topic, which can be selected as required (desired) by the teacher during the course. Included here are materials and methods used in each lesson. The major themes include:

- American Education
- Cultural Isolation
- U.S. Government
- Cross-Cultural Lifestyles
- Cultural Heritage
- Cultural Identity
- The American Family

The thematic content often carries over to the next class, or it may be referenced in a class later on.

TOPICS: Academic Life in the U.S.; Immersion School Education

RATIONALES: 1) To acquaint the student with what life may be like for foreign students, especially Japanese, studying in the U.S.; 2) To introduce the trend in U.S. education toward the immersion school, in this case, a Japanese language school in the U.S.

MATERIALS: 1) video: *Student Life in America*; 2) print materials, a video, and a CD of songs from Yujin Gakuen, in Eugene, Oregon

DISCUSSION POINTS:

- What questions would you like to ask the Japanese students who studied in the U.S.?
- Compare their experiences with what a foreign student's life might be like here in Japan.
- What questions would you like to ask the students at Yujin Gakuen?
- What kind of people will Yujin Gakuen graduates become when they reach adulthood?
- If you were an American living in Eugene, Oregon, would you send your child there?
- Do you think there should be this type of school for English language education in Japan? Where in Japan would you locate the school?

TOPIC: Japanese People Living Overseas

RATIONALES: To explore aspects of those of one culture (in this case, the student's own Japanese culture) moving into another culture to live and work; to note how **cultural** as well as **personal** identities may be affected by such a change, to see what comparisons can be made between Japanese living abroad and people from other countries coming to Japan to live and work.

MATERIALS: Print materials; video: **Japanese People Living Overseas** (*Sekai-he-Tobu*). Program introduces lives of the following people and occupations:
 - Hideo Nomo (baseball player in the U.S.)

- “Cynthia” Oshima (actress in The Philippines)
- Mieko Nakabayashi (Senate Budget Assistant in the U.S.)
- Yutaka Yuzawa (barrister in England)
- Miyako Yoshida (ballerina in England)

DISCUSSION POINTS:

Put yourself in **their** shoes. Think about the following:

- What are their lives like?
- What problems do you think they might have?
- Do their lives seem happy?
- How would **you** feel in each of these circumstances?
- Whose job or lifestyle would you want to have?
- What questions would you like to ask these people?
- What if someone from another country came to Japan to do these jobs?
What might they experience in their daily lives?

TOPIC: U.S. Government

RATIONALES: 1) To describe the three branches of the U.S. federal government, the system of checks and balances, the U.S. electoral system (Electoral College), and to make comparisons with Japanese government; 2) to acquaint the student with the political parties in the U.S. and how political campaigning is done (e.g. political conventions, on-the-road campaigning, etc.)

MATERIALS: Print materials describing each of the three main branches of the U.S. government: Executive, Legislative, and Judicial, as well as the electoral system; videos of political campaigning in the U.S.

DISCUSSION POINTS:

- How does the U.S. government structure (the three branches of government) and the system of checks and balances compare to the Japanese government? Why aren't the U.S. president and his Cabinet members also members of Congress (the legislative branch), as the Prime Minister and his Cabinet members are also members of the Diet in Japan?
- Compare the Japanese and the U.S. electoral systems and the styles of

campaigning.

- What is the significance of the U.S. Electoral College? Why is this method, rather than a popular vote, used in U.S. elections, and how do these compare with the Japanese electoral system?

TOPIC: The U.S. Southern Region

RATIONALES: To provide a definition of regional identity, using as example the lives and variety of cultures of people in the southern region of the U.S.; to introduce the topic and significance of the U.S. Civil War; to make comparisons between Japanese and American regionalism and why it exists.

MATERIALS: video: *Michener's The New South*

DISCUSSION TOPICS:

- 17th- through 19th-century Southern farmers believed that slavery was needed to maintain the large plantations (and hence, the region's agricultural economy).
- Northern economy was largely based on industry.
- Northerners sought to abolish slavery.
- U.S. Civil War as a struggle between economic systems and conflicting ethical beliefs concerning slavery.
- 19th century agricultural economy of the South moved toward urbanization (characterized in *Gone With the Wind*)
- Cultural mix currently found in the U.S. South:
 - Native Americans
 - Japanese (mostly due to influx of Japanese industries)
 - French-Canadian (Cajun)
 - Spanish
 - Black African

TOPIC: U.S. TV Commercials

RATIONALES: To try to gain insight into U.S. culture by the way manufacturers and advertisers try to persuade TV viewers to buy products; to compare American and Japanese methods of persuasion through the TV ad. To gain an insight of a culture through its media imagery.

MATERIALS: American and Japanese TV commercials

DISCUSSION POINTS:

- What devices are used in TV commercials as persuasion?
- Are these devices used the same way in American and Japanese TV ads?
- What can you tell about each culture from the character of the ad?
- What would make an American ad successful in the U.S.? Do you find it successful as a Japanese?
- Might an American watching a Japanese TV ad for the same product be persuaded?

TOPIC: Students' Own Experiences Abroad

RATIONALES: To provide an opportunity for classmates to discuss their own experiences traveling, working, or studying abroad; to discuss how cultural identities may or may not have changed as a result; to enable the students to gain an insight into life or travel abroad from a very personal point of view from one's own peers.

MATERIALS: Students' own photos, realia, and videotapes.

TOPICS: Autumn Holidays in the U.S.—Halloween and Thanksgiving

RATIONALES: To learn about the origins of these American traditions; to see how they are practiced and what they mean to present-day Americans; to see an example of a Native American thanksgiving prayer.

MATERIALS: Written materials on Halloween and Thanksgiving; *Thanksgiving Address* (in Tuscarora and English) Text and Audio

ACTIVITIES / DISCUSSION POINTS:

- Discussion of the holidays; comparisons with any similar holidays or festivals in Japan.
- Listen to and discuss the Tuscarora Thanksgiving Address

The following text is from The Tuscarora School Internet site. Text and accompanying audio were prepared for Internet access by Mr. Logan Scott of the State University of New York at Buffalo (USA). The recording of the Thanksgiving Address, spoken by Betsy Bissell, Tuscarora Language Teacher, can be found on the Internet at: <http://www.tuscaroraschool.org/seethe.htm>

The Thanksgiving Address

The students and staff at *The Tuscarora School* begin and end each week with an all-school assembly. A very important part of that assembly is the Thanksgiving Address, or *Ganonyok*, recited together. Here is the Thanksgiving Address with the English translation.

Yekwarihuwatathe Ekwehewe.

We are thankful for the people.

Yekwarihuwatathe Ene Ufne.

We are thankful for Mother Earth.

Yekwarihuwatathe Wised disne Uherukwe.

We are thankful for the strawberries and grass.

Yekwarihuwatathe Awe.

We are thankful for the water.

Yekwarihuwatathe Ure'ehkehane.

We are thankful for the trees.

Yekwarihuwatathe Karhyukehane.

We are thankful for the animals.

Yekwarihuwatathe Jinekehane.

We are thankful for the birds.

Yekwarihuwatathe Kanehagehrad, Ujihre uthahe're, disne kajhe'wath.

We are thankful for the Three Sisters: corn, beans, and squash.

Yekwarihuwatathe Hedakdikarakye.

We are thankful for the four winds.

Yekwarihuwatathe Hinekehaka.

We are thankful for the Thunderers.

Yekwarihuwatathe Hi'de.

We are thankful for the sun.

Yekwarihuwatathe Gusud Athenyeha.

We are thankful for Grandmother Moon.

Yekwarihuwatathe Yuniserarawe.

We are thankful for the stars.

Yekwarihuwatathe Rawedyaned.

We are thankful for the Creator.

The following series of lessons concern the topic of The American Family:

TOPIC: Cultural Identity and Heritage (Japanese-Americans)

RATIONALES: To define the terms “cultural identity” and “cultural heritage” through learning about several generations of a Japanese-American family, to see how cultural heritage is realized by a transfer of cultural identity from one generation to the next; to see the lives of an American family whose ancestors emigrated from another country (Japan); to learn about how one family’s cultural identity changes from one generation to the next and the subsequent conflicts that often result between one’s “original culture” (Japan) and one’s acquired culture (the U.S.); to learn about the internment of Japanese-Americans during W.W.II.

MATERIALS: Video: *The Yasui's—3 Generations of a Japanese Family* (a program that looks at a rather extended Japanese family living in various parts of the U.S., and in some cases, how “inter-cultural marriages” of some family members have created new identities.

Written materials on the Japanese-American history, in particular from documents and exhibits at the Smithsonian in Washington, DC

DISCUSSION POINTS:

- Why did Mr. Yasui leave Japan?
- What would YOU ask the family members?
- Whom do you admire most? Why?
- How do you think they'd answer your questions?
- Would all the family members answer that way?
- What does “cultural heritage” mean?

TOPIC: **An emerging aspect of the American family: “At-Home Dads”**

RATIONALES: To introduce this trend; to see how it compares to the more traditional American family style; to compare it to aspects of Japanese family styles.

MATERIALS: Video *At-Home Dads*; printed transcript and discussion questions

DISCUSSION POINTS:

- Discuss before viewing program: What is your own image of “father”?
- Discussion following program:
 - *ABC World News Tonight* is a very popular national news program in the U.S. Why do you think this report is important to show, especially as part of its *American Agenda* series?
 - Why is this trend happening?
 - Do you think the *at-home dads* like their jobs?
 - What do they do to make their jobs easier?
 - What is happening to the “father image” in the U.S.?

- How do you think the children of these *at-home dads* will be affected in later life?
What kind of parents do you think they might become?
- What do you think of the idea of *at-home dads*?
- According to the program, do men and women treat children the same way?
What are some differences? How does this compare, do you think, with how fathers and mothers treat children here in Japan?
- What could cause this trend to happen in Japanese society?

TOPIC: Teen Courts

RATIONALE: To introduce the growing trend toward peer judgment of teenage offenders in the U.S.; comparisons with teenage crime and punishment in Japanese society, especially in light of a recent increase of school-related juvenile crime in Japan.

MATERIALS: Print materials on teen courts (from Internet sites, including www.teencourts.com; video program on teen courts in the U.S.

DISCUSSION POINTS:

- Why does the Teen Court exist?
- Which is a better place to try such offenders: in an adult court or in the Teen Court?
- Do you feel the teen court system would work in Japan (to deter juveniles from crime and educate offenders to become more responsible citizens)?
- How do teen discussion techniques-especially sharing of opinions-compare between Japan and the U.S.?

TOPIC: Educational TV in the U.S.—Science Programs

RATIONALES: To show an example of a popular children's science program; to see an example of how TV is used as a teaching tool in the U.S.; to compare the program's style with science programs shown on Japanese TV.

MATERIAL: video: *Bill Nye the Science Guy* (children's daily science show)

DISCUSSION POINTS:

- Why is the pace of the program so fast?
- What can you see about U.S. culture in the show?
- Compare it to Japanese TV science programs
 - similarities ?
 - differences ?

Conclusion

The best way to acquire a foreign language may be for the student to take an active part in the culture or society where the target language is in common use. But when this is not practical, the student studying in the classroom of his/her home country can still see to a certain degree how the language is used in a natural way. Video, audio, and print materials from the target culture can offer sights and sounds of various aspects of a culture. When the syllabus is structured around major themes that are significant to that culture, then the language student can develop insight into the culture, and thus gain an insight into the language the native speakers use.

Selected Videography

Student Life in America (video), USIS Audio-Visual Program Services, Tokyo

The Yasui's—3 Generations of a Japanese Family (video), NHK Enterprises 21, Japan, 1996

Video and a CD of songs from Yujin Gakuen, in Eugene, Oregon, 1998

At-Home Dads ("World News Tonight" TV Broadcast), ABC News, New York, 1998

Teen Court in the U.S. (video), NHK, Japan, 1996

Japanese People Living Overseas (Sekai-he-Tobu) (video), NHK, Japan, 1995

James Michener's USA: The New South (video), Emlen House Productions, Inc., 1981

Bill Nye the Science Guy (video), Public Broadcasting Corporation, USA

(岩手大学教育学部英語教育講座)