Field: Writing, Others (Intercultural Communication)

Enhancing Students' Intercultural English Communication Skills: A Case Study on Japanese and Taiwanese University Students

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Introduction
This presentation is based on an international pen-pal project that Joshua Borden, (PhD Student, University of London) and the presenter have been collaboratively implemented in our classroom since the fall of 2006, when Borden was a lecturer at National Central University in Taiwan. Kurihara and Borden believe that in order to help students acquire global communication skills in English, teaching microlinguistic features of English such as vocabulary and grammatical structures is far from sufficient as misunderstandings or difficulties in communication often arise because learners’ are not fully aware of the cultural influences on their interlocutors’ linguistic behavior as well as their own. As English is often and increasingly used globally as a lingua franca, there is a growing need for English language students to nurture sensitivity towards both linguistic and cultural differences of those they communicate with. The goal of this project is to have our students get involved in real-world communication in English with non-native speakers and investigate how the two groups of students use the language similarly or differently as a means of communication. Based on the analysis on the students’ e-mail interactions, implications for English education will be made from the intercultural communication perspective.

Procedure
Dozens of pen-pal pairs were made between student participants from multiple universities each semester. Of these pairs, those from Chuo University in Tokyo
and National Central University in Taiwan (20 pairs on average per semester) will be analyzed in this presentation. For the project, students sent approximately two e-mails a week to their pen-pals exchanging opinions on various issues such as traditions, customs, beliefs and social problems of their home counties. The students regularly submitted journals to reflect on their interactions and completed a questionnaire at the end of the project. All of these tasks are analyzed for this presentation.

Findings

Overall, the activity was a great success. Since it was only a relatively short-term project, limited to communication by e-mail, most students did not appear to experience any "serious" communicative conflicts, but some patterns of misunderstandings were found. The activity also helped reduce stereotypes held by students, as some students admitted that what they had thought to be true about their partner or partner's country was, in fact, not so, which enabled them to modify their misconceptions. Detailed summary of findings and specific examples of interactions will be given in the presentation.

References

