

報告

Personal Communication to Global Communication

Hakodate University

Joslynn Abe

Exchange Student Nankai University China 2016-2018

Linghui Zhang

Abstract

Being able to communicate in your mother tongue with friends and family is easy and comfortable. Meeting new people may, at first, cause some distress, but soon those people become closer and then communication is more relaxing. Moving from personal communication to interpersonal communication is a natural process all adults acquire naturally in their mother tongue. However, moving further into global communication requires motivation and perseverance to achieve good results. In a second language, the hurdle may seem insurmountable. Nevertheless, many Japanese have done just that: realized the ability to communicate clearly and effectively in English with speakers of other languages. How did they manage to do this? Do they share any common traits, which we can use to help teach current students today? The goal of this research is to try to discover some commonalities and characteristics these speakers possess and then use the results to better plan and teach students today.

Key Words: global communication, motivation, English education, limit of education, personal communication

Introduction

We conducted one-on-one interviews with members of the Hakodate University staff who exhibit exceptional English communication abilities (see Appendix B). These abilities consist of speaking English with speakers of other languages, but is not limited to only speaking. They are able to express themselves in a variety of situations and do not hesitate to challenge themselves in new situations. They are global communicators who have active characters. They want to communicate with other people and are not hesitant to speak other languages. They each found their own motivation to learn and to communicate in other languages. So, what is the difference between people who can become global communicators and those who find it too difficult? How can people change their ideas about global communication?

Background

When Japanese students first learn English in Junior High School, they generally only speak English with their teacher and classmates, in a controlled setting. Until recently, formal lessons begin in the first year of Junior High School when children are 12 or 13 years old. Though some elementary schools have started lessons in English, the official curriculum for Grade 5 and 6 students begins in April 2020 in all public elementary schools nationally. The goal of this movement is to increase the overall ability of English speakers in Japan by exposing children to English from an earlier age.

In addition, the recent move in education to active learning will encourage children to use basic English phrases and sentences in class with other classmates. This trend away from teacher-centered learning can also be viewed as a movement from personal communication to interpersonal communication. How can some children make the leap to communicating beyond their personal comfort zone? How can teachers learn from excellent communicators and help other students acquire the skills necessary to become global communicators?

Communication

For the purpose of this paper, personal communication refers to interacting with family, close friends and those we deal with on a daily basis. Interpersonal communication is interaction with class/work mates, acquaintances and people we meet on a somewhat regular basis, however, they are not within our innermost circle. Global communication, on the other hand, refers to interacting with strangers and people from different areas.

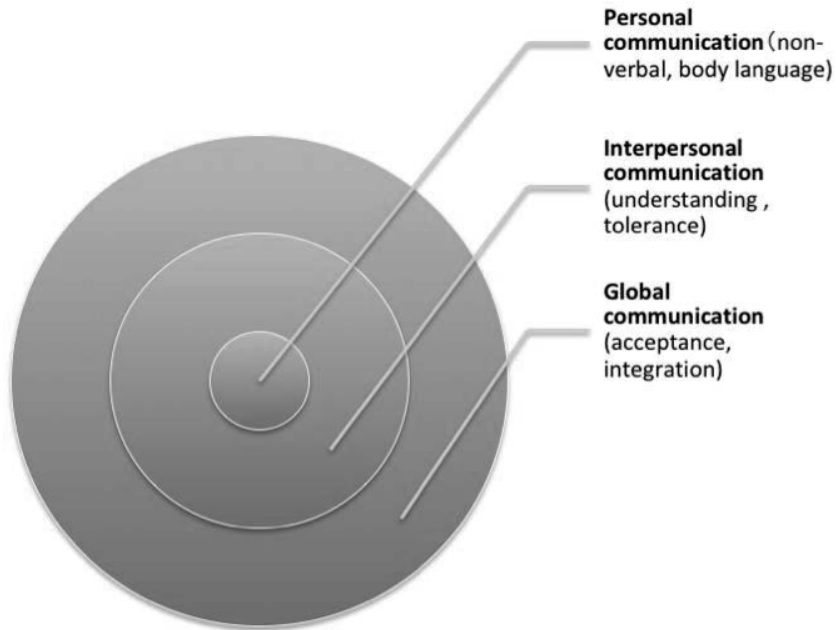
Communication consists of much more than simply words and grammar strung together in sentences and questions. Non-verbal skills, including body language, play a crucial role in how others view speakers and how speakers wish to present themselves. Body language can convey much more than words alone and often communicates the message much more clearly than words. Paralanguage, such as tone of voice, volume, posture and pitch all make an impression on listeners. Within your personal communication group, non-verbal skills are mostly naturally learned from childhood onward and are not likely to be noticed as a means of communication. Moving into interpersonal communication, however, an understanding of others who are different and attempting to comprehend possible misunderstandings is important to getting along with others. In addition, a tolerance of the differences is essential to good communicators. Finally, global communication requires a further step of acceptance of these differences and the ability to integrate those differences to achieve a global perspective.

Interview Process

The interviews were conducted in such a way as to allow the interviewees to talk about their personal experiences freely in English. The questions were created to be open-ended so as to encourage interviewees to elaborate on their thoughts and experiences with English education (see Appendix A). For a full synopsis of the interviews, see Appendix C.

Most of the interviewees completed their education in a test-based curriculum with

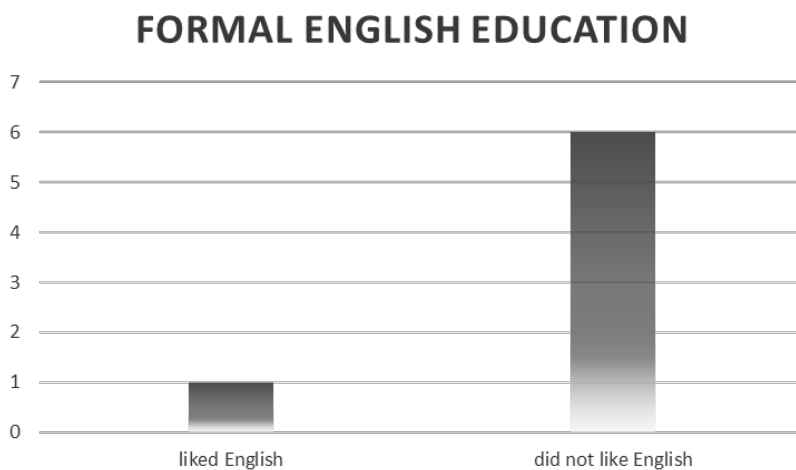
little chance to communicate using English in the classroom. Reading, grammar and translation were the main goals of the English education system. This situation has created a generation of people who feel that they cannot communicate well, beyond the basic level, even after six years of formal education. Now, English will be taught in elementary schools with the hope that younger children will not only enjoy speaking and communicating in English but also have a better grasp of the different style of communication required when speaking with non-Japanese. The goal is, therefore, for a new generation to become better communicators in other languages.



This figure shows concentric circles to demonstrate the growing realm of communicative competence

Interview SummaryInterest in English from Formal Education

The majority of the interviewees did not feel that they could communicate in English well enough after completing their education. Though the grammar studies were helpful, it was not until they were traveling or working and the need to use English arose, that they began to seriously concentrate on English speaking and communication. Only one interviewee stated that due to family circumstances of being a host family for many years, the desire and need to communicate with non-Japanese was a natural situation. This interviewee felt that English was useful and enjoyed studying languages. Another respondent felt that it is not enough to have an interest in English only, but that English can and should be used to study something. The ability to use English effectively should be used as a means to acquire further knowledge or skills. In addition, English can be used to share skills or information with speakers of other languages.



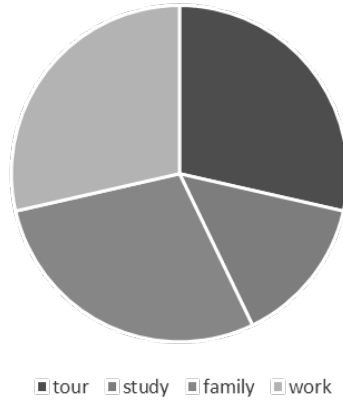
Travel outside of Japan

This is one area that affected most of the participants in our interviews. The first exposure to another culture and language reinforced the need to be able to communicate in English. Survival English developed into more natural and fluent English through experience and study. Either through work or personal travel, the experience of using English in another country greatly changed each member's outlook on English. One participant expressed that communication does not change for travel or studying. For instance, using Japanese for traveling in Japan is no different from using English for traveling abroad. The use of language is the same. Therefore, according to him, the skill of being able to communicate in any language is the prerequisite for international travel.

Another interviewee did not want to travel outside of Japan at first, but was required to go. After the experience abroad, however, he stated that he wanted to learn English to communicate with others because English was the only language everyone could use, even if only in a limited way.

Family situations, work situations or study situations all required traveling outside of Japan for our interviewees. The motivation to travel and use English was extrinsically applied in that each participant did not choose to go merely for the enjoyment of practically using English. In fact, two participants did go abroad for travel purposes only, however, the results were such that motivation to improve English communication skills was heightened before a second trip.

Reasons for going abroad



Influences from Others

Most of the participants said that friends, family and books influenced them. One member met an inspiring university professor who gave him many ideas about study and life. Another interviewee was strongly influenced by his father who encouraged him to travel abroad and learn many languages. These opportunities changed his outlook on life. Though these results are not surprising, I had thought that perhaps an extraordinary English teacher in Junior or Senior high school would have strongly influenced some participants to pursue higher education in English.

Personal Outlook

With regards to English study and communication, each participant expressed a unique opinion. This makes it difficult to draw concrete conclusions. However, a few members answered that a natural curiosity and passion to learn things outside of the realm of English per se, helped them achieve their goals. Others stated that they are not completely satisfied with their English ability yet, but I felt that there was no

difficulty in communicating or understanding each member. A long-term approach to learning English seemed to be a prominent theme through the interviews. Our participants felt that their communication skills were not yet what they hoped them to be and they wished to continue to pursue further practice.

The question of motivation arose during the interview process. Since our participants were extrinsically motivated to begin English studies, ie, at school, at work or due to family situations, the desire to learn to communicate in English lacked personal motivation. A need to develop intrinsic motivation to learn a foreign language is required to become a global communicator. Our interviewees demonstrated the motivation necessary to realize the outcome of global communication, however, not through the formal education system.

It is sincerely hoped that the education system is able to instill an intrinsic motivation in the students. The joy of learning another language and using it to communicate with others is a major goal of the new English education syllabus in Japan and it is hoped that young children can enjoy the benefits of such effective teaching in elementary school from 2020.

Conclusion

The results of this research were both surprising and revealing. Surprising because each of our interviewees had excellent communication abilities, yet still felt that they were not effective speakers of English. They did not enjoy formal education and mostly learned to speak 'on the job'. Yet, I believe that their formal education at Junior and Senior high schools was very important for their future success using English.

What made the results revealing was that there was no easy answer as to how to move from personal communication to global communication. All interviewees worked hard to become the excellent speakers they are now and there were no short cuts to reach their goals. Personal motivation, interests in other cultures and countries, a desire to meet new people and share life stories are all necessary components to building a global communicator.

Based on these interviews, I would like to encourage Japanese students of all ages to interact more in the classroom in English and share their personal experiences with each other. Being a good communicator takes time and practice, involving not only English skills, but also a keen awareness of the importance of non-verbal skills and how you view others (understanding and tolerance). Traveling abroad and/or meeting people from other cultures is one of the best ways to ensure a future with open-minded individuals who can bridge cultural gaps with tolerance, compassion and understanding.

Additional Comments from Linghui Zhang

Before becoming a foreign student in Japan, I had a teacher who influenced me a lot. When I was in senior high school, I had an English teacher who often told us about her life in other countries. After listening to those things, I got a dream that I want to go abroad. During my university, I had a chance to go abroad, and I told my parents. They said if you want to go, you may. So, I am in Japan now. Actually, going abroad, communicating with people using foreign languages are not very difficult things. If you want to do it, then you can. Most of our interviewees could not speak English when they first went abroad, but now they can. Learning languages and going abroad were the motivation to study even more and become excellent global communicators.

It is strange that when the interviewees started to learn English, they said they wanted to continue English because they wanted to use it to communicate with non-Japanese people. I have heard a story that some Japanese students went to Taiwan to have a conference. At first, they felt nervous because of the language, so before leaving, they started to learn English and Chinese. However, after they went there, they felt relaxed, because the Taiwanese students could speak Japanese. So, they could communicate using Japanese. What I am thinking about is: why did the Japanese students stop trying to use English and Chinese? Was it because the Taiwanese students could speak Japanese? In my opinion, language is a skill to help you to learn more from somebody. But some Japanese people are afraid of speaking English to non-Japanese people. Why they afraid of that? Sometimes we are afraid of speaking foreign languages to other people because we are afraid of making mistakes. But for learning languages, more mistakes means more advances. Most of our interviewees said the

limitation of English education in Japan is they cannot learn how to speak English in their class. The teacher teaches vocabulary and grammar in the class. To be honest, vocabulary and grammar are important in English learning, but after you own a vast number of words and grammar, what do you want to do? You should speak. When you start to speak, you will find that you can and you learn more from other people. Actually few people care whether your grammar is correct or not or how many words you can say. Take me as an example. As a foreign student in Japan, when I first came, I could only speak a little Japanese, but when I talk with Japanese people, using even simple words, they can understand what I want to tell them. It is difficult to take the first step, but after the first step, it will be easier.

Appendix A

Personal Communication to Global Communication

Please answer the following questions with as much information as possible (including examples):

1. How long did you study English?
2. Why did you choose English?
3. What did you want to know through English?
4. What do you do to help students like English?
5. First, what interested you to go abroad?
6. Who influenced you to have new ideas?
7. What do you think the limitations of English education in Japan are?

8. Are you afraid of using English to communicate with non-Japanese people? Why or why not?

Any other comments?

Thank you very much for your time!

Appendix B

The staff members interviewed for this paper are as follows:

Interviewee number 1:

Kazumasa Takahashi, Hakodate University, Office Staff

Interviewee number 2:

Takayuki Naganuma, Hakodate University, Office Staff

Interviewee number 3:

Shinji Takahashi, Hakodate University, Teaching Staff

Interviewee number 4:

Toshie Yaegashi, Hakodate University, Office Staff

Interviewee number 5:

Akiko Milner, Hakodate University, Office Staff

Interviewee number 6:

Akira Saizen, Hakodate University, Teaching Staff

Interviewee number 7:

Rin Fujiwara, Hakodate University, Teaching Staff

Appendix CInterview Synopses

Interview #1: (Kazumasa Takahashi)

Q1:

I studied in class (6 years), homework, entrance tests; I like speaking to everyone, so at 18 years old, I went to England for 2 weeks alone and could not speak well enough; at 19 years old, I went to the USA for 3 weeks traveling by bus across the country; at 20 years old, I went to Australia on a working holiday

Q2:

My father's trading company needed English and he encouraged me to study 2 or 3 languages

Q3:

I wanted to know about many countries, cultures and ideas and without English that would be difficult.

Q4:

I encourage students to go abroad which is the best way to learn English. However, if money is a problem, students should try to talk to foreign people here in their community.

Q5:

My father's encouragement and at that time, I could not decide between going to the USA or the UK.

Q6:

I have been influenced by every place I visited, everyone I have met and my family, since my father is an entrepreneur.

Q7:

The problem with English education now is that speaking is not important in the classroom, but it is the best for living with people. More teachers are needed and the students must make chances to speak.

Q8:

Though my vocabulary is limited, I can tell my ideas to others and I feel that my English is enough for living.

Interview #2: (Takayuki Naganuma)

Q1:

I studied for 6 years in school and then at university (a little), but after I began working, I was sent on many business trips which was a very effective way to use English.

Q2:

I had no choice about studying English as it was compulsory, but now I like to study. I also studied Spanish, which I found easier because I could use just words to communicate.

Q3:

I wanted to know how to communicate with people from other countries and cultures.

Q4:

I encourage students to join the Hakodate University English Café where they can communicate in an enjoyable setting with a funny and kind English teacher.

Q5:

My company sent me abroad for business to Russia, Malta, Morocco and Mexico for varying periods of about 3 months for a total of 5 years. Also, I went to Arizona, USA for my honeymoon.

Q6:

I have been influenced by all the people I have met until now, and especially the University President, Mr. Junji Nomata thanks to his innovative ideas.

Q7:

The education system style is too strict about grammar, which makes the students nervous and leads them to dislike English. I hope they can enjoy English using songs for communication. Also, after going abroad, they will want to study more to be able to speak better.

Q8:

I'm not afraid to use English. I have an 'I can' attitude and a strong intent to understand what others are trying to say.

Interview #3: (Shinji Takahashi)

Q1:

Officially, in an educational setting, I studied English for 10 years. However, using

English on business trips became a necessity, so I would say that most of my education in English was OJT (on the job training).

Q2:

I was forced to study English by the education system for 10 years. When I was 23 years old, I traveled abroad to Nepal for mountain climbing. I stayed 5 months and needed English to communicate. I also studied the German language at university in Japan.

Q3:

I had much stress in my trading job and I needed English for paperwork between countries.

Q4:

To help students, I hope they make friends to become more open-minded, to know the world and hopefully, to go abroad.

Q5:

My first interest to go abroad was for mountaineering.

Q6:

I have been influenced by friends, seniors at school, books and by thinking to myself.

Q7:

It is important to have other interests in order to improve English. In other words, use English to learn more about your hobby, for example. Also, there are no short cuts to learning English; day by day you need to study to improve.

Q8:

Sometimes the differences between Japanese and Westerners are very big, but we must try to bridge these differences.

Q9:

I spent 3 years abroad and 3 years working in a company using English; 6 months in the Philippines and 6 months in Vietnam.

Interview #4: (Toshie Yaegashi)

Q1:

I studied English for 10-11 years in school, including University where I studied Linguistics.

Q2:

I thought English was very useful and I liked to study languages. I also spent 3 days in Australia when I was a junior high school student, which inspired me to learn more.

Q3:

I wanted to use languages to learn about the global world. I spent about 1 year in Finland and was interested in Finland because of the PISA test results, which consistently puts Finland at the top for education ability. I wanted to learn more about their education system.

Q4:

I want students to have more chances to communicate with non-Japanese people.

Q5:

My family has been a host family for over 20 years and every summer, students from abroad stayed with us for 2 months (since I was about 2 years old).

Q6:

I liked watching DVDs and listening to music. Also, I tried to speak English and create chances to speak a lot. My older sister influenced me because she went abroad and began working in the movie industry.

Q7:

I think Japanese students' shyness is a limitation and their hesitation to speak out as well.

Q8:

I'm not afraid to communicate in English and since I was a child, I thought it natural to use English.

Interview #5: (Akiko Milner)

Q1:

I have studied English since I was 12 years old, for 6 years. I got help from my high school English teacher, which inspired me to study harder.

Q2:

English is a common language and I like to communicate with people to share ideas with others.

Q3:

I really want to know what other people are thinking and try to understand others well.

Q4:

I hope students have a curiosity and passion to learn something. I want them to talk more and through English input, they can improve their English output and speak to many people.

Q5:

When I was a student, I went to Australia and New Zealand. Then I traveled to England where I planned to stay for a year.

Q6:

I have been influenced by my friends, my husband, my children and university students. Also, my high school English teacher influenced me.

Q7:

I think the test-oriented system is not good for communication.

Q8:

I'm still afraid to use English to communicate because I lack confidence in my English ability.

Interview #6: (Akira Saizen)

Q1:

I have studied English for 40 years since I was a junior high school student. I like studying English and I was a pretty good student of English.

Q2:

I had no choice but to study English. I chose to study French as my second foreign language.

Q3:

I wanted to study language from the linguistic point of view.

Q4:

I want students to understand that language use is the same. For example, traveling in Japan and using Japanese is no different from traveling in another country and using English. The language is different, but the usage is not.

Q5:

I wanted to go to the Netherlands because I was interested in a Dutch artist and wanted to visit the museums. I was 18 years old and spent 1 week there. Then I visited the USA to meet a friend and stayed there for 10 days.

Q6:

I have been influenced by books, the Internet, my friends and family. Also, I had an inspiring college teacher who influenced me considerably.

Q7:

It is limiting to try to speak in English in a Japanese classroom. I try to talk with non-Japanese in English rather than with Japanese people in English.

Q8:

I'm sometimes afraid to speak in English, but I'm also sometimes afraid to speak in Japanese! Using English is more difficult, but it is the same activity.

Interview #7: (Rin Fujiwara)

Q1:

I studied English for 6 years, but not officially in school as my family moved abroad often and I needed to speak English or other languages.

Q2:

I did not really choose English because I needed it for studying at university.

Q3:

I wanted to gain knowledge and I'm particularly interested in criminology in Asia and the USA.

Q4:

I encourage students to read in English. For example, they should read documents or other materials in English.

Q5:

I have had many experiences abroad due to my family traveling. I spent from 3 months to 1 year living in various countries and going to school there. I feel like a citizen of the Earth.

Q6:

I have been influenced by books.

Q7:

My studies of English were not in Japan, so it is difficult for me to say what the limitations are in Japan. However, I spent the past 10 years in Japan and notice that the speaking ability of students is quite limited.

Q8:

I'm not afraid to use English to communicate. I can use 4 languages and I think living in a country is the easiest way to learn it. Japanese students need more chances to speak English in order to improve.