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**AN EXCHANGE PROGRAM/PARADIGM FOR EAST ASIAN
UNIVERSITY STUDENTS: ENGLISH LEARNING THROUGH
CULTURAL EXPLORATION AND FRIENDSHIP FORMATION**

ABSTRACT. A group of eleven third-year students from Fukuoka University in Kyushu, Japan took part in a five-day cultural exchange program at the National Changhua University of Education (NCUE) in Changhua, Taiwan in September, 2015. The purpose of the program was to have the students engage in a variety of enjoyable activities wherein the commonly understood language of English would be required for cross-cultural communication. A qualitative study was conducted, examining before and after surveys that requested comments from program participants about specific themes such as cultural interests, the importance of friendships, expectations for ('pre') and realizations of ('post') English-learning potential, motivation and the role of the native speaker. The findings suggest motivation is enhanced due to a compounding effect of the factors: English-learning, culture-learning¹ and friendship.

Keywords: Anxiety, Cultural exchange program, Motivation, Native speaker, Willingness to communicate.

1. Introduction

A great many Japanese university students, especially those keen on developing foreign language skills, are drawn to the outside world. Yashima, Zenuk-Nishide and Shimizu surmise that this phenomenon reflects the situation of students within Japan's public school system, who they argue may be motivated by a short-term goal of passing English tests for high school or

¹ The expression, "culture-learning," found throughout this paper, is to be understood in its literal sense – to learn (various things about any new) culture. The term has commonly been used in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts to refer to the process of acquiring knowledge about a native-English-speaking culture (C2) in order to better understand the English (L2) which is spoken there. In this study, however, the culture being learned (C3) is completely unrelated to the L2 (English) which functions as the medium that facilitates learning.

university entrance examinations, but have “a somewhat vague long-term objective related to using English for international/intercultural communication” (121). This article seeks to understand more fully the eagerness among both Japanese and Taiwanese students to explore cultures and peoples beyond their island countries’ borders. A literature review that highlights relevant themes from the field of motivation in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) will first be offered, followed by a brief overview of the present English-learning context of Japan. The paper will finally introduce the cultural exchange program (CEP) that brought together university students from Taiwan, Japan and four other countries, and offer an analysis and discussion of how qualitative data gathered from student comments informs us on the overall effectiveness of the endeavor in light of its goal of building communicative English skills through friendly, cultural exchange activities.

2. Literature Review

Our understanding of motivation in second/foreign language learning has been molded by an evolution of perspectives. This brief overview will explore some of the prominent schools of thought in the field from the last half century. To begin, it is helpful to consider this adeptly worded definition provided by Williams and Burden:

Motivation may be construed as a state of cognitive and emotional arousal, which leads to a conscious decision to act, and which gives rise to a period of sustained intellectual and/or physical effort in order to attain a previously set goal (or goals). (“Psychology” 120)

This definition expresses how motivation is more than an initial impetus to get something started – it involves a decision to *keep* going until an objective has been reached. As the reasons behind actions are more closely investigated, the commonly referred to categorization of motivation into “intrinsic” and “extrinsic” types comes to mind. This distinction is explained well by Deci, who notes how “intrinsic” refers to innate interests which are evident in children and remain throughout adulthood; human beings do what they want to do for the pleasure of doing it and the feeling of accomplishment it yields (21). The term “extrinsic” indicates the form of motivation in operation when the purpose of an action is to gain an external reward. As Deci goes on to assert, to be extrinsically motivated is ultimately counter-productive and even coercive; human beings have a natural need for self-determination and personal autonomy which goes hand-in-hand with intrinsic motivation (30). The intrinsic/extrinsic duality in motivation has greatly influenced SLA research in general and is also informative with regard to the present study.

Drawing SLA researchers away from behaviorist psychological approaches was the groundbreaking work of Robert Gardner and colleagues who proposed

the Socio-Educational Model². This model had a profound effect on motivation studies in SLA due primarily to the well-documented “integrative” orientation which it espoused (Gardner 1; Oxford 2). Integrative refers to the type of motivation caused by a learner’s interest or desire to become part of the L2 community. Gardner contrasted this newly proposed “social needs” orientation with the more commonly accepted “instrumental” orientation (Gardner & Lambert 12). Instrumental is used to describe a learner who acts (i.e. studies hard) in order to gain tangible results, such as passing a university entrance examination or achieving a high score on a standardized proficiency test (i.e. TOEIC or TOEFL) by which to gain an edge with respect to career aspirations.

While fully appreciating the influential and foundational work accomplished by Gardner, other researchers began to recognize that motivation in SLA may not be sufficiently explained by a simplistic integrative/instrumental dichotomy (Oxford 3; Ushioda 95), a limitation noted with respect to motivation studies in Japan as well (Irie 88; Kimura, Nakata & Okumura 51). Dörnyei documents the shift that occurred, leaving behind the Gardner-style macro-level focus on “whole language communities” (“The Psychology of Second” 210) to one that claims to incorporate micro-level context issues (i.e. the classroom). Over time a broadened perspective took shape, sparked by a realization that factors which underlie motivation are dynamic, varying significantly depending

² See Williams & Burden “Psychology” 115 and Gardner 1-4 for details.

on the context. To this burgeoning framework were added numerous studies on L2 motivation which began to take into greater consideration themes such as: self-determination, attribution, goal setting, not to mention other motivational components such as agency, identity, anxiety and willingness to communicate (Dörnyei “New Themes” 44; Ehrman 83; Honda & Sakyu 36; Oxford 6; Williams & Burden “Students” 193).

Of particular relevance to this study are the final two factors noted above: “anxiety” and “willingness to communicate” (WTC). According to Takada (9), a number of studies on anxiety in L2 acquisition have indicated how powerful this factor can be in preventing L2 learners from achieving success. It is considered to be more detrimental than other “academic anxieties” in that the students’ self-perceptions and self-esteem are what ultimately suffer (Ibid. 9). When measuring anxiety it is important to understand that what may seem uncomfortable for learners from one culture is not always the same for those in another (Williams & Burden “Psychology” 94). As documented by Takada (20), anxiety is much less evident among students in courses that stress Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills (BICS) as it is in those where Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) prevails.³ Although certain levels of anxiety may be helpful at times, overall, reducing anxiety in the language

³ See Cummins (58) for more information on how BICS and CALP factor into language proficiency assessment research.

classroom will lead to L2 proficiency gains (Dörnyei “The Psychology of the Language” 200; Richard-Amato 83).

If anxiety were on one end of a continuum, WTC is relatively synonymous with whatever term would be placed on the other. Understandably, individuals are not normally “willing” to engage in a conversation that reinforces anxious feelings. Just as we pick and choose (the best we can) our interlocutors and situations for everyday first language (L1) communication, it is not surprising that WTC in second language learning operates in a similar fashion, although there is greater complexity of the trait when studied within L2 parameters (Dörnyei “The Psychology of the Language” 208; Yashima et al. 124). Connections between WTC and motivation have been described by Yashima et al., who equate the previously discussed “integrative motivation” with the “international posture” construct (120). International posture functions within English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts, and denotes an “interest in foreign or international affairs, willingness to go overseas to stay or work, and a readiness to interact with intercultural partners” (Yashima et al. 125). In their study of Japanese EFL students, a positive relationship was determined between international posture and WTC. This suggests, among other things, the desire to communicate in a foreign language is reinforced by another desire to communicate cross-culturally. The motivation factor, “friendship” is brought within the WTC construct by Yashima et al. (129-130) and is placed by Wu and

Chang in the instrumental orientation category (529). The WTC construct, together with anxiety as its nemesis, have a significant role to play in understanding the success of the cross-cultural program this paper reports on.

3. English Language Education in Japan

A common perception of English language education in the Japanese public school system involves the image of a teacher standing by the blackboard, chalk and teacher's guidebook in hand, transmitting grammar rules to approximately 40 silent learners. This image is not, however, indicative of English classes in elementary schools, which are communicative in focus in keeping with the directives set by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, or "MEXT" (MEXT, "English" 1). Although motivation levels are often high when students begin English study in elementary school, as Carreira uncovered in her study, a decrease in motivation occurs, thought to be indicative of a learning context which does little to promote intrinsic motivation (152). The trend continues into junior high school, according to Takada (19), who found that the motivation profiles of junior high school students who had (communicative) English classes in the primary grades and those who did not are virtually the same. In other words, the situation does not improve; the interactive learning methods from elementary school, now replaced with grammar-focused lessons, result in the typical student having no measurable

motivational gains and almost no opportunity to communicate verbally in English in the classroom. Instead, English texts are studied, primarily through translation methods, in order to master complex linguistic rules and memorize vocabulary for high school and university entrance examinations.⁴ Although exceptions to this pattern of study are increasing as calls for reform grow, English teachers at the undergraduate level (such as myself) continue to wait for the arrival of freshmen who are able to engage in even semi-flowing rudimentary conversations.⁵

Despite the apparent malfunction of Japan's English language education system, there is good reason to maintain hope as a number of studies have indicated. University students have a general interest in English and a positive attitude toward learning it (Brown et al. 390). They want to improve their fluency in English, and have been found to value the development of speaking skills well above those of reading, writing and listening (Matsuura, Chiba & Hilderbrandt 76). In general, college students in Japan are characterized as being motivated by an aspiration to achieve passing scores on entrance examinations, a form of instrumental orientation, and by a desire to interact in English cross-culturally (Berwick & Ross 206; Irie 97). In my experience, after teaching

⁴ A similar analysis is found in Yashima et al. 121.

⁵ For additional insights on problems with English language education in Japan, see for example, McVeigh 212; Reedy 165; Seargeant 3; Yoshida 159.

English in Japan for more than 20 years, I have no doubt the majority of students still wish to improve speaking skills in English by using them in authentic situations.

If our goal as EFL educators is to have students develop stronger oral production skills, we must, therefore, find new opportunities for them to speak in English. We must also somehow foster within them a stronger WTC orientation while recognizing and avoiding contexts that increase anxiety. Anxiety goes hand-in-hand with reticence, which is evident among not only Japanese but East-Asian students in general (Tsui 145). Many students likely feel safer to study “about” English than to accept the social risks involved with verbal communication “in” English. It is indeed a tremendous challenge for teachers to help students overcome their fear of speaking out loud in front of peers.

A solution that is often voiced is to find ways to send more students overseas to English-speaking countries. It is important to note, however, that because of the nature of English, which is the undisputed global language, an imbalance exists that non-elite universities in Japan are well aware of. Institutions that seek to establish sister school exchange programs all know with English it is a one-way street. The premise of university student-exchange agreements is to ensure an even swap of candidates, but this is virtually impossible with North American and British universities. Trying to secure a deal that guarantees exact reciprocity

is elusive for East Asian schools. This assertion is verified in data provided by JASSO,⁶ where the disparity of foreign student movement between the USA and Japan is clearly seen. With more than double the population of Japan and a relatively equal standard of living, the USA ought to be sending more students to Japan than vice versa. Figures show, however, that in 2014, there were 2,152 international students from the USA living in Japan (1.2% of all international students in Japan). On the other hand, as we are informed by data provided by MEXT (“The Number” 1), almost ten times the number of Japanese (19,568) became international students in the USA. Based on these figures, we would expect only one out of every ten universities in Japan to be fortunate enough to set up a true student exchange program (with an equal disbursement of students). Within the majority of Japanese universities, therefore, students must still pay all school fees at home, plus the costs for travel, living and, of course, tuition at the university abroad, where English is spoken.

Studies examining the effectiveness of study abroad programs have revealed that a number of merits exist. Language gains among individuals who go this route, especially with respect to oral production skills, are commonly reported (Bachner & Zeutschel 1; Brecht et al. 37; Segalowitz & Freed 173; Tanaka & Ellis 81), as are personal growth factors such as independence and the

⁶ All figures are available at the JASSO (Japan Student Services Association) website: http://www.jasso.go.jp/statistics/intl_student/documents/data14_e.pdf.

development of social skills (Hadis 67; Isabelli-Garcia 254). Adams (262) verifies that the experience of studying abroad influences how students approach language learning. Numerous studies are cited by Adams (260-264) that reinforce what we may often consider to be common sense – that learners in these novel environments will excel. Surrounded by speakers of the target language, they often adopt new learning strategies that reflect the influence of interpersonal factors. We might say the reason why study abroad works is that a totally new purpose for learning English (authentic communication) has a profound influence on students' motivational orientations. Interlocutors are no longer grammar teachers or classmates who interact primarily by reading dialogs from a textbook. Communication becomes real.

However, study abroad programs are not always what students may at first imagine them to be. Homestays, for instance, are typically less family-oriented than they once were and in some situations have become more like living arrangements. The number of single-parent homes that students stay in is increasing and its residents are often too busy with their own lives to converse regularly with their guests. Churchill and DuFon explain how feelings of negativity toward the host culture can arise for various reasons, such as when foreign students perceive a “shallowness in their relationship with host members” (21). The reality is that most students who enroll in ESL programs at overseas universities spend their time socializing with other foreign students and the

native speaker advantage of living in English-speaking countries is gradually being lost as internationals end up sticking together socially.⁷ Although there are still huge merits attached to the typical study abroad setting described above, we ought to methodically and creatively consider ways in which to remedy some of the ills just described.

The new paradigm proposed here builds upon the question of whether or not it is possible to have students from various East-Asian cultures gather in one location in a coordinated way in order to develop communicative English skills. In one sense this is already being accomplished via international universities such as Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University (APU), for example, located on the island of Kyushu in Japan. Here students from around the world, with intermediate to advanced English abilities, enroll in order to complete a full four-year degree. APU has demonstrated advanced English skills can be developed among its students in a nation situated within Kachru's expanding circle.⁸ It still requires a great commitment however, with regard to both time and money, to move in this direction; while fully acknowledging all the strides APU has made, another niche still exists. The new paradigm thus takes us one

⁷ This claim is made in light of personal conversations with numerous students who have had such experiences; additionally, this theme was raised during a presentation at the Fourth Annual Roundtable of the Language and Society Centre in 2012 at Monash University, hosted by the Director of the Centre, Professor Farzad Sharifian, who joined in, offering comments that support this position.

⁸ Details about the "three circles" are also available in Crystal 61.

step further, past the APU model, providing an option for motivated English learners which builds on the idea of *student exchange* between East-Asian universities. Normally, exchange students seek to master the language of the home culture, but in this case, English, the international language becomes the primary medium in which students would communicate with each other.

For this paradigm to expand, the question that must be answered is: “Will students indeed be able to substantially improve English communication skills under these conditions (in a contrived English-speaking subculture within a non-English-speaking society)?” The present study has been designed to shed light on this question, fully aware that an unequivocal “yes” or “no” is still far in the distance. We must always keep in mind that we are talking about English – the lingua franca in a 21st century globalized world, where social networking, pop culture and values systems evolve at a pace well beyond our ability to accurately assess; we are in uncharted territory. A fundamental assumption is that amidst the confusion, friendships will prevail. The countries of East-Asia are filled with university students who study English, many of whom strongly desire to build speaking skills; to do this, verbal interaction with real people is necessary – preferably with those easy to get along with. The rationale for bringing members of different cultures together is thus very simple. When Japanese students talk amongst themselves, culturally ingrained inhibitions ordinarily prevent them from using English. If, however, Japanese and Taiwanese students are brought

together, English is almost always the only language they have in common. The solution for them is to either speak in English or not speak at all. When the added dimension of friendship gets drawn into the equation, English usage is expected to immediately take off. The more communication grows, the more friendship grows, fueled not only by the enjoyment of finally using English for a real, practical purpose, but because of the culture-learning happening as well.

The next obvious question to ask at this point is: “Will students indeed form friendships, use English a lot to maintain these friendships, and appreciate the value of communicating with residents of a foreign culture *without* native speakers of English added to the mix?” The study that is documented below will explore these questions. In the next section an overview of the cultural exchange program itself will be offered. Following this is a presentation of the findings of a qualitative study designed to assess various aspects of the program.

4. The Cultural Exchange Program

A previous study on an almost identical program that took place among students from the same two institutions demonstrated that friendships which develop between students of different cultures leads to perceived language gains through its motivational effect (Kimber 144). The present study has sought to build on the positive elements inherent in the previous program in order to explore more deeply some of the issues that arose there.

Due to the gracious cooperative efforts made by faculty and volunteers at NCUE, the second CEP was successfully planned and carried out in early September, 2015. At NCUE, 16 Taiwanese students (13 females; 3 males) worked together under a student leader named Alex (a pseudonym) to organize activities and also prepare for and eventually welcome 11 students (10 females; 1 male) from Fukuoka University. These 11 were all third-year students, classmates in my seminar course on bilingualism. The planning committee also invited eight other exchange students at NCUE to the CEP – students from Korea (3 females), France (2 males), Germany (1 male), Croatia (1 male) and Japan (1 female). A total of 35 students thus joined in. For the Japanese group, the trip lasted six days in total, although with travel time excluded, the number of full days on the CEP was four. During these days students took part in various on-campus culture-learning activities and off-campus sightseeing excursions. Students were busy every day from morning till evening. Convenient accommodations at a school dormitory were provided for the Japanese students. Most of the exploratory trips were to nearby destinations, except for a whole-day trip to an amusement park, located adjacent to the scenic “Sun Moon Lake,” which we also visited – a highlight of the program.

The goal of the CEP was readily agreed on through e-mail communication with Alex. English would be used as the common language for communication among all participants taking part in a variety of enjoyable and/or culture-related

activities. In so doing, it was expected this would lead to an increase in communication between participants as friendships grew. In order to facilitate this objective, students were always paired or grouped such that a mixture of cultures formed. For example, one rule entailed that students with the same L1 were not to sit next to each other on buses. Based on my observations, this worked out very well. I walked up and down the aisle occasionally just to see what was happening and was pleased to hear plenty of English being spoken much of the time. Both on and off buses, English was being used – there is little doubt that the primary objective of the CEP had been met.

After four tiring yet exhilarating days, the time came for the Japanese cohort to return home. At 4:00 a.m., while boarding the shuttle bus on the NCUE campus, we were surprised once again by our gracious Taiwanese hosts. More than happy to escort us to the Taoyuan Airport (a 2-3 hour trip) were as many Taiwanese students as could fit on the bus with us. Needless to say, in the end, good-byes were hard to say.

5. The Study

5.1. Methodology

A qualitative design was used to gather thoughts and reflections on the CEP by 11 Japanese and 16 Taiwanese students. Unfortunately it was not possible to collect data from the other foreign students at NCUE that took part in the

program. Both sets of students completed pre- and post-CEP surveys.⁹ The participants were all of an intermediate or higher level of English ability¹⁰ and were able to express themselves in English with sufficient clarity. All students completed the pre-CEP survey prior to their initial meeting on the NCUE campus. The post-CEP survey was administered approximately two weeks after the program ended. They were instructed to simply complete each question with honest and unrestricted comments. Data analysis methods were informed by grounded theory.¹¹ For each question, comments were read and then re-read; notes were taken and commonly occurring responses highlighted. Themes that arose will be discussed in the section that follows.

5.2. Participants

Results of the data analysis for the pre-CEP questionnaire will be used to describe the participants – especially the expectations they held for this event and their beliefs about English language learning via cultural exchange. We begin with the Japanese students.

These 11 were interested in learning new things about Taiwan, its history,

⁹ Please refer to the appendix, which provides the contents of both questionnaires in condensed form.

¹⁰ Most students would fit in either the “B1” or “B2” category of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). Details are available at: http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Source/Framework_EN.pdf.

¹¹ Details on this method of qualitative data analysis are outlined by Strauss & Corbin.

language, good points, etc., but also hoped to share ideas and compare cultures through interaction. Linguistically, their main goal was just to communicate with the Taiwanese students – they wanted to interact, as they put it: “aggressively,” “meaningfully,” “purposefully” and “effectively.” All were positive about the topic of friendships, wanting to make many friends by speaking English, hoping to learn various things about Taiwan and its people. Even at this stage there was an expectation that these friendships would continue long after the program ended, through social networking services and even subsequent visits, whether to Japan or to Taiwan again. Some students were internally motivated as language learners, claiming they simply like English and desire to communicate in it with others – in particular with foreigners. They hope to use English for some purpose and to gain a sense of success in communication. Others mentioned external motivational factors – to meet personal goals such as becoming fluent speakers or getting a high TOEIC score. Most Japanese felt the length of the CEP would be “just right,” while others had the feeling it would either be too short or too long, unsure at this point what the exact purpose of the program was or would be. Most students thought studying in an English-speaking country was the best way to learn English well. Only one student at this point supported studying English in Taiwan, commenting that “location” is less important than “desire to learn.” The three remaining students were non-committal.

The Taiwanese were somewhat less concerned about setting their own personal learning goals than about *sharing* culture-learning experiences with the Japanese. This could be explained by what was evident to all overseas guests – that our hosts were serious about making the program a success. Two participants suggested that learning about Japanese students’ ideas/interests, etc., is quite important. Some voiced an interest in learning more about Taiwanese culture. Trips to popular locations were planned, which they were looking forward to visiting. Language learning was expected by all the Taiwanese participants. Unlike the Japanese, a key word used by many of the Taiwanese was “improve.” They expected to improve their communication skills in English by speaking with the Japanese students, picking up on different English accents this way and building courage to speak more. Friendship was a topic all the Taiwanese were positive about. For some it was the most important reason for joining the program. They really wanted to or hoped to make friends by sharing experiences, learning new things from each other and having fun as well. With regard to motivation, the Taiwanese were similar to the Japanese. Internal motivation was common among many who had a strong interest in English and/or a desire to communicate smoothly with foreigners, achieve success in communication and build self-esteem. External factors were noted by others. These include: getting a job, graduating, getting good grades, and to live or travel abroad. A few students claimed to be motivated by interests in music,

movies and books (in English). Almost all respondents thought the program was of the right length, with two feeling it might be too short. A slim majority felt learning English in an English-speaking country would be best since gains would be achieved via daily use, living in an ideal environment in which they would be surrounded by “correct” English. Others thought anywhere would be fine as long as one possessed persistence, strong desire and a positive attitude toward learning the language.

5.3. Results and Discussion

The method by which all questionnaire comments were analyzed naturally began with an examination of each item on the survey. During the process of axial coding and categorizing the data, it became evident that a fair degree of overlap was occurring between items on the forms. This was actually a positive discovery, indicating that certain themes were popular and participants desired to express their thoughts on them repeatedly. Most of the themes that stood out were shared by both the Japanese and Taiwanese students. Prior to presenting and discussing these, there were a few instances where the two groups differed, to which our attention will now be directed.

Most of the Taiwanese students were generally of the perception that the CEP proceeded as planned and expectations were met. On the other hand, the Japanese all felt that their expectations were surpassed. This suggests the hosts

possessed a great deal of confidence and made sure their efforts in putting together the CEP were not wasted. They expected great things and due to their commitment to meeting them, they were not disappointed. The Japanese, on the other hand, were recipients, fairly unsure of what exactly would happen at NCUE. Expecting an “average” CEP, they were all amazed by how all aspects of it went well beyond their expectations.

The next difference between the two groups concerns their perceptions of the native speaker in language learning. One of the post-CEP questionnaire items asked them if they believe going to an English-speaking country to interact with native speakers is “necessary” to gain strong English communication skills. The responses between the two groups differed rather significantly. Seven Japanese respondents (out of the ten who completed this question) claimed it was indeed necessary, stating that for reasons of learning grammatically correct English, understanding its proper usage, and being in an ideal English environment, the best way to gain English skills is to go where native speakers live. Tsuneyoshi (125) explains how from elementary school on, preferential treatment is given to the language and foreign culture of the native *English* teacher – a subtle system perpetuated at the expense of other foreign cultures (Chinese, Korean) that have a much higher representation of residents in Japan than foreigners from English-speaking countries. The tendency toward supporting native-speakerism is thus higher among Japanese respondents than

those from Taiwan. Eight of the thirteen Taiwanese students who offered comments on this question favored the opposing viewpoint – stating that the desire to communicate is most important than employing the native speaker, and opportunities to learn English in any environment can be found and acted upon if determination and courage are present. This finding appears to conflict with Wang and Lin, who conclude that among the four East-Asian countries they investigated (Japan, Korea, Taiwan and Hong Kong), there is little difference between them in how their governments value the native speaker as the ideal English language teacher in schools (13). In this study, however, the specific issue is whether Japanese and Taiwanese students feel it is useful to go abroad to reap the supposed benefits of conversing with native speakers. This difference between Japanese and Taiwanese students (also noted in an earlier study – Kimber 144), may be explained in two ways. First, teacher beliefs about native speakers may have been strongly conveyed to students in one university sub-culture, and differently or not at all in the other. Next, it is possible that economic factors are responsible. With the standard of living being somewhat higher in Japan than in Taiwan, it is not surprising to hear students make this claim. Living abroad is on average more feasible for Japanese students than for Taiwanese students.

The rest of the findings from the qualitative analysis of text entered by participants on the post-CEP questionnaire suggest commonalities between the

two groups. These are centered on three main themes: culture-learning, friendship and English communication skills.

Culture-learning is depicted by the Japanese and Taiwanese students as that which is both external and internal. The art, history, scenery and food which are part of a foreign land are attractive based on the unique interests of each individual. Many Japanese students noted how fascinated they were by certain aspects of Taiwan's culture, and particularly upon discovering how similarities and differences exist between Taiwan and Japan. The *internal* side is indicative of the people who live within a culture and thus embody it. Students regularly spoke about culture-learning as that which occurs by getting to know the character of the Taiwanese people and vice versa. This was accomplished by comparing and contrasting aspects of each culture which came to their attention while chatting. They were discovering new, interesting points of connection between them. Bonds of friendship were beginning to form as a result, facilitated by the presence of English as a common medium of communication.

Both solicited and unsolicited comments about "friendship" appeared repeatedly in the data received from both parties. The responses given to the third question on the questionnaire ("Which is more important to you as an English language learner: 1) to make good friends who speak English with you, or, 2) to speak with a native English speaker?"), provides evidence that friendships are considered extremely conducive toward the development of

English language abilities. Since English is the common (international) language that makes meaningful interaction possible, students see a clear connection between it and friendship. Some noted how nervousness, normally present in speaking with native speakers, was diminished. Since most would agree that nervousness and anxiety are relatively synonymous terms, there is support for this finding in a study by Dörnyei and Kormos, where it was suggested a tendency toward anxiety reduction in verbal interaction occurs when one speaker has an interlocutor also demonstrating low anxiety (296). It was made clear by the comments offered in the fourth questionnaire item (“How important to you is “friendship with other speakers” when trying to stay motivated as a language learner? What motivation factors are MORE important than this (if any)?”), that friendships were motivational as well with regard to English language learning. Numerous “additional” comments on the survey about the role new friends played in the CEP, add further validity to the finding that the factors of friendship and perceived gains in English speaking proficiency are somewhat intertwined.

In the remainder of this section, as the theme of English communication skills is presented and discussed, Figure 1 will be used to encapsulate how the interplay between the three main themes from the data appears to support certain aspects of motivation. The diagram is to be considered transitional – as further studies addressing CEPs are undertaken, adjustments will likely be made. For

the time being, it is helpful in demonstrating how individuals may become more motivated when all the themes work together; this compound effect instigates the growth of “purpose.” It brings together factors not unlike those uncovered in a study undertaken by Wu and Kawamura.¹²

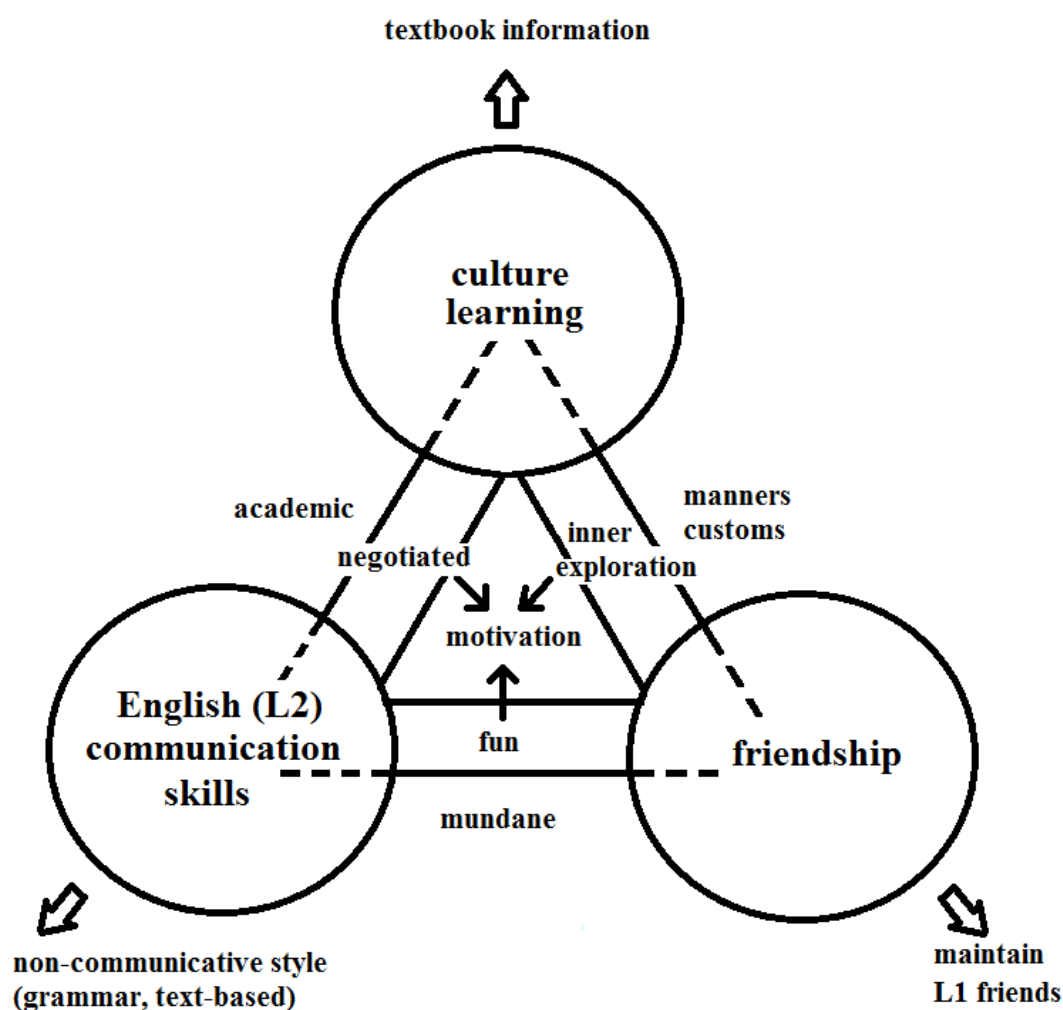


Figure 1. Visualizing the relationship between culture, friendship and English learning

¹² In their mixed-methods study on the attitudes of Japanese and Taiwanese students engaged in online interaction tasks, four factors that were extracted by quantitative analysis include: 1) Cross-cultural relationship expectation, 2) Intercultural friendship orientation, 3) Importance of communication skills, and 4) Contribution to English and cultural learning.

The following exemplar describes how it works. Suppose a female student from Japan were keenly interested in learning more about Taiwanese-style calligraphy. She could explore this theme educationally with the help of a textbook, but it would be academic, not negotiated through dialogic, verbal means – a type of learning that is non-communicative. By speaking English with an able interlocutor, however, much would change and motivation to learn more would arguably increase. Next, add the dimension of friendship. Would not her motivation be enhanced even more if a new friend – a Taiwanese student – were part of the learning process? At first, communication might be mundane if the two were still relative strangers, but in time, once smiles and laughter are added to communication and a bond begins to form, the entire learning process becomes “fun” as anxiety disappears and WTC increases. To complete the cycle, not only would the Japanese student learn about the topic of study, but a personal dimension would emerge, due to the presence of her new interlocutor-friend. Sharing of experiences and insights into calligraphy would occur, allowing the Japanese student to go beyond a basic knowledge of the cold manners and customs of a different culture. She would begin to explore her own beliefs about calligraphy by placing them alongside those of her new friend. This richer level of culture-learning would not be possible if the Japanese student decided to try to figure out calligraphy by communicating in Japanese about it with L1 friends.

The data I have analyzed in this study thus point toward the concepts depicted in Figure 1. The three circles in the diagram indicate the three salient components of the CEP which are tightly connected to motivation – motivation to speak a new language, motivation to develop close bonds of friendship and motivation to engage in deeper culture-learning.

The predominant claim by both groups was that the CEP worked – there was a lot of English spoken in meaningful and fun ways. With regard to this theme, some students commented that speaking with the Taiwanese students (and vice versa) did not make them nervous at all although a few thought they might have difficulty at first. Students quickly discovered they were all roughly at a similar level of competency in English. This led students to speak “without fear” as commented on by some. Because all were not beginners but had already spent six or more years studying English in formal classroom environments, gains in speaking and listening proficiency, which many participants claim occurred over the short period of the CEP, are not surprising to hear about in light of a study by Brecht et al., where it was stated: “investment in grammar instruction in the early years of instruction may result in advances in speaking and listening skills at the upper intermediate and advanced levels” (59). A quantitative study by Shimizu et al. offers evidence for a positive relationship existing between English ability and motivation (127), which the findings of this study also support. Many CEP participants commented that due to their common

knowledge of English, there was a means by which to communicate and become friends. Using the language authentically had been a relatively uncommon experience for many of them prior to the CEP and they came to realize how motivating this was.

6. Conclusions, Limitations and Future Considerations

For both Taiwanese and Japanese students, the typical, deductive style of learning English in the university classroom was completely set aside in order to learn inductively for four full days in Taiwan. Instead of reading textbook dialogs, filling in blanks and translating sentences for a test, they simply communicated verbally, learning from each other according to whatever topic of conversation happened to come up amidst a busy schedule of events over a period of four days.

The purpose of introducing Figure 1 was to present the findings in a simplistic fashion. The reality is that, as stated earlier, this transitional illustration is only meant to lead us to the next stage in researching the macro and micro phenomena which arose as a result of the CEP. With a small number of participants available from which qualitative data was gathered, we may have caught a glimpse of the general mechanics behind these students' motivation orientations, but quantitative studies are necessary to reveal more fully what this study was too limited in scope to provide. Future studies should consider

applying instruments such as the Intercultural Willingness to Communicate Scale (IWCS), the Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (ISS)¹³ or some other means by which to quantitatively measure motivational factors, such as the questionnaire recently developed by Wu and Chang (527).

The all-encompassing term “motivation,” which I have placed at the center of Figure 1, is explicated by descriptors like “intrinsic,” “instrumental” and also by components such as international posture, (low) anxiety and (heightened) WTC. The data analyzed and presented here, however, is unable to verify the exact nature of the constructs that apply. What is apparent from this study is that all participants demonstrated a strong interest in culture-learning, making cross-cultural friends and improving English communication skills. The CEP, I suppose, drew them away from the standard model of learning, where they would usually stay with L1 friends, read about Taiwanese culture from textbooks and study English by non-verbal grammar-based methods. Based on the findings of this study, the majority of students were attracted to the paradigm that has been introduced.

¹³ These assessment tools are noted in a paper by Wu and Kawamura 2.

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Appendix – Questionnaires (Pre & Post)

Pre-CEP Questionnaire

Name _____ / Male/Female (please circle) / Home country: _____

1. What are some of your expectations for the cultural exchange program in regard to: Culture-learning? English language learning? Forming friendships? Any other theme?
2. When it comes to learning English, what factor (thing) really helps you stay motivated? Explain.
3. This program lasts one week. Do you feel this length of time is too short, too long, just right...?
4. In this special program we will use real, meaningful English in Taiwan. Do you, however, feel it would be better to go to an English-speaking country to gain strong communication skills? Explain.

Post-CEP Questionnaire

Name: _____ / Male/Female (please circle) / Home country: _____

1. Expectations – Did your expectations change as a result of the program? Please explain.
2. Language – Did you think that using English for cross-cultural communication was helpful for you as a language learner? Please explain your thoughts on this.
3. Friendships – Which is more important to you as an English language learner: 1) to make good friends who speak English with you, or, 2) to speak with a native English speaker? Please explain.
4. Motivation – How important to you is “friendship with other speakers” when trying to stay motivated as a language learner? What motivation factors are MORE important than this (if any)?
5. Length of program – The program lasted 4-5 days. Can you imagine a much longer program (for example, one month or a whole semester)? If it were a much longer program, with daily interaction in English this way, discuss how you think your English communication skills would improve.
6. Native speakers – Do you feel it is necessary to study abroad in an English-speaking country and interact with native speakers to gain strong English communication skills? Why? / Why not?
7. Culture – How do you feel personally about the culture-learning that took place during this exchange program? What were the most positive points? (were there any negatives?)
8. Final comments – Overall, what was your impression of the program? If there are any additional comments you would like to make, PLEASE do so below.