

CROSS-CULTURAL DIFFERENCES IN STUDENTS' AND TEACHERS' VIEWS ON ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING

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The purposes of this study were to explore Japanese students' views towards communicative language learning, and to explore how differing views might affect the classroom dynamic. It was found that Japanese students of English as a second language held views based on their prior learning experiences under grammar-translation methodology. Such views were incongruent in various ways with the communicative language teaching methodology under which they presently study. This paper outlines possibilities for bridging the gap between teachers and students, and suggests possible areas for further research.

INTRODUCTION

So many times in the past, popular methodologies and their underlying ideologies have set the pace for second language instruction, regardless of students' language learning backgrounds. Too little effort, however, is put into the cross-cultural issues surrounding ESL classrooms, and into viewing teachers and students as partners, who work together to attain the ultimate goal of language learning. The purposes of this study were to come to a better understanding of teachers' and students' views on language learning, and to explore possible avenues for further research on the issue.

RESEARCH DESCRIPTION

Because I wanted to work with numerous students in an English language program, I had to find a suitable institution with which to conduct my research. I also wanted to find a program chiefly with Japanese students, as it is this group which I work with as an EFL instructor. The *Aloha* program¹ has a student population of 80

¹ So as to protect the anonymity of participants and of the program in general, all names and titles are fictitious.

percent Japanese and 15 percent Korean. The other 5 percent includes students of various European, Asian, and South American countries. The students are all adults, averaging 21 years of age, of various English competency levels, and residing in Hawaii for the purpose of studying English. Students in the program attend class four hours a day, five days a week, for ten weeks.

Though the Aloha program makes efforts to help students improve their four skill areas, the main focus of instruction is on oral communicative competence. (See Appendix 1 for a statement of the Aloha program's goals.) During the four daily hours of instruction, students attend three different classes, *Grammar*, *Fluency*, and *Interactions*. The Grammar class is in place to help students develop better grammatical accuracy while the Fluency class aims at producing more fluent speakers by helping them develop their vocabulary and pronunciation. The aims of the Interactions class, on the other hand, are to help the students integrate skills learned in Grammar and Fluency classes in communicative contexts.

The Grammar and Fluency classes are generally taught more teacher-fronted than the Interactions class which is taught more with communicative tasks and pair and small group work. Students in the Grammar and Fluency classes study with textbooks, often doing written fill-in exercises and oral drill-like activities. On the other hand, it is up to the teachers in Interactions classes to find or create materials which commonly include interactive, task-based communication activities such as role-plays or even content-based activities like producing a short film.

The cooperating teachers with whom research took place are all United States nationals with varying degrees of ESL teacher education and differing levels of experience. Three of the five cooperating teachers have a state teaching certification and have at least four years of experience teaching subjects such as English composition and literature in the public school system. Two of the five instructors, including the main cooperating teacher *Jennifer*, have a Master of Arts degree in teaching English as a second language. Only one of these teachers, *Kyle*, has English teaching experience overseas, which was in Japan. Jennifer, although having had contact with cross-cultural situations in her bicultural (American and Greek) family, had no experience teaching English in a foreign context, and had no prior experience teaching Japanese students.

Since better understanding of issues surrounding students' and teachers' views on English language teaching was the goal of this project (Spradley, 1980; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Erickson, 1986; Wolcott, 1987, 1994), collecting ethnographic

information was the mode of data collection I chose. Research was conducted, by interviewing participants, observing participants in interaction, collecting documents such as questionnaires and policy statements, during the extended time period of 30 weeks. As a validity criterion, I tried to spend as much time as possible with the participants and to view the issues from their perspectives. According to Erickson (1986),

the issue of using as a basic validity criterion the *immediate and local meanings of actions*, as defined from the actors' point of view, is crucial in distinguishing interpretive participant observational research from another observational technique with which interpretive research approaches are often confused, so-called *rich description*. (p. 119)

In addition, this ethnography was conducted in a circular method (Spradley, 1980, pp. 26-35; Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 343), where data which suggested certain phenomena was re-investigated by further and more focused study, and was checked by comparing (triangulating) it with other data sources (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Initial research, including a questionnaire (see Appendix 2) completed by 39 of the 55 students to whom it was given, interviews with five teachers and the program coordinator, and observations of five classes, was conducted during one ten-week term in the spring of 1995. During the initial research, which was exploratory in nature, I sought to narrow the focus of the subsequent study. Issues concerning how students received language instruction under the communicative approach began to emerge from the initial data collection, and thus became the general theme of this research study. From late spring 1995 to early fall 1995, during two terms, I focused mainly on Jennifer's class. During these two ten-week terms, I observed three classes per week, conducted five interview sessions with each of the five cooperating students, and consulted with Jennifer on a weekly basis. In addition to spending time with Jennifer's class, I continued to attend meetings, interview all teachers and the program coordinator, and to collect documents such as student assessments of the program, advertisement materials, and the Aloha program's statements of policy.

IMPLICIT THEORIES OF LANGUAGE LEARNING AND TEACHING

Language teachers, perhaps as language learners themselves, and in many cases as trained and experienced language professionals, have attitudes and beliefs about

language education. Such attitudes and beliefs are based on: (a) community sociocultural experiences; (b) schooling experiences, including teacher education; and (c) teaching experiences (Davis, in press). These traits contribute to the formation of an instructor's unique *culture of teaching* (Feiman-Nemser & Floden, 1986; Halkes & Olson, 1984; Kennedy, 1990; Kindsvatter, Willen & Ishler, 1988; Lortie, 1975; Richards & Lockhart, 1994). The teacher uses this belief system in planning lessons, classroom organization, and all other complexities which make up language instruction. Although teachers and students may come from different countries, I refer to the belief system they have developed from their language learning experiences rather than to their native country's culture. Moreover, in second language classrooms where teachers and students often come from widely divergent language learning backgrounds, the chances are higher that the various belief systems will not correspond on a one-to-one basis.

Some recent studies have focused on the concept of *cultural compatibility* as one explanation of why congruencies and incongruencies between teachers and students may exist in classrooms. Tharp (1989) suggests that the "cultural compatibility" hypothesis in a basic form suggests that "when instruction is compatible with natal-culture [native culture-school] patterns, improvements in learning including basic skills, can be expected" (p. 166). In Shirley Brice Heath's (1983) research, differences in European-American middle class teachers' style of questioning African-American children resulted in the children's failure to respond as expected to the teachers. When she helped teachers to ask questions in ways more compatible with their expectations, the children were more successful.

In an ESL context, differences between teachers' and students' beliefs may be even more pronounced because participants in such contexts often come from widely divergent backgrounds. Such "differences between teachers' and learners' beliefs," according to Richards and Lockhart (1994, p. 53), "can sometimes lead to a mismatch between their assumptions about what is useful to focus on in a language lesson." Moreover, "Learners, too, bring to learning their own beliefs, goals, attitudes and decisions, which in turn influence how they approach their own learning" (p. 52).

However, while students may feel most comfortable engaging in classroom settings familiar to them and using materials they are well versed in, they may also understand the need to put their assumptions aside and openly accept alternative learning styles which suit their new situations. In order to better gauge the issue I compared and contrasted with learner expectations, aims, and goals.

Briefly, research into second language acquisition has revealed the benefits of learning language through interaction, namely that students may acquire linguistic competence through the numerous negotiations for meaning which come out of communicative style lessons (Ellis, 1980; Long, 1980). Long and Crookes (1993, pp. 9-54) look at the most common syllabus types such as structural, notional-functional, topical, and structural and find that task-based syllabi, and task-based language teaching in particular, might have the most to offer. In their paper, they reason, on both empirical and conceptual grounds, that "(pedagogic) tasks provide a vehicle for the presentation of appropriate target language samples to learners—input which they will inevitably reshape via application of general cognitive processing capacities—and for the delivery of comprehension and production opportunities of negotiable difficulties" (p. 39). In light of such findings, communicative language teaching is widely regarded as a good way to teach language, as it provides a context for the implementation for such tasks. However, one question which comes out of the discussion is whether such an innovative approach to ESL education is compatible with learners' expectations based on their prior language learning experiences, and how classroom techniques unfamiliar to students may affect their second language learning.

An emic look into what the learners think and feel about their English studies, about their concept of education, and how tolerant they are of methodologies new to them will offer some perspective on the topic. I will first look into the historical context of language learning in Japan and how these experiences might influence the ways in which Japanese learners view their English education at Aloha. I will then address the issue of how the instructional methodologies studied in the Aloha program are received by Japanese students. Lastly, I will provide some analysis of how to resolve incongruencies based on differing expectations, if any in fact exist.

THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF ENGLISH EDUCATION IN JAPAN

The nature of English language education in Japan has been utilitarian from the outset. According to Koike (1978), from the time of the Meiji restoration starting in 1867, English education had the aim of helping Japan catch up with the West in modernization. By tapping into the plethora of written materials from the West, Japan could access the technological innovations and industrial techniques of the

West. This rather practical need had a heavy influence on how English education would be, and still is to a great degree, viewed in Japan. The need to access the intellectual resources within the West's literature necessitated the emergence of competent translators. Thus, the grammar-translation method of English language instruction was adopted and has predominated (Hasegawa, 1978).

Tajima (1978) details a typical English class in the grammar-translation method: First the teacher reads as a model.... After this practice the students are required to read the text individually for a few minutes. Usually a few of them are then asked to read one after another.... Then begins the process of translation. Again one after another some students translate the sentences of the text into Japanese, occasionally helped by the teacher. After... the translation works... the teacher goes through the whole part translated.... The teacher, then, if there is time left, might give the students a few questions about the content of the text they are dealing with either in Japanese or rarely in English. (pp. 220-221)

Clearly, the aim of this type instruction is on developing grammatical accuracy with regards to written texts; as a result very little class time is spent on oral skills.

Although the grammar-translation method is deeply entrenched in Japanese educational curriculum, there have been recent moves towards alternative styles of instruction. In the last three decades, there have been calls by various groups to improve English education by highlighting the need for enhancing oral English skills. A booming export economy had developed in post war Japan. Accordingly, the need for communication on a global scale (as opposed to the pure need for importation of knowledge), commonly referred to by the generic term *internationalization*, has been the main reason for the calls for shifting the focus of English language instruction (Education Council, Japan Committee for Economic Development, 1984, pp. 284-291). For example, *A Proposition from Businessmen for Educational Reform: In Pursuit of Creativity, Diversity, and Internationality*, a 1985 proposal to the Education Council, Japan Committee for Economic Development, calls for reforms in English education:

In English language study at lower and upper secondary school levels, serious considerations must be given to the four skills of "reading," "writing," "hearing," and "speaking" as clearly stated in the course of study. In the present-day education, attention to the three areas other than "reading" is lacking in general.

(p. 289)

Such movements, along with the importation of native English speakers as assistant teachers since the 1960s, have challenged the grammar-translation method which had become entrenched in the Japanese educational system. However, while the original intention of schooling translators still exists, the more significant reasons that grammar-translation instruction survives are due to the internal organization of Japan itself. Rigid requirements for entrance into universities and subsequent standardized examination policies tend to make grammar-translation, for its ease of testing, the chosen method of instruction (Shimahara, 1991, p. 133). Japanese students flock to *juku* (preparation schools) in order get training in the grammar and comprehension of written texts which appear on entrance examinations. In addition, the large number of students in each classroom in Japan inhibits the implementation of more *communicative* approaches to English language instruction (Wadden & McGovern, 1991, pp. 111-112). Furthermore, a more communicative, student-centered approach requires that teachers themselves be proficient in oral communication and, because of different training and few occasions to use English outside classrooms, many teachers are not (Bamford, 1993, pp. 63-64).

Under such circumstances, it might be fair to assume that Japanese students of English, having much experience with grammar-translation methodology, have developed views about language learning based on such experiences. It may also be said that based on their experiences in the Japanese educational system, the same learners will have developed distinct assumptions of how languages are learned and what curriculum is best for learning, and expectations of what a teacher's role is and how a classroom should be managed.

FINDING DIRECTION

Many of the teachers I interviewed during the study expressed the view that since the students have come to America to study English, they should adjust to the American style of instruction. The following interview excerpt with *George* summarizes his sentiment:

I don't bend over backwards. I try to be sensitive and sympathetic. But I also try to lead them to understanding that I'm an American, and this is an American way of learning. Students are learning language, and they also have to learn our culture.... Everybody is worried about making them [the students] happy and comfortable and all this stuff. A lot of these methods are not comfortable for

them. Teachers who have taught in Japan are more likely to accommodate their expectations rather than their needs.

Another teacher's (Kyle's) thoughts on the matter were: "well, they do have different experiences with learning English. But this is America, and learning how to do things in the new context is part of their whole experience. Language and culture can't be totally separated." Interestingly, many students shared the same concept. *Junko*, a student in the program for her second term, expressed her opinion in such a manner, "this is America, and I must get used to American class style," and *Hiro*, in his third term, said, "I know we cannot speak because of Japanese style grammar lessons, so we should get used to the American way of teaching, but still it's hard to get used to."

From the students' and teachers' perspective, it would appear straightforward and simple that students would adjust to the Aloha program's style of language teaching. Although students were seemingly in wide agreement with their teachers that they should adjust, contrary attitudes began to filter through. As I spent more time interviewing, a more complex picture began to emerge.

PROBLEMS WITH THE COMMUNICATIVE APPROACH

In consultation with the program Coordinator, I learned that the communicative competence aspect of the program was initiated five years prior in the attempt to bring the program up to current pedagogical practices. *Rebecca* stated that, "we thought we would bring the program up to date by trying to incorporate task-based methods and communicative techniques, but it became a problem." This suggested that I focus the study primarily on the Interactions class in order to investigate an area of difficulty while perhaps finding answers to some of the program's problems. With the eager cooperation of *Rebecca* and my main cooperating teacher, *Jennifer*, I was allowed total access into an Interactions class. We all shared the hopes that this study might shed light on a perplexing issue.

Not too far from what the students experienced in Japan, the Accuracy and Fluency classes are more teacher-fronted than the Interactions classes. Much of the instruction in these two classes is done by teachers directly explaining grammatical or phonological functions and having students practice them in textbooks. Students are often presented a grammar point first in a dialogue, then in an explanatory section,

then they are expected to practice the points by fill-in exercises in the case of grammar, and by drills in the case of pronunciation (Chamot, Rainey deDiaz, deGonzalez, & Yorkey, 1991, pp. 138-139).

However, because learning activities in the Interactions class are most different from the types of classes the students had in Japan, I decided to focus on this class more than on the Accuracy and Fluency classes. For example, in an Interactions class which I observed, students were given the information-gap task of interviewing each other about their lives. In fact, during nearly all Interactions classes which I observed, students were involved in one or more of five communicative task types which Pica, Kanagy, and Falodun (1993, pp. 9-34) suggest are based on interactant relationships and requirements in communicating information to achieve task goals and reach task outcomes.²

According to the questionnaire results, taken during initial data collection, presented in Table 1 and Table 2, the Grammar class was decidedly more popular with students than the other two.

Table 1

Student Responses to the Question: Which class do you like best? (N=39)

| Class | No. responses |
|---------------|---------------|
| Grammar | 27 |
| Fluency | 7 |
| Communication | 5 |

² Jigsaw, information gap, problem-solving, decision-making, and opinion exchange were the task types that they considered.

Table 2
Student Comments on the Good Points of their Grammar, Fluency, and Communications Classes. (N=37)

| Class | Comments |
|--------------|---|
| Grammar | <p>It's important. I want to speak English correctly. I learned useful English. There are good and interesting examples during the class. It was helpful to me, but it is easy. I can understand most of what's happening in Accuracy class. It is really easy for me to understand. I can study correct grammar. We go into details. This class teaches me basic conversation. It is important for me. We can learn correct grammar. I have a problem with grammar. Textbook and workbook. Because we can learn and practice grammar. I can make sure if I'm correct or not. It's important in order to improve my skill at making correct sentences.</p> |
| Fluency | <p>Talk a lot. I can get used to English. Speaking practice. Fluency gives me opportunity to speak English. I can enjoy and I can hear good pronunciation. The class teaches me basic pronunciation. I can learn new idioms. It's comfortable for me. Easy to learn English and fun. Learning new words and conversation. Learning a lot of new vocabulary. It gives me good opportunities to use the sentences I learn in Grammar class.</p> |
| Interactions | <p>Many things to do. It's fun and I try to talk according to circumstances. Very interesting. We saw a movie. It was good practice for listening. Speaking practice. I enjoyed. I had a lot of fun times. I could hear good pronunciation. I can ask questions anytime. Relax. Read or write story. We could have a good time. Everyone was cooperative, especially when we were making a video. Able to refresh [myself]. Sometimes, I feel that I get tired of Accuracy and Fluency class</p> |

As shown in Table 2, students mentioned positive aspects about all classes, but referred to the Grammar class in more utilitarian terms like "useful" and "important." On the other hand, students expressed that Fluency and Interactions classes are "relaxing," "refreshing," and "enjoyable." Because the focus is on developing grammatical accuracy, and classes are teacher-fronted, the Grammar class is more similar to the grammar-translation approach in both content and style. In general, grammar classes are more familiar to the students and hence more in tune with their expectations of a language class. Although the Grammar class may be outwardly viewed as "useful" and "important," the Fluency and Interactions classes are also valuable to language learning, judging by such students' expressions as: "I could learn...", "It was good practice...", and "The class teaches me...."

Students contributed negative comments about the Fluency class such as, "I was bored. I couldn't understand what I study;" and about the Interactions class like, "I can't understand this class," "Nothing special," and "I think it isn't necessary?" Meanwhile, the only comment about the Grammar class that could be interpreted as negative is, "it was helpful to me, but it is easy." *Yoko*, in her third term with the program, commented that, "I do not understand how the [Interactions] class can help me improve my English. There must be some way, but I do not understand. The point of the Grammar class, on the other hand, is clear [translated from Japanese]." Although the students see value in all three contexts, the methodology of the Grammar class seems to be more familiar to the students

Instructors and program administrators were aware of this dilemma. As it turned out, the popularity and effectiveness of the Interactions lessons were often the main topic of faculty meetings. At one meeting I attended, the topic turned to whether incongruent cross-cultural factors were the cause of student dissatisfaction with the Interactions class. At one point, as the following excerpt from my field notebook suggests, *Kelly* became frustrated:

Why is not it working? It seems like we're doing everything we're supposed to, but the students do not like it much. What is it, a cultural thing? What should we do? Should we teach them like they're used to? Like they want to be taught?

It was apparent from the data that the Interactions class at Aloha, based on underlying principles of the communicative language teaching approach, was not popular with students as the program's teachers and administrators had hoped. In subsequent sections, I describe in further detail the incongruencies between the communicative learning environment at Aloha and students' reactions to such an

environment.

PAIR WORK AND SMALL GROUP WORK

Perhaps the most characteristic aspect of communicative language teaching is pair work and small group work (Bygate, 1988). The concept behind pair and small group work is that students learn from each other through the numerous negotiations of meaning they go through in order to complete a task. Such methodology is substantially different from more teacher-centered ones like grammar-translation where learning is believed to take place through transmission of knowledge from teacher to student. Differences in expectations for what counts as language learning were revealed in interviews.

Junko commented, "I do not understand why we do pairs in class," and that, "I cannot learn by that way." *Sachi* said, "I can learn from teacher better, teacher knows English, not other student." These and similar comments given by student informants indicate clearly that the students could not see the value in doing pair work, nor could they understand why a fellow Japanese speaker could help them with their English more than their teacher, a native speaker, could.

In this sense, the teacher was viewed as the possessor of knowledge, who may help them most to improve their English. Such comments suggest that students lack the concept that the linguistic skills fellow students possess can be shared with their partners. Also absent from the students' concepts was the idea of learning English through the negotiations for meaning they go through to complete a task. Yoko and Hiro believed that pair work was a means of language practice rather than an actual language learning situation. Yoko commented, "Pair is not so good.... I can't learn something. Another student is same level, and I cannot learn something." While Hiro said, "Pairs? No... I do not like because it strange to talk to another Japanese. Only practice, but I do not know if I make mistake."

For the students, language learning seems to be restricted to expanding their L2 knowledge through new input rather than also including increasing control of processing the L2. This narrow view of language learning seems to be related directly to their experience with grammar-translation methodology in Japan where conversational competence was not required or developed. When asked about the way she learned English in Japan, and how it may have shaped her expectations of English language

teaching in Hawaii, Sachi replied,

I think it [English education system] is bad. Because just point is grammar only and we don't need to speak English.... Before I came here, I decided not to use the Japanese way of studying. Because if I took notes often, I would miss what teacher said. I decided, too, not to study just for next day's work or test. Most Japanese students just study before test just get some points. I don't want that style. I put out that style and changed.

Clearly, Sachi expected language teaching in Hawaii to be less teacher-centered and test-oriented, and she made efforts to adapt her learning strategies to such a new learning environment. However, she still held the belief that her English would improve through the new input she received from the English speaking teacher rather from using the language in communicative contexts with her peers.

PAIR WORK VS. SMALL GROUP WORK

Small group work was comparatively more popular with the students than pair work. Comments provided by some of the students illustrate their positive attitudes towards small group work: "[there were] many things to do. It's fun and I try to talk according to circumstances;" "We could have a good time. Everyone was cooperative, especially when we were making a video." It is the cooperative nature of small group work which seems to lead the students to prefer it over pair work.

Among the five task types described by Pica, Kanagy, and Falodun (1993), jigsaw, problem-solving, and decision-making are most suited for small group work, while information gap and opinion exchange are most commonly done in pairs. The three group-oriented exercises are generally designed for the attainment of consensus. One very popular activity is the "who gets the heart" exercise which encourages students to make decisions about which one out of five medical patients will receive a donated heart. In such a classroom event, it is group decision-making which takes place in order to solve a dilemma.

In contrast, the negative comments about pair work included: "Pairs? No... I do not like because it strange to talk to another Japanese," by Hiro and, "I'm so shy to talk with Japanese about me. With my American friends, it's OK," from Junko. Yoko's comment, however, illustrates the point best, "Why should I talk to my same countries people about my life in Japan? It is not need for them to know about my life in Japan." The students' reactions are to activity types which they do not like

(namely ones which require personal information), and not necessarily the task type.

However, many pair work activities used in the Aloha program are designed for students to engage in such discourse. One such pair work task is the lifeline activity (see Appendices 3 & 4) in which pairs must separately list their individual life experiences, then interview their partner to fill the gap of knowledge with personal information. Participants in information gap and opinion exchange exercises are expected to assert themselves as individuals rather than work together for the common group goal (G. Yule, personal communication, September 20, 1995). Many other information gap and opinion exchange materials encourage competitiveness. Included in this category are ones which are based on swaying the opinion of or convincing one's partner of, a certain case. Such activities can be found in *Tell Me About It* (Tsukamoto & La Luzerne-Oi, 1993), the textbook for the Interactions class. The textbook activity *Mingle* (p. 18) not only requires that students exchange personal information about food preferences but it also suggests, in a sort of test-like competition, that students complete the task as thoroughly and as quickly as possible. Thus, quite a few pair work exercises foster individualistic and competitive discourse, while many small group tasks encourage consensus reaching by the group's participants.

Anderson (1993) points out two characteristics of Japanese communicative style, relevant to the present pair-work and group-work discussion: group-mindedness and consensual decision-making (pp. 101-110). Group-mindedness is developed early in Japanese childhood in both the home and school (Clancy, 1987, pp. 213-250), and continues throughout the students' education. As Anderson (1993) writes, "the *gakkyukai* or 'class meeting,' is characterized by whole-class discussion focused on a particular task—planning a class party, for instance—with designated students presiding over the meeting and others recording the decisions on the blackboard, and minimal teacher intervention" (p. 104).

Closely related to group-mindedness is the Japanese inclination for consensual decision-making, developed from elementary school, and in contrast to the more dyadic classroom talk of American classrooms (Anderson, 1993, pp. 104-105). According to Anderson, "only after a student's answer has been assessed and sometimes discussed by peers will the teacher provide his or her own evaluation, which may also serve as a summary of whatever collective response has emerged from the group interaction" (p. 105).

Such aspects of communicative style may have a strong impact on how Japanese

talk when first confronted with communicative ESL classrooms. Group work activities, for example, are well suited to the Japanese cognitive style because they often encourage work towards a common goal, and often are aimed at reaching a consensus. The "who gets the heart" activity is a prime example. On the other hand, many pair work activities used in the Aloha program, such as the Lifeline activity and the Mingle activity in the textbook, require students to act individually.

In light of Anderson's (1993) arguments, students in this study indicated that they did not like many pair work activities perhaps because they require them to be individualistic and to reveal personal information. It is no surprise, then, that small group work, which aimed at minimizing difference by consensus reaching, was decidedly more popular than pair work which encouraged and highlighted students' individualistic differences.

PERFECTIONISM

During data collection, I learned that students had a sense of perfectionism where they believed that their English was either right and good, or wrong and bad. If they thought what they would say was less than perfect, they would rather not speak. Yoko commented: "I don't like speak in class because I'm shame to make mistake." Sachi felt that she would like "to speak English correctly," while Hiro intimated that his "weak point is grammar, so I [he] need[s] to study grammar," and that he thinks "grammar is [the] basic" [basis] of English." Yoko was even more candid about her view of English as we can see from her opinion of the Grammar class: "I can make sure if I'm correct or not.... It's important in order to improve my skill at making correct sentences."

Additionally, if the students did speak aloud in class, they would often interrupt their utterances to correct themselves or to find the right word or expression for the situation. Looking into their dictionaries to find the right words rather than say something wrong, students' utterances emerged slowly. The following passage from my field notes further illustrates the students' reliance on their dictionaries:

Students often use their dictionaries. It seems that they [dictionaries] are open as soon as the students encounter a new word, and every time they find a new word. It does not matter if they find the word in their textbooks, while talking with other students, or from listening to their teacher. They do not just read the translation, though. As far as I've noticed, all new words are transcribed from dictionary to

notepad and the Japanese translation is written next to it. At one point Jennifer suggested that a student buy an English-English dictionary, but the suggestion was met with a sigh and a shake of the head.

Such examples suggest that the students prefer speaking near perfect English to errant English. Such beliefs may result from how the students learned English in Japan under grammar-translation methodology where students are often tested for grammatical accuracy. Because of their almost exclusive exposure to "test English" in Japan, the students may have developed beliefs that there is only right English and wrong English. In addition, because the students have studied English in the past with the aims of passing written tests, they may retain the habit of striving for perfection in the English they produce in oral communication.

It is not difficult to observe that there is incongruence between the students' perfectionist beliefs and the general aims of communicative language teaching. While the students seem to do well with the structural components of English, they have problems with the more functional aspects of the language. Perhaps this condition could be remedied if teachers provide their students opportunities to develop awareness about the realities of language use. What might particularly help them depart from their perfectionist tendencies is knowledge that much of native speaker oral discourse is often ungrammatical, although communication is still achieved.

A NEED FOR DIRECTION

In terms of the materials used and how the classes are organized and managed, Grammar is the most structured, Fluency is less structured, and the Interactions the least structured of them all. According to Rebecca, the Aloha program's aims in having three separate classes is to have a more traditional, teacher-fronted Grammar class complete with a textbook that is to be followed chapter by chapter, and to have a less structured Fluency class and a relatively unstructured Interactions class. Nearly all my student informants expressed the desire for more structure, consistency, and direction in the Interactions class. This example of what Sachi once said underscores the point well (translated from Japanese):

I think we need more instructions from the teacher. He is a teacher after all. He knows English, so he has to give us direction. I would like to have a clear beginning and end to the class. Maybe the teacher could write the plan on the board at the beginning of class and go over what we learned at the end of class.

Instead, I'm never sure of what we accomplished during the lesson.

Four years prior to this study, administrators and the teachers of the program believed that grammar is best taught in a more structured way because it is more of a concrete subject, while fluency is not as concrete as grammar, but more tangible than the Interactions class. Rebecca related that the Grammar and Fluency classes serve more as receptive learning environments, whereas the Interactions class provides a venue in which students may more practically apply what they learn in the two other classes.

Learning through the process of completing communicative tasks is not so straightforward, and the target of learning is not as explicit as that in many traditionally structured Grammar classes. Therefore, it is very difficult for students to gauge their own progress and to consciously reflect on and review what has been learnt, in contrast to the grammar-translation methodology which spells out the aims and goals of each class. Some students' questionnaire comments on the Interactions class help to illustrate their frustrations with the vague aims and goals of the Interactions class: "I can't understand this class;" "I cannot understand very much;" "I think it is not necessary;" and "what did I study?" Indeed, if students do not have the theoretical background of communicative language teaching, how are they to understand the value of such methodology?

The students need their lessons to be more explicit. In its structured nature, the Grammar class offers students a sort of road map, a schema for the direction their learning is taking, while in its relatively unstructured form, the Interactions class offers little guidance. This is very understandable since communicative language teaching focuses on functional aspects of language of which the aims are not always apparent to the learner who often has little knowledge of second language pedagogy. In light of such information, I believe that, in addition to the language itself, students also want to understand the processes of learning English. It would be logical, then, to say that a dialogue could be established between students and teachers aimed at helping the students understand how communicative language learning will help them. What needs to be made clear to the students is that learning can take place in communicative settings, not just in formal, teacher centered contexts.

SUMMARY

This study confirms earlier findings (Allwright, 1984; Willing, 1988; Spada, 1990; Heath, 1992; Anderson, 1993; Block, 1994, in press; Nunan, 1995) that within

the educative process, gaps affecting the classroom dynamic may exist between students' and teachers' experiences with and beliefs about language learning. It was found that both parties acknowledged the gap, but both teachers and students believed that it is the students' responsibility to adjust. However, there was an obvious incongruence between students saying that it is their duty to adjust and their abilities to adjust. As I learned during the study, the proposition that students should conform to the learning environment is not a simple and straightforward one, and in fact students put up a certain amount of resistance to such adjustment.

I found, from the evidence of interviews, observations, and questionnaires, that the students in this study do have a very clear leaning towards certain pedagogy. They seem to feel comfortable with methodologies similar to those of their past experiences, which, in the case of this study, were based on grammar-translation. However, students also criticized the grammar-translation approach. Sachi's comments illustrate this point: "I think it [grammar-translation] is bad because just [the only] point is only grammar, and we do not need to speak English." Since the students do not understand the functions of communicative language teaching, they therefore have no basis for comparison. It is natural that their leaning is toward what they are used to, even though they are not content with it, rather than toward something they do not understand. Students also showed a willingness to understand the new learning environment their teacher provided for them. Yoko defined a good teacher as one who gives answers to such questions, "How can I find the way to study English? What is the best way to progress my English?" Her comments suggest that the way she studied in the past is insufficient, yet she has no better concept of her own and thus looks to her teachers for guidance.

Both teachers and students made moves towards reaching mutual understanding about language learning, but such efforts were uninformed, undirected, and tentative at best. To her credit, Jennifer, unfamiliar with the Japanese, initiated classroom activity on the level of cuisine, art, and customs aimed at cross-cultural understanding. Had Jennifer realized that students also possess beliefs about learning, she might have been able to create mutual understanding of each classroom participant's view on language learning. A class might have been organized around how all participants in the language classroom view language learning.

Yoko's sincere wish for her teachers to show her the way to better learning coupled with Kelly's frustrated expressions of not knowing how to make connections—"It seems like we're doing everything we're supposed to, but the

students do not like it much. Why is it not working? What should we do?"—aims at the heart of the issue. To offer a metaphor, while teachers are diligently following the theoretical foundations of communicative language teaching, their students seem to be wandering around lost in the forest, looking for someone to guide them.

It would seem that in the Aloha program, the ideology behind communicative language teaching has been driving pedagogical practices, but has also created a separation between teachers' and students' expectations and beliefs about language learning. As Richards and Lockhart (1994) suggest: "Language teaching is often discussed from the point of view of the teacher... However, while learning is the goal of teaching, it is not necessarily the mirror image of teaching" (p. 52). Kelly's seemingly simple interjections, "we're doing everything we're supposed to... why is it not working?" indeed ask complicated questions for which no simple answer exists.

CONCLUSION

While second language acquisition research has traditionally offered insight into how humans learn languages, less attention has been given to the social and cross-cultural factors surrounding language learning. Schumann's (1986) acculturation model for second language acquisition attempts to address the issue, but it is limited to "conditions of immigration where learning takes place without instruction" (p. 385). Rather, it is from ethnographic research that we might gain fuller understanding of the cross-cultural conditions of language learning. Jordan's (1985) statement that "the translation of anthropological knowledge into culturally compatible classroom practices and teaching techniques that then become part of a coherent program that can be put into practice by ordinary classroom teachers," (p. 118) may be one of the solutions to incongruent teacher-student views on education. Similarly, Bassano (1986) offers six steps which may be taken in classrooms where students "experience unexpected teaching techniques, materials, or environment." They are as follows:

1. Become aware of students' past classroom experiences and their assumptions about language learning.
2. Build students' confidence in your expertise and qualifications.
3. Begin where the students are and move slowly.
4. Show them achievement.
5. Allow for free choice as much as possible.

6. Become aware of the students' interests and concerns, their goals and objectives. (pp. 15-18)

Perhaps this list could be used as a guide as teachers translate ethnographic knowledge of students into compatible classroom practices.

In the program I looked at in this study, the absence of teacher-student communication about the learning process was clearly evident. Such dialogue was most likely absent because neither teachers nor students realized that there could in fact be cross-cultural communication on the different views about language learning which they bring into the classroom. However, as I discovered, significant differences exist, and if a form of such communication exists, I believe improvement of the tenuous situation between teachers and students may result.

A model for different language learning groups can be formed from information gleaned from dialogue, and such models can be used by teachers upon which to base tactical language instruction decisions. For example, Anderson (1993) gained knowledge about the Japanese "value placed on formalized—almost ritual—speechmaking, as opposed to the casual expression of 'original' ideas so esteemed in the West in both public and private interaction" (p. 105). In response to such knowledge, he suggests that "bridge" activities that ease the transition from the students' interactional norms to that of the teacher are useful" (p. 109). Such an activity (as described by Anderson, 1993)—to offer students who are more used to formalized public speechmaking pre-prepared scripts during initial interaction, then eventually put the scripts away—may be useful in getting Japanese students used to "the more spontaneous conversation values in the West" (p. 109), and hence communicative classroom activities.

In addition, Nunan (1995) reviews the concept of learner centeredness and finds that

key decisions about what will be taught, how it will be taught, when it will be taught, and how it will be assessed will be made with reference to the learner.

Information about learners, and, where feasible, from learners, will be used to answer the key questions of what, how, when, and how well. (p. 134)

However, dialogue leading to cross-cultural teacher-student awareness is not the only solution to the complicated dilemma.

Current inquiry into the issue (Auerbach, 1986; Willing, 1988; Nunan, 1995) has revealed ways to more actively include students in the educative process, to involve

students in their own needs analysis, lesson planning, and classroom organization. Such movements are often in response to learner-centered curriculums which, in fact, are not as learner-centered as they appear to be. Auerbach (1986), for example, found that the curriculum contained within many learner-centered survival ESL textbooks was largely aimed at socializing newcomers to the United States in American ways. She found that the materials were based on how authors would have students learn English rather than on the language that students might really need in their own unique contexts.

In other words, the materials didn't allow key decisions to be made in reference to the learner. Similarly, Nunan (1995) makes the distinction between learner centeredness and what he terms *learning-centeredness* where students participate in setting up the entire learning environment. He relates that

A learning-centered classroom carries learners toward the ability to make critical pedagogical decisions by systematically training them in the skills they need to make such decisions. Such a classroom is constituted with complementary aims. Whereas one set of aims focuses on language content, the other focuses on the learning process. Learners are therefore systematically educated in the skills and knowledge they will need in order to make informed choices about what they want to learn and how they want to learn. Rather than assuming that the learner comes to the learning arrangement with critical learning skills, the sensitive teacher accepts that many learners will only begin to develop such skills in the course of instruction. (p. 134)

Heath (1983, 1987) has also engaged in numerous collaborative efforts in classrooms where teachers and students alike have collected language data. During such ethnographic work on communication,

Students go out into their own homes and communities, taking fieldnotes on contexts of the talk they hear, the reading and writing they see others doing, and the actions which result from such communications. Accompanying these fieldnotes may be audiotapes of conversations, sermons, songs, jokes, riddles or any of a variety of types of language uses. (Heath, 1987, p. 94)

This material subsequently became the basis for language work in the classroom. Under such circumstances, students are not only involved in "producing theories about how language produces actions, relationships, and ideas" (Heath, 1987, p. 94), but they are also active participants in forming syllabi from which they will learn English. In such a context, students are fundamentally involved in the educative

process.

I learned from Rebecca that students are briefed on what their classes will be like in the program, but such information comes at the beginning of each term and during only a short orientation meeting. Moreover, in the classes I observed, Jennifer did not explain how pair work would help her students learn English. In light of all this, the students certainly did not have a framework for understanding the purposes of communicative language learning before they entered the program, and they got only minimal exposure to such concepts while participating in the program. Perhaps teachers and students alike in the Aloha program could benefit from mutual understanding of one another's language learning beliefs, and together base such understanding on building a learning centered classroom. Then, Yoko might find her "way to study English," and Kelly may find answers to his questions of "why is it not working?" and "what should we do?"

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APPENDIX 1

GOALS

The focus is on helping foreign students to develop *conversational* and oral communication skills in English, especially in *social, recreational and daily life* settings. Our goals are as follows:

- * Improve conversational fluency and accuracy
- * Improve interaction skills in English
- * Strengthen listening comprehension
- * Increase vocabulary
- * Learn about and experience American culture and customs
- * Practice English language skills in a variety of settings
- * Build confidence in speaking English
- * Promote cross-cultural friendship

PLACEMENT INFORMATION

All *new* students take *placement tests* on the first day of the term. The tests place students into the appropriate level of classes. Placement testing includes two tests in the language lab, and an oral interview.

Continuing students are placed in the appropriate levels by *recommendation* of their previous teachers.

Class assignments are ready between 11:00 and 11:45 AM on the first day of classes. Students should report to the office to find out their levels, teachers' names, and classroom assignments.

APPENDIX 2

Please take a few minutes to fill out this questionnaire to help us understand how students feel about the Aloha Program. You can write in either English or in your first language (Japanese, Korean, Italian, etc.). Nobody will know your answers except two researchers. **PLEASE DO NOT WRITE YOUR NAME ON THE FORM. THANK YOU!**

1. Class levels:

Grammar _____

Communication _____

Fluency _____

2. Which country are you from? _____

3. How many terms have you been studying with the Aloha Program? _____

4. What do you want to do with your English?

5. How and where do you use English in Hawaii?

6. What are the good points about your Grammar class?

Why? _____

7. What are the good points about your Fluency class?

Why? _____

8. What are the good points about your Interactions class?

Why? _____

9. Which class do you like best? _____

Why? _____

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