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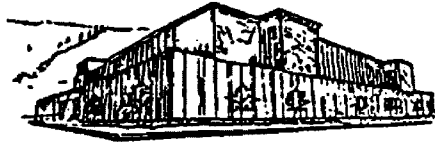
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**Cross-cultural Studies of the ESL Classroom:
A Bridge between American and Japanese Classrooms**

By

Tomoe Ito

B.A., University of Montana, USA, 1998

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the degrees of

Master of Arts

Communication Studies

The University of Montana

May 2001

Approved by:



Chairperson



Dean, Graduate School

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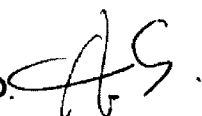
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Communication Studies

Cross-cultural Studies of the ESL Classroom: A Bridge between American and Japanese Classrooms

Director: Alan Sillars Ph.D.



The ESL teachers and students make adaptations and accommodation in order to find a middle ground in between their different cultures. This research examines the culture of ESL classrooms, analyzes cross-cultural communication between ESL teachers and Japanese students, and identifies mutual accommodations made by ESL teachers and students. Preliminary interviews were first conducted with six ESL teachers and twelve Japanese students. Follow-up interviews were conducted after observing six ESL classes for twelve hours. The study was designed to identify the cultural factors that both ESL teachers and students bring into the classroom contributing to the ESL culture.

Five themes were coded and discussed: ESL culture, expectations, educational backgrounds, learning styles, and teaching philosophy/strategies. Although these categories were overlapping with one another, the results went far beyond these concepts. For discussion of the results, six communication aspects were focused on and discussed: individualism versus collectivism, high versus low- context communication, directness versus indirectness, nonverbal versus verbal communication, and gender issues. The results of this study were used to identify the cultural adaptations and mutual accommodations made by both ESL teachers and students.

“When You Enter the Classroom, You Are No Longer in Japanese Culture.”

Introduction

The ESL classroom provides multi-cultural settings in which many students from various countries get together and study English as their second language. Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey (1988) state that “the culture from which individuals come affects the way they communicate, and the way individuals communicate can change the culture they share” (p.17). Therefore, the various cultures contributed by the ESL students may influence the way they interact with their teachers. In other words, the ESL students’ ways of communication may shape the culture of the ESL classroom. At the same time, the American culture in which the ESL students reside may also affect the interaction between the students and American teachers in the ESL classroom and may contribute to cross-cultural communication.

Since there are one hundred thirty (130) Japanese students at the University of Montana, the majority of ESL students are Japanese. Most of the ESL classes offered at the university include a number of Japanese students. In addition, there may be some Japanese-specific communicative functions that I, being a Japanese student, have taken for granted. Therefore, this study focuses on ESL culture affected by Japanese cultural communication as well as Japanese students’ contribution to ESL cross-cultural communication.

Even though the Japanese have been studied and reported about often and by many researchers of different backgrounds, in many respects the Japanese are still considered to do some “strange,” “surprising,” “hilarious” things, or their behavior

simply makes “no sense” to some Americans (Lebra, 1976). One teacher informant, who has studied Japanese and taught English in Japan for one and a half years, states that she often finds that she knows nothing about Japanese culture. Many communication scholars have studied the culture of Japan; however, not many have studied the culture in the context of cross-cultural settings as in the ESL classroom.

This study of cross-cultural communication may provide ESL teachers with insights into Japanese culture, including the different learning styles of Japanese students as well as their communicative behaviors. Having taken a few ESL classes in my undergraduate courses and having participated in American culture for six years, my interest lies in the cross-cultural communicative interactions between Japanese students and American teachers of ESL classroom. When I attended an ESL class in 1994, I experienced a discrepancy between communicating as a Japanese student and communicating as the American culture expects.

Backgrounds

“Why don’t you speak up in the class?”

“Because I am not supposed to...” This is the direct conversation I had with my ESL teacher at a class conference in 1994. Although I had never missed the class and did fairly well on the examinations, I had never actively participated in the class discussions. Being raised in Japan for eighteen years, I did not know that my teacher had expected me to speak up in the class discussions. My learning styles, as well as my way of speaking, had already been shaped through a social interactions (Carbaugh, 1996) among Japanese.

As I became aware of differences in communicative behaviors between American teachers and Japanese students, I started to learn the appropriate interactions that the ESL

teacher expected. Based on the rationale discussed above, I decided to focus this qualitative study on cross-cultural communication in the ESL classrooms of the English Language Institute (ELI, hereafter) and in the ESL classrooms of the University of Montana.

Purpose of the study

Gudykunst and Nishida (1994) state that cross-cultural communication between Japanese and Americans can be improved if individuals become aware of how people in each culture communicate. Gudykunst and Nishida (1994) outline three components for effective communication: motivation, knowledge, and skills. This field research may contribute to teaching effectiveness, as well as communication effectiveness, by providing knowledge about communicative behaviors between Japanese students and American teachers in ESL classroom.

Since the ESL classroom has not been studied with respect to its particular culture and communicative functions, this study may contribute to international students who enroll in ESL classes, as well as American teachers who intent to teach English as a second language. The study also reveals the importance of studying cultural-specific learning styles and communicative interactions shaped by participants of various cultures in ESL classroom. Specifically, this study explores the factors that influence Japanese students' learning styles and communicative behaviors in ESL classroom. There are many communication rituals that Japanese students take for granted. By interviewing Japanese students and American teachers who teach ESL classes, this study identifies and compares the different perspectives on Japanese students' learning styles and American teachers' teaching styles. The implications of this study may help ESL teachers to further

understand the communication styles and educational background of their Japanese students as well as their specific learning styles. The study focuses on the adaptations that both ESL teachers and students make in order to accommodate their differences in educational background.

Literature Review

Based on my preliminary observations and other research, the following cultural factors are believed to have contributed to the culture of ESL classroom and Japanese students' learning styles and their communicative interactions with ESL teachers: individualism versus collectivism, low-context versus high-context, nonverbal versus verbal communication, direct versus indirect communication styles, and culturally-based gender perceptions. It is important to keep in mind that there is considerable overlap between these concepts even though each will be discussed separately. In this section, I will compare Japanese cultural communication with respect to each of the above phenomena.

Individualism versus Collectivism

Individualism and collectivism have been discussed by a number of Japanese and American researchers. This cultural pattern has been shown to predict social behavior (Wheeler, Reis, & Bond, 1989) in a number of ways. Triandis, et al. (1993) studied the key elements of collectivism and individualism as they correlate each other and with other constructs, such as cooperation, competition, self-reliance, and so forth within a culture. Triandis, et al. argue that the socialization patterns found in collectivist culture

emphasize obedience, duty, sacrifice for the group; cooperation, harmony, and favoritism toward the in-group; acceptance of in-group authorities; and interdependence.

Schwartz (1990) has argued that individualism and collectivism essentially reflect basic value emphases. These two value emphases presumably function as group ideologies and as guides to individual behavior (Schwartz, 1990). As Trandis (1989) has stated, individualism and collectivism are part of broad syndromes of attitudes, self-concepts, and behaviors.

Based on his study, Schwartz concludes that the following types of values are important factors to the average person in collectivist cultures: tradition, restrictive conformity, and the interpersonal subset of social values. He argues that the people from collectivist cultures express the greater identity of group interest rather than individual interest in the communal societies.

Leung and Iwawaki (1988) studied cultural collectivism and distributive justice, with the assumption that a culture's collectivism level influences people's preferences for different distributive rules. They argue that collectivists behave in a business-like, and sometimes even exploitative manner toward out-group members. Based on these assumptions, Leung and Iwawaki studied cultural boundaries, with an attempt to establish the generosity effect in a comparison of four cultures; China, the United States, South Korea and Japan. The results of their study suggest that Japanese college students may be more individualistic than their Chinese counterparts (Leung & Iwawaki, 1988). Their study shows that "across the Japanese and American groups, collectivism was correlated with both the equality score and the equity score (p.43)." In other words, the more collectivist a subject is, the more he or she would follow the equality rule and the less one

would follow the equity rule. Leung and Iwawaki (1988) state that the Japanese students in the study were, in fact, as individualistic as the American students. They argue that these results may have been caused by an individualistic trend in Japan.

Intercultural Communication Patterns

There are more than one hundred books and articles that discuss the unique characteristics of Japanese interpersonal communication styles (Ito, 1992). Many studies of Japanese communication styles use American communication styles as their basis of comparison. In his article, Ito (1992) discusses various reasons given for each difference in interpersonal communication styles. Although it has been emphasized that interpersonal communication styles are determined by individualism or collectivism, Ito proposes a new concept of “modern collectivism” as a solution to several problems with the concepts of collectivism and individualism.

In his discussion of modern collectivism, Ito (1992) argues that people’s selfish tendencies to maximize their collective interests at the cost of other groups’ interests. However, as Clark (1977) has pointed out, Japan has been changing itself into an ideological society in response to its other relations. Ito (1992) argues that this change may make the traditional Japanese communication style more like the American style (p.263).

Goldman (1991) provides with an inventory of how Japanese generally perceive Americans communicating. Goldman presents many types of communicative behavior that are typical to Japanese who engage in intercultural communication with Americans, and who are communicating through English as a second language. In his list of typical

Japanese communication traits, he includes formality in speaking, gestures, and facial expressions. Furthermore, Goldman states Japanese communication facilitates complementary and smooth relationships. On the other hand, Japanese style of communication avoids confrontation. Communication also stresses cultural gender roles and status. Goldman points out that the form of communication, how a communicator speaks, is often times more important among the Japanese than its content, what is said.

Based on his research and his experience with Japanese business people, Goldman continues to list various Japanese typical communication styles. He points out that Japanese tend to avoid use of the word “no” in interaction, as they avoid strong positives or negatives as well. Therefore, to Westerners, Japanese tend to be more passive than aggressive or assertive as communicators. Goldman (1991) states that sometimes Japanese do not readily reply or respond to an American speaker who may expect an immediate response.

These general assumptions about typical Japanese communication styles may provide me with an insight to communicative interactions between American teachers and Japanese students in ESL classroom. Goldman (1991) suggests that we should make careful note that these perspectives and typical ways of communication are filtered through American eyes, American ears, and American minds; therefore, the assumptions about Japanese communication styles in the ESL classroom need to be carefully tested.

With regard to both verbal and nonverbal communication, Barnlund (1989) argues that Americans respect the power of words, whereas Japanese respect the authority of words, with noble phrases seen as oversimplifying events. While Americans emphasize the verbal code, (what is said), the Japanese place more emphasis on

nonverbal codes, (what is left unsaid). Barnlund (1989) states that, “if intellect is an instrument of understanding for Americans, it is intuition that is valued among the Japanese (p.33).”

Low-Context versus High-Context Cultures

Chua and Gudykunst (1987) examined how culture influences styles of interpersonal conflict resolution. They compared communication styles of members of low-context cultures in comparison with members of high-context cultures. They argue that conflict in Japan is non-confrontational and that it involves accommodation through indirect methods (Chua & Gudykunst, 1987). Nomura and Barnlund (1983) found that Japanese prefer passive forms of criticism, while Americans prefer active forms (cited by Chua & Gudykunst, 1987).

Erez and Earley (1993) suggest the cultural dimension of high- versus low-context dependence. They state that the Japanese, Chinese and Arabs are identified as members of high-context cultures, whereas Americans are considered members of low-context cultures. They further argue that low-context communication predominates in individualistic cultures whereas high-context communication resides in collectivistic cultures. In Japan, which is perceived as collectivistic, high-context culture, “face” is an important psychological construct that is closely tied to “honor,” “shame,” and “obligation,” therefore, Japanese are more concerned with saving face than are Americans, who are members of low-context cultures (Erez & Earley, 1993; Nomura & Barnlund, 1983).

Gudykunst and Nishida (1994) state the members of low-context, individualistic cultures tend to communicate in a direct fashion whereas members of high-context,

collectivistic cultures tend to communicate in an indirect fashion. Japanese scholar, Okabe (1983) outlines this pattern as follows:

Americans' tendency to use explicit words is the most noteworthy characteristic of their communicative style. They prefer to employ such categorical words as "absolutely," "certainty," and "positively."... The English syntax dictates that the absolute "I" be placed at the beginning of a sentence in most cases, and that the subject-predicate relation be constructed in an ordinary sentence (p.36).

Therefore, the communication styles of members of American culture emphasize direct, low-context communication (Gudykunst & Nishina, 1994), whereas Japanese communication styles emphasize uncertainty, ambiguous use of words, and self-depreciation in order to maintain group harmony.

Nonverbal versus Verbal Communication

Since Japan is considered a high-context culture, the Japanese attach great importance to the value of silence (Leathers, 1992). Leathers discusses that the Japanese cultural ideal of non-obvious, subtle, and indirect expressions, may explain the expressionless face of Japanese. In addition, the importance attached to showing respect for superiors and being polite is manifested in cultural rituals that openly emphasize those two values (Barnlund, 1975; cited by Leathers, 1992). In a high-context country, such as Japan, the power structure is well known, the people behave with deference toward their superiors (Andersen, 1999).

Although a number of nonverbal actions show substantial cross-cultural similarity (Andersen, 1999), "Americans frequently complain that the Japanese never 'get to the

point,' yet they fail to recognize that high-context cultures rely highly on the context and setting and let the point evolve" (E.T., Hall, 1984; cited by Andersen, 1999).

Direct versus Indirect Communication Style

Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey (1988) define direct-indirect styles as the extent to which speakers reveal their intentions through explicit verbal communication. They outline several implications from the analysis of verbally direct and indirect styles:

First, the dimension of direct-indirect speech styles is a powerful construct to tap possible differences and similarities in verbal interaction across cultures. Second, the use of direct verbal style in individualistic, low-context cultures is for the purpose of asserting self-face need and self-face concern, while the use of indirect verbal style in collectivistic, high-context culture is for the purpose of preserving mutual-face need and upholding interdependent group harmony (Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey, 1988).

Silence may be an extreme case of an indirect communication style. Barnlund (1989), who studied the function of silence in Japanese culture, states that many Japanese sayings reinforce the notion that the truly important things are shared in silence. For example, *enryo*, the attribute of humility, modesty and reticence, is admired in the silent communicator (p.142). However, Miller (1982) considers the distinctive role played by silence in the social life of Japanese and concludes that Japanese use silence no more positively, or with any greater sensitivity than do any other people.

In summary, many communication scholars have studied cultural communication between Japanese and Americans. In the studies of cross-cultural communication between Japanese and Americans, five different aspects are focused: individualism versus

collectivism, high-context versus low- context, direct versus indirect, nonverbal versus verbal communication, and gender issues.

Goldman points out some communication styles that are typical for Japanese. In interactions with Americans, Japanese are often perceived to be more passive than an aggressive or assertive. Although it is widely believed that Japanese is a collectivist culture, Leung and Iwawaki (1988) argue that there is an individualistic trend in Japan. Gudykunst and Nishina (1994) state that Japanese, a high context culture, focuses on maintaining group harmony. Therefore, the Japanese value silence as a means to express the truly important things.

Gender Perceptions

Sadker and Sadker (1994) have studied gender issues in instructional communication settings and discussed the alienation of female students on the male campus. They state, “female students may feel vulnerable and powerless to object (p.173).” In the American academic settings, there seem to be differences in male and female teachers’ expectations and behaviors. Wood (1997) outlines those differences as follows:

Female university and college professors, compared with their male counterparts, tend to be less biased against female students, are more able to recognize female’s contributions and intellectual talents, and are more generous in giving them academic and career encouragement. In general, female students participate more actively and more equally with their male peers in classes taught by women than in ones instructed by men (p.265).

The previous interviews with Japanese students and the preliminary observations of the ESL classroom suggest that male students speak up more than female students in

Japan. One Japanese female student actually stated, “I don’t feel comfortable speaking up in the class because I am the only female student in my ESL classroom.” The perceptions of gender among Japanese students may further affect the communicative behaviors of the ESL classroom.

In addition to these aspects of communication that may contribute to the culture of ESL classroom, other researchers focused on the cultural factors that are specific for Japanese students.

Japanese Students’ Oral Skills

An ESL teacher at The University of Montana, Julie Vetter, has conducted a comparative needs analysis of Japanese students’ oral skill. The results of this study were very practical and applicable, as the study was conducted by an ESL teacher. Although the sample size of this study (n=34) was quite small, the results of this study suggest the needs for Japanese students’ speaking ability, as the university classroom encourages more interactive lecture styles and more active class participations. The study was designed to help ESL teachers of Japanese students design their courses effectively to prepare their Japanese students for American classrooms as outlined by the author:

The findings suggest a surprising trend in the university classroom towards a more interactive lecture style, active expectations of professors as to students’ speaking, and helpful indications as to where Japanese students excel in their speaking and where they need improvement. The results of the study will help ESL/EFL teachers of Japanese students better design their curriculum in helping their students prepare for university studies in the United States (Vetter, 2000, p.1).

Research Questions

After reviewing the literature and observing ESL classes, I found that there are few studies that focused on the effects of learning styles on ESL interactions. Based on my preliminary observations and previous research done by communication scholars, the general goal of this research is to examine cross-cultural communication between the ESL teachers and Japanese students and how they make cultural adaptations in ESL classrooms.

In order to explore cross-cultural communication of ESL classrooms, the following focused research questions may help achieve the goal of this study:

- RQ1. How do the ESL teachers' perceptions of the ESL classroom differ from the students' perceptions?*
- RQ2. How do cultural concepts of the Japanese students play a role in the culture and communication of the ESL classroom?*
- RQ3. How do Japanese students and American ESL teachers perceive Japanese students' learning styles and their adaptation to the American educational system?*
- RQ4. How do Japanese students and ESL teachers perceive the teaching styles of the ESL teachers and their teaching adaptations to a variety learning styles of their students?*
- RQ5. What common advice is given by Japanese students and ESL teachers for ESL students?*
- RQ6. What common advice is given by Japanese students and ESL teachers for the ESL teachers?*

These conceptual research questions may help as I focus and recognize what is relevant in the observed context (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 1995).

Method

Research Setting

The research setting of this study was the ESL classrooms of a northwest university, the University of Montana with 12,000 students. Some of the observed classes were affiliated with the English Language Institute (hereafter referred as ELI), which is an educational program, offered by the University of Montana, where international students attend twenty hours of class each week with the main purpose of admission to the university. The ELI is introduced in the following manner on its website:

The ELI offers international students the opportunity to study Academic English in a University setting. This course is for individual students who need to significantly improve their English skills in order to attend an American university or for individuals whose professional or personal goals require a mastery of English (English Language Institute, n.d.).

All interviews were conducted in the conference rooms in which informants were informed that the interviews would be completely confidential and were asked for permission to record their interviews. The average length of an interview was approximately an hour. With all informants, additional impromptu questions are added to confirm and follow up some of their answers.

The research participants of this study were ESL teachers and students, Japanese students in particular. The context of this study is the ESL classrooms of the university

and ELI, in which American teachers and international students share a unique culture as well as cross-cultural communication. There are certain communication practices in the ESL classrooms; however, it is rarely acknowledged that such practices emerge from particular cultural perspectives (Carbaugh, 1988; Katriel & Philipsen, 1981; Perks, 1995; cited by Braithwaite, 1997). Braithwaite (1997a) stresses the importance of clarifying the cultural assumptions underlying communication practices because “ethnographic studies of classroom interaction provide an opportunity for instructors to present cross-cultural comparison for their students” (p.219).

By focusing on the aforementioned communicative aspects, I will observe the ESL classrooms as a research setting in which the international students study English in order to acquire communicative English skills both culturally and linguistically. Since the majority of the ESL students are Japanese, this study particularly focuses on the communicative aspects of the Japanese students as well as their learning styles. In the ESL classroom, the study should reveal cultural communicative styles as structured sequences of action, and “highly codified acts which, when properly played out, demonstrate the consensus of the players regarding their shared identity” (Braithwaite, 1997b, p.423).

In order to observe cross-cultural communications from inside the classroom, I gained access to ESL classrooms of both the university and the ELI by getting permission from the Chair of the Linguistics Department. As a participant observer, I conducted total of twelve hours of observation following my preliminary interviews with both teacher and student informants.

Immediately following those observations, less formal, focused narrative interviews were conducted with the particular students or teachers who were involved in the scenes or events observed in the ESL classrooms. Those follow-up interviews were designed to test and confirm the analysis of data collected through the preliminary interviews.

Research Procedures

Preliminary Interviews. The goals of using interviews in communicative data collection are described as follows: (a) to verify the accuracy of my discussion and interpretation of the literature reviews, (b) to listen to the actual voices of the Japanese students as well as the ESL teachers with respect to their experience and perspectives of ESL classes, and (3) to explore cultural factors and adaptations that contribute to the culture of the ESL classrooms. The interview data should reflect both the events observed during the interviews and observations, as well as the context of the interview itself. The rationale for interviewing emerges in a statement by Pelto and Pelto (1978) that, “humans differ in their willingness as well as their capabilities for verbally expressing cultural information (p.72).” As Goldstein (1964) states, the interviews should provide the insider’s perspectives of the individual, his/her culture, and the way in which each informant conceptualizes this knowledge. In the following section, I will describe the interview participants, the instruments used, interview questions, and the interview format I employed for this preliminary interviews.

Interview Participants. Formal preliminary interviews were conducted with twelve Japanese students of ESL classes and with six ESL instructors. The student

informants were twelve Japanese students: eight female students and four male students who were currently enrolled in the ESL classes of either the university or the ELI. Nine of the student informants were the Japanese students who had only been to the U.S. less than two years whereas only one student informant had lived in the U.S. more than four years.

The teacher informants were six ESL teachers: including three ESL teachers at the university, two of whom are American, and three other American ESL teachers at the ELI who have taught English to international students for several years. Those three ESL teachers at ELI have met the special requirements of the institute as outlined in its website that “English Language Institute instructors hold MA’s in Linguistics, TESOL, or English, specialize in teaching English as a Second Language, and have overseas teaching experience” (English Language Institute, n.d.). One of the ESL teacher informants was Bulgarian; however, the research results show that her perspective and inputs were not distinct from those of the American teachers. Therefore, upon analyzing the data, the comparison of perspectives was only made between the Japanese students and the ESL teachers.

Additionally, both teacher and student informants were voluntary participants, who were willing to contribute their insights and perspectives into this field research. Therefore, as previously mentioned, all interview informants were informed that they could quit the interviews at any given time if they would not feel comfortable answering any of the interview questions.

Interview Instruments. All of the Japanese student informants were given the option of using either Japanese or English language in the interviews, whereas only

English was used in the preliminary interviews with the teacher informants. All Japanese student informants chose to use Japanese language in the interviews. Cassette tapes were used with permission from the each interviewee. Tape recording, as outlined by Briggs (1986), “has greatly increased the precision of data collection, and a great deal of attention has focused on the range of contexts in which recordings are made (p.17).” All interviews were transcribed immediately after the preliminary interviews. The interviews with the Japanese students were translated into English after they were transcribed. As previously discussed, the interviewees were informed that all interviews would be completely confidential and that there would be no names on the collected data. Moreover, they were informed that the recorded tapes would be either destroyed or returned to the interviewees after they were transcribed.

Generally, open-ended interview techniques were used. After transcribing the interviews, each response was analyzed and coded. Upon requests, the interview questions were given to all interviewees prior to the interviews via e-mail.

Interview Questions for Teacher Informants. Based on my literature review and preliminary study on the ESL classroom, following interview questions were asked to the ESL teacher informants:

- What is your teaching philosophy / strategy?
- How do you define the characteristics of the ESL classroom as compared with other English classes?
- What part of the students’ cultural factors contributes to the culture of your ESL classroom?

- What difficulties have you faced in terms of differences in students' learning styles?
- Have you changed your teaching styles in order to make adaptations for the students' different learning styles?
- What advice would you give to a teacher who is going to teach an ESL class in the future?
- What advice would you give to a student who is going to take an ESL class in the future?

Each interview question will be probed with follow-up questions in order to receive full input from the teacher informants.

Interview Questions for Student Informants. The following interview questions were asked to the student informants:

- Do you see any differences or similarities between being a student in ESL class and in Japan? If so, specify in what way it differs/ similar.
- Do you show consideration when you speak to your ESL teachers?
- Do you try to/try not to stand out in your class? How do you feel about speaking up in your ESL class?
- What difficulties have you faced in terms of differences between teaching styles of the ESL instructors and Japanese teaching styles?
- Have you changed your learning styles after coming to the United States? If so, how?
- What advice would you give to a teacher who is going to teach an ESL class in the future?

- What advice would you give to a student who is going to take an ESL class in the future?

As in the interviews with the teacher informants, probing questions followed each question if necessary in order to gain further input from the student informants.

Interview Format. The format of these interviews was structured, relatively formal, with the above questions that were given to interviewees ahead of time upon requests. Interviewees could contact the interviewer at any given time if they had questions with regard to the interview questions provided. Although all preliminary interviews were formally structured, the interview informants were encouraged to interrupt the interviewer at any time during the interviews for any questions or comments they might have brought to the interviewer. As previously mentioned, all of the preliminary interviews were transcribed immediately following each interview, and then translated from Japanese to English if necessary. Each interview took approximately an hour even though the interview time varied depending on inputs from the interview informants.

As Briggs (1986) points out, “The goal of getting the ‘individual true value’ for each question thus greatly oversimplified the nature of human consciousness.” The all interviews should be considered as speech events in general. Therefore, social situation created by the interviews should shape the form and content of what is said.

Participant Observation. Through the course of participant observation, I sat in a corner chair in which I could see all students and teachers and recorded the interactions among them. Some of the ESL teachers introduced me to their classes, briefly explaining the rationales of my research. However, my presence as a participant observer did not

seem to affect any of the interactions between ESL teachers and students, for I could pass for another international student who happened to be in their classroom. Since I have taken the ESL classes in the past, it was easy for me to adjust to the environment of the ESL classrooms.

Being an international student and having taken ESL classes in the past, my experience should provide me with an insight to the context of this study. I also have the advantage of knowing the native language of Japanese students, who are dominant in the ESL classrooms, even though Japanese language was rarely used in the observed classrooms. Knowing cultural-specific nonverbal cues of Japanese students should also help the observer interpret their interactions correctly.

Although I have a preconception of the ESL classroom, I was an outsider participant as well as an insider. The ESL classroom of ELI was a foreign environment to me, as I have never attended the English Language Institute in the past. When I was enrolled in the ESL classes at the university in 1994, I was the only Japanese student in my ESL classes. Today, the majority of students in the ESL classes are Japanese students, because one third of the international students attending the university are Japanese. This research allowed me to have an outsider point of view, adding to my insider preconception of ESL classrooms in general.

Moreover, as discussed in the previous section, the ELI has special requirements for ESL teachers in addition to its specific educational goals. Therefore, my personal experience in the ESL classes that I have taken previously may have offered insight into this cross-cultural speech community and its environment. However, it should not lead to

biased observations, because of the difference between the ESL classes I attended and the ESL classes I observed for this field research.

Being a participant observer, it is natural for a researcher to take notes during the observed class periods. Since students were constantly taking notes, the setting allowed me to make open jottings without students asking what I was recording. Therefore, as a communication researcher, I could stress the importance of accuracy, of getting down exactly what had been said at the very moment (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 1995).

Through the course of my observations, I observed the sequence of patterns in the teacher-students interactions. The follow-up interviews were conducted based on those particular events. Immediately after each observation, I asked some questions to particular students or teachers who were involved in the particular scenes or events that I had observed. The follow-up interviews were another technique of data collection for this field research.

Follow-up Interviews. The follow-up interview questions were focused and varied, depending on the observed event. Therefore, the follow-up interviews were more informal than the preliminary interviews, thus allowing room for modifications. The participants of the follow-up interviews were determined through the observational data. Each interview informant was asked to participate in the follow-up interview immediately after the observation. Similar to the preliminary interviews, all the interviewees were voluntary participants and confidential.

The number of interviews was determined from the field observations. Each follow-up interview lasted approximately an hour to two hours. Since the interview

questions were not given to the informants ahead of the time, the interviewees took more time to process their answers. The interviews were structured more informally, as different questions were asked in each interview. A similar interview format was used for the follow-up interviews: tape recordings, confidentiality, voluntary participation, and so forth. The follow-up interviews were designed to attest and confirmed the analyzed data collected through preliminary interviews and observations.

Data Analysis

The data collected through the preliminary interviews, participant observations, and follow-up interviews were analyzed and interpreted immediately after each interview and observation. First, the data collected from the preliminary interviews were analyzed, looking for the patterns that emerged from the coding and interpreting. Then, individual differences and the uniqueness of interviewees was examined and identified. The data collected from preliminary interview was categorized upon each theme as it was coded under following six themes: the ESL culture, expectations, educational background, learning styles, teaching philosophy/strategies, and advice. The data collected through the field observation was immediately supplemented by more focused, follow-up interviews. The follow-up interviews allowed me to confirm the accuracy of analysis of preliminary interviews and to clarify the particular events or scenes observed in the ESL classrooms.

Further, I considered what all the collected data, (fieldnotes, methodological notes, personal notes, interview notes and tapes), revealed about cross-cultural communication and culture of the ESL classrooms. In addition to the reviewed literatures,

various sources were used in interpreting the collected data, and in testing predictions relevant to inferred cultural speaking patterns (Phillipsen, 1992).

Results

In this section, I discuss findings relevant to each categorical aspect of cross-cultural communication: individualism versus collectivism, high versus low- context, direct versus indirect, nonverbal versus verbal communication, and some issues related to gender perspectives. It is important to note that these aspects of cross-cultural communication are overlapping in many ways and the actual findings go far beyond these aspects. This section of the results has two major divisions. First, the data collected through preliminary interviews are analyzed and categorized according to patterns that emerged from the coding. Second, the observational data and focused interviews were analyzed and discussed to confirm and modify the data collected through preliminary interviews. The discussion section should provide a synthesis of findings from these two analyses.

The results of this study revealed the function and characteristics of ESL classrooms as a cross-cultural context. In this context, both ESL teachers and students make mutual accommodations and create the middle ground in between cultures. In the following section, perspectives of Japanese students and ESL teachers are outlined with respect to the ways they identify themselves accommodating with each other. There are three main themes related to cross-cultural communication in the ESL classrooms: ESL culture, cultural differences, and cultural adaptations.

ESL Culture

The ESL classroom, in which many students from various countries bring their own cultures into a classroom, has unique characteristics on its own. There are mutual

accommodations made by both ESL teachers and students in order to create a shared culture, the middle ground between cultures. However, it seems that ESL teachers and students have different perceptions of the culture of ESL classrooms. ESL teachers perceive ESL classroom being unique and specific to ESL whereas Japanese students expect it to be more like an American culture.

The ESL teachers often categorize their classrooms as an ESL specific culture, rather than identifying them as any other culture. One teacher informant stated, “as an American teacher, I often bring my cultural perspectives into my classroom, and there are many Japanese students in my class, which is a dominant culture. But I think a culture of the ESL classroom is different from any other cultures. It’s an ESL culture.”

No single teacher informant identified the culture of the ESL classroom as an American culture. One of the teacher informants distinguished ESL and American culture as follows:

An ESL class seemed to be kind of like a world on its own, as far as how the classroom was supposed to be structured. Especially with the beginning of communicative language teaching, it’s completely different than anything that’s ever gone before in classrooms. So, maybe I don’t know if I would say it [the ESL classroom] is particularly American or not.

Another teacher informant also pointed out there is always a cultural mixing in the ESL classroom:

The ESL classroom is kind of a third culture in its own, because you have all these students here in America, but particularly in this kind of class they are from all different cultures... And of course, I am an American, and they’re dealing with Americans all the time, the American educational systems all the time. But

they've got their own cultural backgrounds too, and there's always cultural mixing.

At the same time, one culture sometimes dominates the ESL classroom. One teacher informant stated, "If you get any one culture in the class, the culture where the majority of students are coming from tends to dominate the classroom, greatly affecting the ESL culture.

Contrary to the answers from the teacher informants, eight out of twelve student informants identified the ESL classroom as an American culture. The students are often unaware that they bring their own cultures into the ESL classroom. One female student informant said, "I came to the United States because I wanted to study English in the American culture... and the ESL classroom provides the context in which I experience American culture."

Although the ESL teachers are aware of the cultural factors that their students bring into their classrooms, the ESL students tend to overlook the fact that their presence would affect the culture they share in the ESL classroom:

I think... ESL class is American culture. Teachers are American, and we use English to communicate. I think it's very American. I know there are many Japanese students in my class, but they all act like American. [*How so?*] I don't know... well, maybe they speak up more in class discussion. When we talk in class, we even talk in English with other Japanese students. So, I think the ESL classroom is very much like an American culture.

Although the culture of ESL classrooms is shared among ESL teachers and students, ESL teachers and students have different perceptions of ESL culture. But how is this unique culture created? The differences in expectations, educational background,

and learning styles that both ESL teachers and students bring to ESL classes are the factors that contribute to the specific culture of ESL classrooms.

Cultural Differences

Expectations. The ESL culture, a multi-cultural classroom, has several unique characteristics that both students and teachers share. However, the ESL teachers and students seem to have different expectations of the ESL classroom. Since the goal of the ESL classroom is to teach communicative English as well as academic English, the ESL teachers expect their students to learn about American culture in addition to their own cultures. One teacher informant explains these differences in expectations of ESL classroom:

The greatest difference in the expectations of ESL classes, compared with regular English classes, is the communicative and cultural aspect of the ESL classes. The ESL classes focus on the skills of using English and also focus on communicating in the second language, while the regular English classes only focus on the content level of English... Also, the ESL teachers expect their students to learn American culture as well as the cultures of their students.

The ESL students are often discouraged from speaking their native language when they are in the classroom. One ESL teacher stated that she tells her students explicitly that they are not expected to talk in their native language. Most of the Japanese students speak to each other in English once the class get started; however, some students still talk in their native language:

I announced at the beginning of the class that I don't want any native language. I respect that they are bilingual, but that this is an English class and they just have to speak English. But still, I do have [some Japanese students who speak in

Japanese in class]... Those students would tell me that they feel awkward speaking in foreign language among Japanese students.

One teacher informant stated that she would always remind her Japanese students that they are not expected to bring Japanese culture into the classroom. She said, “I always tell my Japanese students, ‘When you enter the classroom, you are no longer in Japanese culture’.” She also discourages her Japanese students from speaking in Japanese in class.

One teacher informant stated that she expects her students to participate in class discussions as American students are expected to do:

I do have an expectation that they are in an American classroom and they are supposed to act according to an American classroom. But again, what is an American classroom? But yes, we’ll just say that communicative teaching mainly has a lot to do with American culture. So, I do expect them to participate in that way.

Her response is closely related to the educational background of the students, with respect to class participation. This point is discussed in a later section.

The ESL teachers often tell their students what their expectations are at the beginning of each semester. It is important that both ESL teachers and students understand their expectations of the ESL classroom, so that they can do their best to meet these expectations. One teacher informant, as outlined below, goes through different phases of expectations:

When I first started, my expectation was very American because that’s the way I’m trained to teach, because you learn to teach by watching your teachers. So, my expectations were very American. And then, I thought to myself, well, I shouldn’t be like that. I should be more sensitive to my students, then I thought, no, but they are here in America and they have to deal with other American

teachers whose expectations are those of American teachers. So, I kind of found a middle ground where what I end up doing is just explaining in very detail what my expectations are and why they are those, so that my expectations are basically the same as other American professors, but I go greater lengths to make that explicit.

The ESL students, on the other hand, seem to have different expectations than the ESL teachers. The students expect the ESL classes to prepare the students for their future American classrooms; however, some ESL teachers already expect them to meet the expectations of the American classrooms. One male student informant stated, “I don’t know what my teacher expects in my class, but I know that her expectation is different from mine. I just want to study English, but I think the ESL class is more than just teaching English.”

The expectations of the ELI students are also different from the expectations of other ESL students, whose TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) scores are high enough to study at a university. The ELI students expect their ESL class to help them get high scores on the TOEFL exam and to prepare them for the American classrooms of their majors.

The ESL teachers often experience a discrepancy between their goals and the expectations of their students. One of the ELI teachers, who has many years of experience in teaching ESL, stated that the students want to pass the ESL courses and study their majors. The teacher informant said, “I often tell my students that ten years from now, you may not remember what you learned from your math course, but you still remember your English.” The ESL teachers not only make their expectations clear to

their students but they also help students set their goals on mastering communicative English.

Due to differences in their educational background that will be discussed in the following section, the Japanese students often expect their ESL classes to be like one of their English classes they had in Japan. The ESL teachers are aware that the expectations of Japanese students are closely related to differences in their educational system.

“Japanese students in particular are seemed to be more authority oriented and what is defined as their analytical style is that they want to write everything down, they want to have their textbook. So that they are very text oriented.” The different expectations of both ESL teachers and students can be explained through the discussion of educational background.

Educational Background. Differences in educational background play a great part in the ESL classrooms. There is a great difference between the Japanese educational system and American educational system. This difference in educational systems may cause difficulties in Japanese students’ learning as they study in the American universities. Three major aspects of educational background are particularly important that contribute to the ESL culture: class participation, disagreement, cultural hierarchy, and processing time.

Class Participation. The theme of class participation was brought up many times in the preliminary interviews. Japanese students do not feel comfortable actively participating in class discussions because they are “not supposed to in my country.” One Japanese student informant explains the Japanese classroom:

In Japan, the best thing you can do as a student for your Japanese instructor is to remain silent during the class. But in the ESL classroom, it's almost opposite. The ESL teachers expect their students to respond orally with their questions or comments. The teachers assess students' understanding by the students' questions or comments... But the Japanese teachers are only concerned about the progress of their lecture. They seem not concerned about whether their students are following their lectures.

In the ESL classroom, Japanese students give opinions or answers only if questions are addressed directly to the students. In other words, voluntary participation by the Japanese students was rarely observed in the classroom. One student informant stated, "I don't like raising my hand during the class. If my teacher wants me to speak up, she would call me by name. I don't want to disturb her lecture and make the class behind the schedule. If I have question, I will ask her later."

As you can see in the above example, the Japanese students in the ESL classroom rarely ask questions to the teachers because the students are concerned about the progress of the class and do not want to interrupt the lecture. Another student informant said, "I don't want to stop the lecture or class discussion with my personal questions or comments. I feel more comfortable asking my personal questions individually."

The Japanese students seek common goals and opinions rather than expressing their personal questions or comments.

In Japan, I don't ask questions unless I know for sure that my classmates have the same questions. If I know that other students can benefit from my questions, I would ask those appropriate questions in class. Otherwise, I wait and go to see my teacher after the class. But in the U.S., teachers expect their students to give their response and to ask questions. They think we are listening only if we give some kind of feedback. The lectures are more interactive in the ESL classroom.

Another student informant discussed that the Japanese teachers discourage their students from asking questions in class:

Japanese teachers are so concerned about getting their points covered in their lectures. So, they don't appreciate when students ask so many questions in class. In Japan, the teachers rarely ask their students, 'do you have any questions?' The Japanese students are expected to ask questions outside of the classroom so that they will not interrupt the lecture. In the ESL class, I hear this question all the time. So, it's easier for me to ask questions in the ESL class, but I am still not used to asking questions

Moreover, the Japanese students do not ask questions because they don't want to be embarrassed in front of their classmates. One male student informant stated, "I don't want to embarrass myself by asking stupid questions in class. But American students are so open to discussion. I don't think they worry about being embarrassed or anything. They just say things 'for the time being.'"

The Japanese students share common ideas or opinions in class, whereas American students ask personal questions or share their personal opinions and stories. Some ESL teachers appreciate the Japanese students' concern for fellow students:

It seems that my Japanese students are so concerned about the progress of my lecture. They never interrupt me or ask questions that are not appropriate. For my first year of teaching, I taught English composition at this university... where most of my students were Americans. I frequently asked my students if they had any questions in mind, and often times they asked some questions that brought us off the topic. I sometimes found myself discussing some issues with a single student in class. This would never happen with my Japanese students.

In the Japanese educational system, "class participation is not as important as it is here in the U.S.":

When I was in Japan, I never asked to share my opinions in class. I only spoke up when my teacher called me... I didn't feel comfortable raising my hand unless I knew for sure that my answer was right. I still don't feel comfortable speaking up in my classes; so, I always get a bad grade in class participation.

This student reasons that her unwillingness to participate was shaped through her educational background in Japan:

I've been always this way [not participating] in Japan... and I think my teacher was okay with it. I have never complained or anything. I was a good student in Japan, even though I did not speak up. I don't think any of my teachers had points set aside for our participation. Our educational system encourages students to remember the concepts, what's in the text... and discourages students from sharing their personal opinions or comments. Those opinions or comments would not help other students' learning.

The ESL teachers are often aware of this difference in the two educational systems as one American teacher stated:

I notice that because they [Japanese students] are authority oriented, I would often have to make special time after class or through email to discuss 'what was that assignment again' to explain to Japanese students. In addition, because Japanese students in particular are... I had a lot of Japanese students like this last semester who are very reserved in the classroom, they want me to do all the talking, me to do everything. They just wanted to sit and listen. They mentally engage in the activities but do not necessary do it verbally.

The ESL teachers who understand the rationale behind Japanese students' learning styles, would often make certain accommodations. The next example shows how the ESL teacher provides the Japanese students with "safer space" in which the Japanese students feel more comfortable sharing their ideas:

I tried to compensate last semester, because there are such a huge discrepancy between those learners, by having outside discussion groups with Japanese

students. I tried to compensate for the lack of any kind of cohesiveness, like group activities between the other students and the Japanese students, by allowing them a safer space, what they might consider safer space to practice the skills that we've used in class. But they weren't comfortable doing this in class where there are bunch of people.

When forming a small group, the ESL teachers often match Japanese students with the students from other countries in order to encourage their discussion. One teacher informant stated that she tries to pair up Japanese students with the students from other countries "Because I notice that if I group Japanese students all in one group, there will be no talking going on. They just all shut up." Another teacher informant stated that she always tries to mix Japanese students with African or Mexican students, who are very talkative.

The ESL teachers are often aware of the educational background of their Japanese students who are simply not used to participating in class discussion:

... as my understanding of the Japanese educational system is much less discussion oriented, that students are not expected, not encouraged to express their opinions in class, and that students are much more expected to take their notes, study their notes, memorize their notes and learn that way, whereas the European students are more like the American students, where discussion is the key part of the learning process. So, I think that the Japanese students, some of them are just naturally shy, and but I think the major factor is just that they are not used to it. They are taught in their education systems that that's not what you do in class. You know, that's why they're uncomfortable with it.

Finally, the students' class participation is closely related to their ability to speak English. One teacher informant pointed out that if the students have pretty good ability in

speaking English, they often break the cultural expectation of the Japanese students, “not willing to participate”:

This semester, I have one Japanese female student who has been here for a while. Her English level is very high compared with other students. She often raises her hands and gives her opinions in class. I never had a student like her from Japan. She probably feels so comfortable because English is not her barrier. She knows that she can communicate very well in English. I hope my other Japanese students would feel the same way.

A few Japanese students reported that they were sometimes treated as if they were “babies”. Students don’t appreciate teachers who treat them special in their class because of their inability to speak English fluently. One female student informant stated, “I don’t speak English very well, but I don’t think it’s a disability. I can think and speak in my language fairly well. I don’t like some professors who treat me like a “baby” because I can’t speak very well.”

As previously discussed, some students appreciate the teachers who would ask students for their cultural input even though the teachers still treat them special:

My teacher often asks me to provide some cultural input, for example, he asks me what Japanese people would do in certain occasion. It makes me nervous sometimes, but I enjoy answering his questions because I am the only representative from Japan in my class. I answer them very seriously because I don’t want my classmates to misunderstand my culture... I think it’s a great opportunity for me to share my culture with my classmates.

Disagreement. The Japanese students tend to avoid having disagreements with their teacher or other students. This can be another factor that keeps the Japanese students from participating in class discussions. If a Japanese student has an opinion that

is in disagreement with other student's opinion, the student simply avoids disagreement by not mentioning his/her opinion in class. One student stated, "I don't like to disagree with other students. I just don't tell them my opinions, because I don't want to hurt them or make them feel embarrassed."

The ESL teachers, however, encourage students to contribute their opinions even if they disagree with other students' opinions. One teacher informant stated, "I often tell my students that it is okay to disagree with other students... This way, the students can discuss the argument and come to a conclusion as a whole class."

The ESL teachers always provide some rationale for the in-class activities. However, one teacher informant stated that the Japanese students would not ask for the rationale behind class activities. This implies that Japanese students trust that the teachers have good reasons for asking them to do particular things:

I had this experience a lot with Japanese students. Sometimes I forget to explain why we are doing the activity, but my Japanese students would do it anyway, no questions, they just do the activity, and then, if they don't understand why they're doing it, they probably won't ask. They just assume that I have some kind of reason for it, so let's just do it, and go on. And that's not true for students from other cultures.

The students are challenged to agree or disagree with an author about a subject, even though the Japanese students are not used to stating their opinions:

Western educational background is used to this [sharing one's opinion]. But the Japanese students often have a difficult time identifying whether they agree or disagree with the author. They say, "who cares about how the author thinks about the subject?" They don't work well with their opinions, which they can't find the answer to in their text.

Literally every student interviewed stated that they never disagreed with their teachers and felt uncomfortable sharing their opposite opinions:

I don't want to upset my teacher by disagreeing with her. In Japan, no students would disagree with their teachers. We learn that what teachers say should all be correct, so, we never try to argue or question what they say... They may be wrong sometimes, but it's not the students' job to point out their failure. Only the teachers have their responsibility to correct the students' answers.

Finally, one student informant, who has been in the U.S. for more than two years, stated that she now feels comfortable disagreeing with other students, even though she still feels uncomfortable disagreeing with her teachers:

After going school for two years [in the U.S.], I no longer hesitate to share my opinions even if they are different from my classmate's opinions. If it disagrees with my teacher's idea, then, I don't think I would try to argue with my teacher, however. Now I know, in the American classrooms, students come to the solution or conclusion by talking, by sharing different ideas, and by disagreeing with each other. What I've learned most at this university is to share my opinion in a class discussion and back up my points so that others can understand where I am coming from. This is something I probably would never learned if I stayed in Japan.

As the Japanese student pointed out, most of the Japanese students do not disagree with their ESL teachers. The following statements from the ESL teacher illustrate how the Japanese students are always concerned about the teacher's response and who are hesitant to give negative comments toward American culture:

[Do Japanese students disagree with you at all?] No, not really. No, no, not at all. I even think... we can often compare American culture with other cultures. My students write journals all the time with *Newsweek* articles. And they would often

talk about American culture in a negative way, and they [Japanese students] would say oh, but I think Americans are very nice and they would apologize to me. And I would tell them I don't really care even if they criticize American culture in negative way.

Furthermore, the ESL teacher informant stated that her Japanese students would only give their negative comments or suggestion for changes after becoming good friends:

Japanese students don't like to argue with their teachers. A couple of my students, after having them as my students, we became really good friends, and then, they tell me, well... maybe, you shouldn't have done that like this... only after becoming really good friends, they would never say that during class whereas, in contrast, my European students, they're polite about it, they'd come to me after class and say ... you know, you need to do this differently. And Japanese students would never do that. Also, Japanese students are much more punctual, they always have their homework done, and their homework is always neat. And I think a lot of that is kind of their respect for teachers, respect for the education process, that is lacking in some other cultures.

Although Japanese students would not disagree with their teachers, the students from other countries sometimes disagree with their ESL teachers. One teacher informant stated, "last semester, I had three Scandinavian students. They were just so into it [the discussion]. They had no hesitation in asking for clarification or even disagreeing with me in the middle of class. So, they were very different from Japanese students."

Cultural Hierarchy. The cultural hierarchy of Japanese classrooms exists in the ESL classroom. As discussed in the previous section, the Japanese students do not want to disagree with their teachers because the teachers are in the top of their hierarchy. One Japanese student stated, "I know that I am in different culture now, but I still carry the

concept of my Japanese culture. I don't speak to my teachers in the same way I do to my friends. I should show my respect as they are my superior."

The hierarchical concept of the Japanese culture still exists among the ESL students. Japanese students believe that *kohai* (the person who is lower in the hierarchy than *senpai*) should speak less than their *senpai* (who defined as a superior or elder to *kohai*) in the ESL classroom. One Japanese student informant said that she would not feel comfortable speaking up in class because she is the youngest in the classroom:

I don't like to speak up in my class because there are many *senpai* [seniors] in my class. They are older than me, and have been to the U.S. for longer time. One of them told me that I shouldn't worry about those things [cultural hierarchical rules], but I still care for them. I am the youngest student in my class, so I should speak up less than any other students.

Therefore, class participations of Japanese students in ESL classroom are greatly affected by the cultural rules; however, these hierarchical rules are not always understood by the ESL teachers. One teacher informant was aware of the hierarchy, but unsure about the cultural rules behind it:

I would like to know more about kind of social hierarchy in Japanese class, *senpai/kohai* thing. I can't quite understand what's going on because there are some Japanese dominant classes where students are just flying. In most of my classes, I can easily tell which students are older or *senpai* to other students by their class participation... I don't understand what causes younger students not to participate, though.

Other ESL teacher also recognizes this cultural hierarchy existing in the ESL classroom:

I don't think that senior students are telling junior students not to participate in class, but I think that junior students are just not talking because they are not

supposed to in their culture. I often encourage them to forget about their cultural rules, but most of them still value their cultural hierarchy in class.

Although some Japanese hierarchical rules still exist in the ESL classrooms, some Japanese students ignore those hierarchical rules if they have been to the U.S. for longer period:

I don't care how old my classmates are. It doesn't bother me. In Japan, I knew who are my *senpai*, whom I should speak in *keigo* [honorific language]. But in the U.S., I find myself more equal than others. The teachers treat us equally, and other students treat us equally. I don't have to worry about how old I am or how old my classmates are. We speak to each other in the same way. Of course, I speak to my teacher in *keigo*, though.

Some Japanese students advise the ESL students that they should ignore their cultural rules once they are in the classroom. One Japanese student informant pointed out that the peer pressure Japanese students often experience in Japan does not exist in the ESL classrooms:

You know, the notion of *senpai-kohai* [senior-junior] doesn't exist in the ESL class. So, I would tell those students who are coming to the U.S. not to worry about those peer pressures. The age doesn't really matter in an American classroom... because I was like that... I was worried that I shouldn't speak up because there were Japanese students who were older than me. I was wrong. Who cares about our age? No one does in my class.

Processing Time. Compared to the students from other countries, the ESL teachers point out that the Japanese students seem to take a longer time to answer the questions. One teacher informant stated that the Japanese students contribute to the class discussion if they have enough time to prepare their answers:

In general, the Japanese students need more time to produce their answers. It is not linguistic reasons, I don't think... maybe, it can be explained by the educational difference. Japanese students in general are more thoughtful than the students from other countries and more concerned about giving a 'good answer' or 'accurate answer'. It seems that 'accuracy' is very important in Japanese culture.

Since the Japanese students try very hard to avoid giving a wrong answer, they take a longer time to answer the questions, as one of the teacher informants explained:

I often give longer time for the Japanese students. It seems that Japanese students are more concerned with giving a right answer. They contribute greatly in their journals... But they don't necessarily contribute their answers in class discussions unless I call upon them. If I give them [Japanese students] enough time, they would often come up with very good answers.

Some ESL teachers who studied Japanese culture understand that Japanese students take longer time to answer because they don't want to embarrass themselves in front of others by giving a wrong answer. One teacher informant pointed out how Japanese students contribute their answers:

Since my Japanese students are so used to giving only a right answer, they don't want to speak up until they know for sure that their answers are right. So, Japanese students take longer time because they make sure that their answers are correct before sharing them with other students... On the other hand, other students, especially American students come up with the right answer by talking. So, they answer questions right away even if they are not sure whether their answers are right or not.

Since Japanese students take longer time to process their thoughts, Japanese students visit their teachers outside the class more often than the students from other countries:

I definitely see my Japanese students coming to see me more often. Especially after class, especially for the first few weeks, I had about six students who wanted to talk to me, mainly Japanese students. I'm thinking of one student in particular this semester. He sees me after class everyday to get my clarification on, "so what was the assignment, I am not sure what you mean by this." I see a lot of students... feeling uncomfortable asking me in class, "I didn't really understand what you just said, could you say that again?" So, they ask me after class. It seems to me pretty common for many students.

As the ESL teachers are aware of the difference in processing time, some Japanese students also realize that they need longer time to articulate their answers. One student informant illustrated the differences between the American students and Japanese students:

American students seem to answer the questions without testing their answers in their mind. They speak up what they think without making sure that their answers are correct ones... I never get used to that. Before giving my answer, I always make sure that my answer is correct by testing, confirming, and clarifying. It seems that the American students find a correct answers by throwing different ideas.

Since Japanese students take longer time to process their answers, the ESL teachers suggest that the teachers should give enough time for their Japanese students to volunteer for the class discussion:

Just give them [Japanese students] enough time... Wait for them because they take their time before they volunteer to participate. Provide enough time for them to come up with answers. If you give them enough time, they often give good answers. They probably can't process talking and thinking at the same time. So, be patient and just give them more time.

All of these differences in educational background of the Japanese students suggest that most Japanese students made some adaptations to the different educational system as they study at American universities. This adaptation in their leaning styles will be discussed in more depth in the following section.

Learning Styles. Learning styles of the ESL students are strongly affected by the difference in the educational systems. Japanese students often make changes in their learning styles in order to adapt to the American educational system. The following interactions from the preliminary interviews illustrate how a student made adaptation to the American educational system:

I never spoke up in my class when I was in Japan. Now, I think of the way to participate in the class discussion. I think I study differently than I used to. [How so?] For example, when I had a reading assignment in Japan, I just read what was assigned. But now, as I read, I try to reflect the article on my mind. I try to think of the questions that my teacher may ask... and I also think whether I agree or disagree with the author. This is something I would never do when I was a student in Japan. In Japan, our texts and what teacher says are the correct answer. No student would argue that.

In Japan, the examinations and assessments are focused on measuring how much students remember the materials covered in lectures rather than how students can apply the materials. The student informant said, "I can remember what teachers said in my class and understand what I learned, but I can't write essays that require me to apply the materials and to give my own examples. I know I could do better in short answers as I always did in Japan." Another student informant said that in Japan, students are not supposed to make up the answers based on their personal insights.

As one teacher informant answered in the interview, “Most students want to come to class, be quiet, and just listen. So, I get frustrated sometimes with students who do not participate, speak, or ask questions. But I still come up with some exercises that can make them more involved.”

Although there are differences in learning styles between American and Japanese classrooms, the ESL classroom gives opportunity for international students to adjust their learning styles to an American classroom setting by promoting individual opinions in the classroom. It is not that American teachers value their way of teaching more than teaching styles of other cultures, however, it is their goals to prepare their ESL students for the American educational system of the universities:

I don't want to say one way is better and the other way is not. But our job is always to prepare students for professors who may not understand or may not want to switch their classes, or may not accommodate to those things.

The learning styles of the Japanese students tend to be analytical, text-oriented, and theory-oriented as previously discussed. One teacher informant stated, “Most of my Japanese students seek their answers in their textbook and expect some sort of rationale behind the correct answers.” Another teacher informant explains the learning styles of her Japanese students as follows:

My student often asks me where students can find the answers in their textbook. They always expect that the correct answers are given in their text explicitly. But it's not always the case. They sometimes have to engage in creative thinking. However, they are more analytical and theoretical than creative.

Because the Japanese students are theory-oriented, they often seek theories or reasons for their answers. One teacher informant discussed the discrepancy between the students' learning styles and her teaching styles:

My goal as an ESL teacher is to teach communicative English. But most of my Japanese students are grammar oriented. They want more rules, structures, and regulations to follow. I often remind them that they should learn English as means to communicate, but they want to understand everything.

One female student also pointed out to the difficulties she had when studying the English grammar:

I always want to know 'why' in order to fully understand the concept. But in ESL class, often times they [grammatical rules] are not explained. When I write a paper, I always ask my American friends to proofread it. They correct my grammatical mistakes, but they won't tell me why they were wrong. They say, "I don't know why they are wrong, but I know they are wrong." I expect to learn the rules of grammar in my ESL class, but I learn things that are more applicable.

Students often employ different learning styles when adjusting to the American classrooms. Some students said that now they study more than they used to do when they were in Japan. The Japanese students study hard to enter the high school or the university; however, once they are accepted, they do not have to study hard to pass their classes. One student informant who graduated from a Japanese university explained how she was doing when she was attending the university in Japan:

I didn't study at all when I attended the university in Japan... I only went to the lecture in which my teacher would take attendance. I brought some letters to write, books to read, or I often fell asleep during the lecture. That's what we all did in our class. Teachers seemed that they didn't care whether we listened or not. We had homework sometimes, but I always copied my friends' work because this is what we always did in our college... But now, I have to study hard because if I don't do my homework, I can't participate in my class discussion. Teachers seem to care about our work in the ESL class. So, I guess my learning style has changed because now I have to study.

Some students expressed that they have a stronger need for creative learning in the U.S. than they do in Japan. In Japan, students are encouraged to maintain the harmony in a classroom, whereas students are encouraged to express their unique individual characteristics in the American classrooms. One female Japanese student, who has been to the U.S. for more than two years, now has a different perspective on individual uniqueness:

When I was in Japan, I didn't like to be different from others. Even if I had a different opinion from other students, I didn't want to express my different viewpoint because I wanted to look the same... But now, I like sharing my opinions in class especially if I am the only one who could talk about Japanese culture... When my teacher asks me what Japanese people do in our culture, I enjoy the opportunity to share, because I would be the only student who can provide the information the teacher is asking.

While some students make changes in their learning, some other students appear to make no adaptation in their learning styles:

I didn't make any changes in my learning even after coming to the U. S. I don't think I need to make any changes. I like reading a book. So, I continue to read rather than writing something out... Although my American teacher teaches the class differently than my Japanese teacher back home, I still keep my learning style.

Although it is up to the students whether they change or keep their learning styles, the ESL teachers stated that ESL students, as with American students, should be responsible for their own learning. An ESL teacher is just a person who is going to guide the students through their learning. One teacher informant stated, "I'd like to tell the ESL students about the expectations of particularly communicative ESL classrooms, that every learner is supposed to be responsible for his or her own learning." Therefore, if an

ESL student is not learning effectively, the student should consider making appropriate adaptations in his/her learning styles.

The ESL students, who have made adaptations in their leaning styles, have provided some advice for the future ESL students. The most common advice among the ESL students is to study hard. One ESL student suggested that the ESL students have to change their study habits as outlined as follows:

Well, I would tell them to study hard. If they are ordinary Japanese students, they probably don't study at all. They don't probably expect the amount of work they are required to do in the ESL class. I was like that.... So, the advice I would give them is to get prepared and expect that they will be demanded... really, demanded to do a lot of work. I was surprised at the amount of homework I should submit each day. I never studied so hard until I came here. You can't succeed if you continue to do what you used to do. So, accept changes in your leaning habit because it's required.

As ESL students make adaptations in their learning styles, ESL teachers also make necessary adaptations in their teaching strategies and styles in order to accommodate to their students' different leaning styles. In the following section, cultural adaptations that ESL teachers and students make will be discussed. The ESL teachers accommodate to their students by modifying their teaching philosophy.

Cultural Adaptations

Teaching Philosophy. The ESL teachers perceive ESL classrooms as a student-centered class, and therefore, the teachers practice different teaching styles and accommodate to the different learning styles of their students. The goals of the ESL class are to help the students master their communicative English, to help them adjust to

American culture, and to prepare them for the American university settings both culturally and academically.

A common definition of the teacher's role in the ESL classroom is shared among the ESL teachers. The ESL teachers are like a guide who is going to help their students focus on their goals. One teacher informant said, "my role as a teacher is to facilitate students' discussion and help them learn what they are learning."

The ESL teachers see their roles as more than just a teacher. They are not only concerned about their students' learning but also concerned about the cultural adjustment of their international students:

I can imagine myself teaching English composition to American students... In that sense, I would make myself available to my students in personal way, but I wouldn't be so concerned about them. I feel really concerned about international students in particular, because I know that a lot of them, especially for those who've only been here a little while or even a year or two, it's just hard to be in a whole different culture... and they start missing home, and sometimes they don't understand interaction that are going on around them. So, I feel like I have been much more sensitive to international students than just to American students because they are at home and in their own culture. And, they don't have the same kind of worries. I can't even really imagine... being in university is hard enough, being in a university that is outside of the country in a whole different language, I mean, it seems like the pressure is almost overwhelming to those students.

One female teacher informant defined the role of ESL teachers as a counselor, advisor, and to be motherly to the students. The ESL teachers should establish a family-like environment in their classroom in which students feel at ease even though they are away from their real 'home':

I think as an ESL teacher, I should make myself available for students all the time. I take a role of counselor with respect to not only academic issues but also cultural aspects. Many of my students are experiencing cultural shock, coming to my office hours... I always try to make myself available for those students to come see me.

As previously mentioned, the ESL teachers employ a variety of teaching strategies to accommodate to the different learning styles of their students:

I learn language in certain kind of way, so I brought that assumption to the classroom... well, this is how I learn language so everybody must learn language like this. But I realized that's not true, the learners have different styles, so I try to accommodate much more. Like, I learn language best from hearing it, so I used to not write on the board at all, but I got much better in writing everything on the board so that students who need to see words written down on the board are accommodated.

The ESL teachers use a variety of teaching strategies and styles to meet the different needs of their students. The ESL teachers provide different opportunities by using computer journals, small group discussions, large group discussions, and so forth.

Since Japanese students learn things analytically using written texts and instructions, the ESL teachers make adaptations in their teaching styles and strategies in order to encourage students' learning:

What I have been trying to do to compensate for that communicative arch is to provide more of the texts, even as simple as following directions instead of directions just given orally, I try to give them either a slip of paper or write them on the board. This semester, we've just done an activity where they were to define the elements of good presentation. Instead of having them as a group orally present this idea to the class, I had them put their outlines on the board because I know a lot of Japanese students love writing on their notebooks. They

are very analytically-oriented and authority-oriented. So, there's a lot of that. I am very communicative but I am trying to compensate for the Japanese students who are not communicative.

The ESL teachers aim to teach communicative English and are always concerned about how their students learn and what media their students use to learn:

In order to help students learn live English, I try to use as much real communication as possible, both live and academic English as well... the students have variety of learning needs and styles... and I try to appeal to variety of learners... you know, students who are creative learners, nuts and bolts learners, structured learners... by using top-down, bottom-up approaches.

The ESL teachers often use journal entries to facilitate discussion with the students who are not talkative in the classroom. One teacher informant said that the Japanese students seem to work better with journal entries:

We tend to judge students' learning by their participation. After all these years of teaching, now I understand that some Japanese students may not be orally participating in the discussion, but it doesn't mean they are not thinking. They may be mentally engaging in the class discussion. I am often surprised at the students' answers in their journal entries where they feel comfortable participating.

One student, who has been in the United States for a while, even asked her teacher to let her participate in the class discussion through journal entries. Since she did not feel comfortable speaking up in her class, she wrote her ideas down on her notes and turned that in as her journal:

My ESL teacher allowed me to share my opinions through the journal entry. I also did this with other classes... I asked other professors to compensate... and they are willing. I did this because I don't want my teacher to think that I am not studying or I don't have any opinion. I did have my opinion, but I just didn't

know how to participate in English... After doing this [journal entry] for a while, I got much more confidence in my opinion and felt good about speaking up in the class discussion. I still worry if I am making myself embarrassed by giving completely “out of context answer.”

Since the ESL class is a students-centered classroom, student learning depends highly on the students’ motivations. If the students have had bad experiences at school in the past, it is difficult for the ESL teachers to get them motivated. One teacher informant stated that the only thing she could do is to “help them not to hate school.” She believes that good teachers can motivate students, even though it is up to the students whether they study or not.

As a teacher, I can’t make them [my students] learn. It is their choice whether to study hard or not. The students learn more than teachers teach. So, I just have to do my best to help them get motivated in learning. My teaching styles have been changing as I continue to teach, but the basic is the same. I teach things more than once, and in more than one way. There are students with different learning styles. So, I apply the concepts in different ways. I write things on the board, and try not to do too much at one time.

Finally, the last important aspect of ESL teaching philosophy that are reported by the interview informants is becoming aware of individual differences between students. Most of the Japanese students prefer the teaching styles that are commonly used in Japan; however, the ESL teachers report that they avoid making general assumptions toward students based on their teaching experience:

It seems to me that Japanese students in particular prefer me to stand in front of the room and just try and teach something very traditionally. Yeah. Well, but I don’t know though, because a lot of them, especially last semester they really

enjoyed working with certain students in their groups. So, I can't make this huge blanket statement about it because they all seem to be different.

Cross-cultural Experience of the ESL teachers. When the ESL teacher informants were requested to provide some advice for future ESL teachers, the importance of cross-cultural experience and sensitivity was revealed. The ESL teachers of English Language Institute have experience in teaching overseas. Their experience in teaching English outside of the United States helps them understand what students are going through in a foreign land. One teacher informant stated that learning another culture helped her understand her students better:

My experience in teaching overseas would definitely benefit me to understand more about my students, to know where they are coming from, and to understand the difficulties they may be facing here in the U.S. By living in a foreign country, I also experienced many difficulties that my students may be experiencing. They are in a country where people speak a different language and the culture is completely different.

ESL teachers suggest that it is helpful for the teachers to learn another culture, as it helps them understand more about their students who come from other countries:

I definitely think that an understanding of the cultural background of the students is a really great thing. Sometimes, that might be very difficult, in that you have a roomful of students that are from tons of different countries. You might know six of them, but you are not sure about others. So, I do think it's best to know even something like space differences. You know, there's all these ideas of how different cultures regard space... like American want a lot of space. And, I read that Japanese students want more space than Americans do. And then, in some culture, it's okay to be like really close together. So, even something simple as that. You don't want to make your students uncomfortable. But at the same time,

in the ESL classroom, which is taking place in the target language culture, you have to respect those differences, but also, having understanding that these students are here now.

One teacher informant stated that ESL teachers should be aware of the cultural factors of their students as those cultural factors affect the students' learning as well. Furthermore, the other teacher informant pointed out that "Good ESL teachers monitor themselves many times, focusing on communication."

One important characteristic of the ESL teacher is to be culturally sensitive to their students. One teacher informant advises future ESL teachers to travel overseas or teach in foreign countries:

My belief is that the ESL teachers should teach cultural skills as well as English language skill. I suggest that they would travel outside of the country and teach abroad... and see if they are culturally sensitive or not. It is very important for the ESL teachers to be culturally sensitive.

The other teacher informant also pointed out the importance of being sensitive. Since ESL students are unique individuals, it is very important that the ESL teachers do not generalize them but understand each student's unique characteristics:

The most common sense advice that I can give to someone is just to be a sensitive teacher, to understand the students. Especially in the ESL class where you have just a whole mix of students from different backgrounds... and again, even if it's just a classroom for Japanese students, they all have different personalities. So, I think the best thing to do is just to be sensitive, and not force these huge expectations of having them being the way you want them to be. Leave room for their unique characteristics.

As previously outlined, the biggest difference between the ESL teachers of the university and those of the ELI is that ELI teachers are required to have some cultural

experience as well as teaching experience in a foreign country. On the other hand, the ESL teachers of the university are usually teaching assistants who have less training in teaching English as a second language.

Although teaching experience may help the ESL teachers understand their students better, a few ESL instructors reported that the years of experience can be disadvantage if a teacher over-generalizes his or her student based on one's experience in the past. One teacher informant pointed out in the following statement that the ESL teachers with many years of experience are not always the best teachers:

Stereotypes of the students comes from experience... teachers with many years of experience tend to expect Japanese students to act in a certain way based on her experience in teaching Japanese students. It is good to make some assumptions about the students from a particular country based on your teaching experience, but at the same time, the ESL teachers should avoid overgeneralization and stereotyping their students.

Students often appreciate teachers who understand and appreciate the students' cultural backgrounds. One student informant stated that "my ESL teacher has been to Japan, so she knows something about my culture. This helps me a lot as I try to adjust to the American classroom."

Therefore, willingness to understand the students' cultures is one of the important aspects of the ESL teacher reported by the interview informants. One teacher informant stated that she tries her best to understand the cultures of her students:

Be more patient and understanding. Know that they have different cultural background. If you admit the difference, you probably feel less frustrated. Also, try to notice things by being sensitive to your students. Show your students that you are willing to understand their culture.

As illustrated from her suggestion, it is advised that the teachers who are going to teach ESL classes should be patient with their students from other countries. One teacher informant stated, “the only advice I would give is to be patient... there are struggles and difficulties you may face, but you need to be patient with your students. Being an ESL teacher requires lots of work, very time-consuming, but very rewarding.”

Open-Mindedness of the ESL students. When interview informants were asked to provide some advice for ESL students, both ESL teachers and students pointed out to the importance of open-mindedness. The ESL teachers suggest that students should have an open mind, be willing to try new things, to ask for help, and to realize that the teachers are willing to help them. One teacher informant suggested that the students should not assume that “American universities are similar to Japanese universities, because they are not. So, it’s very important to go into the American classroom with an open mind.”

The ESL students also pointed out to the importance of being open minded. One student informant gave an advice based on her experience:

I will tell them not to expect too much. Leave room for unexpected events. There are many things that you don’t expect in the classroom, such as a number of homework, class participation grades, etc. It helps if you go into the classroom with an open mind, flexible attitude.

After coding and analyzing all the data collected through preliminary interviews, further observations and follow-up interviews were conducted in order to test the accuracy of the interpretations and observations of preliminary interviews.

Observations and Focused Interviews

Based on my observations and focused interviews, there are many interesting cultural factors affecting the ESL classroom and the students' learning. As previously discussed in the method section, six classes were observed twice. All the ESL classes observed included Japanese students. In fact, the majority of ESL students were Japanese in all six classes. In order to confirm the data collected and analyzed through preliminary interviews, observations and follow-up question provided further cultural concepts that explain differences in educational background: specifically, Japanese students' unwillingness to participate in class discussions. In this section, three of those cultural concepts contributing to the ESL classrooms are focused and discussed: *Amae* (indulgence), *haji* (embarrassment), gender perceptions. Furthermore, the discussion of nonverbal and verbal communication may illustrate the mutual understanding and accommodations attributed by both ESL teachers and students.

One of the observed ESL classes had eighteen students who attended the class; ten of them Japanese students. Of those ten Japanese students, there was one Japanese female student who has been to the U.S. for more than four years, while other students have only lived in the U.S. less than a year. This student's English level appeared to be much higher than the other students' level in the ESL classroom. The follow-up interview was conducted with the student with high English skills right after the second observation. The student shared her concerns about her presence in the classroom, as her English ability is much higher than her classmates:

I don't know what my classmates think of me being in our class. I have been here for a long time and I know most of the stuff we are doing. I hope that I am not

standing out in our class. Probably I am, though. I don't want to discourage any of my classmates. I want to encourage them instead. They should be able to speak up in class discussion much more than I do in the next few years. I also want to tell them that I've been through many difficulties to come to this point.

When the student was asked about the difficulties she has faced in the past, she said that she learned through her experience that her teachers won't understand her if she wouldn't speak up. When she was in Japan, she could express her feelings with her teacher through nonverbal communication:

In Japan, I didn't have to speak up to communicate with my teacher. She would understand that I don't know the answer if I looked down. The teacher would also know that we do not understand when we show the "confused look" on our face. But in the U.S., a number of words is required in order to communicate with my teacher.

Amae – indulgence. The student also discussed the Japanese cultural concept, *amae*, which means indulgence. The student pointed out that some of her classmates show *amae*, taking advantage of being Japanese:

Some American teachers are very understanding of Japanese students and our culture. The down side is that some of my Japanese friends take advantage of the kindness of their teachers and make excuses for not participating, for missing their homework, or for being lazy. I sometimes hear my Japanese classmate saying 'I think my teacher will tolerate me for missing the homework.' That is their *amae*, being spoiled by American teachers.

As Japanese students are used to working together or helping each other, some Japanese students seek other students for assistance. The Japanese students often exchange their notes, the tests they have taken before, and they even share their homework with each other:

I even have some classmates asking me if they could copy my homework or journals. Of course, I wouldn't let them... but you know, it's difficult to refuse a request in my culture. So, I try to find a good excuse to turn them down. For example, the other day, my friend asked me if I have read the book that was assigned for our homework. She said, "I've read the article but didn't understand." Then, she asked if I could briefly explain its content to her. I knew she hadn't read it, so, I said, "You can't write a journal unless you read it for yourself." It's sad, but this happens quite often to me.

The Japanese student, who is in the same class as the above student informant, stated that having a classmate with high English skills has been a good stimulation for her to study hard:

I always look up to her and wish to speak English like she does. When I asked her why she can speak English so well, she told me that she hasn't always been like that. She told me that I speak better English than she did three years ago. This encourages me and gives me hope. Although I know there are some students who don't like her because she speaks so much and always stands out in our class, I appreciate her being in my class. I think those students who don't appreciate her are just being jealous.

Haji – Embarrassment. During the observations, there were several European students asking questions in class while only a few Japanese students asked questions during the class discussions. In one of the observed classes, a female Japanese student went up to her teacher right after class and asked some questions. Through the follow-up interview with that student, the cultural concept of *haji*, embarrassment, appeared to take part in the students' class participation.

The Japanese students are often concerned about giving wrong answers because they are always concerned about *haji*, being embarrassed in front of other students. In

Japan, the students are not used to asking questions because they do not want to make themselves embarrassed by asking ‘stupid questions’:

I don't like asking questions in class because I don't want to be embarrassed by asking stupid questions. Even a simple question, like what was the homework assignment for tomorrow, I don't feel like asking in front of the class because all other students might have got the assignment. I think American students are so brave that they can ask questions of the top of their head. They seem like they don't care about what other students would think about them. I always worry what my classmates would think about me if I asked a bizarre question. I am just not used to asking questions in class. So, if I have a question that I'd like to ask, I always go to see my teacher after class or visit her in the office.

In addition to these two cultural concepts, *amae* and *haji*, the cultural concepts on gender roles may be another attribution to Japanese students' unwillingness to participate in class discussions.

Gender Issues. Japanese students' perceptions on gender issues may also affect the students' participation. In small group discussions, male students seem to speak up more than female students, facilitating the group discussion. One female student stated that she speaks up less if there are male students in her class:

In general, I think male students are more talkative in class discussions. When I have a male student in my small group, I let him lead the group discussion and I wait until he shares his ideas. I don't know if it's cultural things or not. But, I think in the U.S., female students are more talkative.

In the ESL classroom, Japanese female students rarely speak up in discussions unless the teacher calls upon them. The gender rules of Japanese culture definitely exist

in the ESL classroom. One female student said, “I feel that I shouldn’t speak up more than other male students in my class so that I won’t make them lose their face.”

Moreover, some of the ESL teachers are aware of these gender rules existing in the ESL classroom, as one teacher informant stated:

If there is a male student in the class, Japanese female students refer to him first. And then, they will speak up. In the past semester, I had a class where there was only one Japanese female student, where it seemed like the main reason for not participating was that she is female. She had a number of male students in her class. So, even though her English speaking level was high, she felt she needed to make them feel good about themselves and let them speak more.”

All of these examples illustrate how Japanese cultural concepts contribute to the class participation of Japanese students in the ESL classroom. ESL teachers are often aware of these cultural concepts and seek further accommodation. Moreover, the discussion of gender also revealed the cultural adaptations made by some Japanese students after exploring American culture for a while.

Cultural adaptations are also made in order for ESL teachers and students to communicate efficiently and effectively. In the observed ESL classes, it seemed that ESL teachers and students shared common nonverbal and verbal communication. The following examples illustrate how both ESL teachers and Japanese students modify and evolve their nonverbal and verbal communication cues in order to accommodate with each other.

Nonverbal and Verbal Communication. In the ESL classroom, nonverbal communication as well as verbal communication is frequently used among the ESL teachers and students. When the teacher asked a question of the female Japanese student,

for example, the student smiled and tipped one side of her head. This gesture is commonly used when expressing uncertainty in Japan. Although this gesture is not practiced in American culture, the ESL teacher acknowledged her nonverbal cues and asked the fellow students to elaborate the answer for her.

Further, when there is a word or phrase that the student does not know in English, nonverbal channels, such as gestures, are used to communicate with ESL teachers. For example, when one male student did not know the word ‘snore’ in English, he made a noise and gestured “sleeping” to demonstrate that his roommate snored. The teacher immediately interpreted his gesture and said, “Oh, your roommate snores.” The student did not recognize the new word and said “he’s noise?” Then, the teacher repeated his sentence clearly and wrote ‘snore’ on the board.

When the students made mistakes, the teachers often made corrections that also revealed verbal communication used in the ESL classroom. The ESL teachers avoided putting their students on the spot by pointing out their mistake explicitly. Instead, the ESL teachers often correct the students’ answers by rewording their sentences in grammatically correct ways. For example, when a student said, “Masa is absent because he *catches* cold,” the teacher promptly corrected him by repeating his words, “Okay, Masa is absent because he *caught* cold.”

The ESL teachers did not refer to the students’ mistakes as “wrong sentences” but provided the students with correct sentences as examples. Moreover, even when the students made mistakes, the ESL teachers encouraged them by saying it was a good point or by admitting that the question was a tricky one. When one female student answered

that “computers may warn us when they got virus,” the teacher said that she might be right even though it was not the answer that she was looking for.

Although teachers did not make corrections explicitly by pointing out the students’ mistakes, students always recognized the nonverbal cues of teachers when their sentences were corrected or repeated. One student informant said that she would know whether her sentence was correct or not by determining whether her teacher smiles at her and repeats her sentence or not:

When I make mistakes, the teacher won’t tell me that I am wrong but instead, she will teach me how I could say it correctly. It really helps me because I don’t want to be on the spot or feel embarrassed. If the same thing happens in Japan, often times I make mistakes or ask bizarre questions and other students would start laughing at me. But it won’t happen in the ESL class.

The ESL teachers rarely used “wrong” or “no” when correcting their students’ mistakes as if they were adapting their verbal communication styles to more indirect styles of the Japanese students. The ESL specific nonverbal and verbal communication styles are understood and practiced in the ESL classrooms. In other words, the both ESL teachers and students share the same nonverbal and verbal communication by creating a new “culture.”

All of these examples show how the ESL teachers and students create a shared culture in between their different cultures that they bring into the classrooms. Both the ESL teachers and the Japanese students make some cultural adaptations in order to increase their understanding and to achieve their common goals.

Discussions and Conclusions

This research used a qualitative cross-cultural study to provide some insight into the ESL culture. ESL classrooms create its unique culture in which ESL teachers and students find a middle ground in between their different cultures by making mutual accommodations. The results of this study have identified cultural differences and adaptations that contribute to the specific culture of the ESL classrooms. Cross-cultural communication concepts discussed earlier may attribute to the explanation of cultural differences and adaptations: individualism versus collectivism, high versus low- context communication, directness versus indirectness, nonverbal versus verbal communication, and gender issues. This section provides a summary of the results according to different cultural aspects, discusses limitation of the study, and suggests implications for future research. Nevertheless, it is important to note that the discussion of cultural adaptations would go far beyond these concepts.

Summary of Conclusions

Individualism versus Collectivism. Since Japanese students are raised in a collectivist culture, the study shows that the Japanese students like to work as a group rather than as an individual. The ESL teachers perceive that the Japanese students contribute to the large group discussion even more after having small group discussions. The Japanese students gain confidence in their answers after sharing them with the small group members and then, they feel comfortable sharing their ideas with the large group members.

The American teachers valued each student's opinions as discussed in Philipsen's (1992) Nacirema culture. They believed that each individual has something to participate. On the other hand, Japanese students have been taught in the environment

where class participation is not so valued or may even be considered inappropriate. Since one of the goals of the ESL classroom is to help students adjust to the American educational systems, the ESL teachers encourage those Japanese students to participate in the class discussions by creating exercise a welcoming each individual input.

The discussion of the Japanese students' class participation is closely related to the cultural concept of individualism versus collectivism. In Japan, collectivistic culture, people value common benefit and shared meaning. Therefore, the Japanese students ask questions if the questions are shared among other students. If their questions are personal, they ask questions individually outside of the class. On the other hand, American students feel free to ask their personal questions and share their personal experiences or comments in class. In the U.S., where culture is more individualistic, people value the uniqueness of an individual.

In the ESL classroom, where students and teachers make mutual accommodation to create a shared culture, Japanese students still value their collectivistic culture by seeking goals of a group. Moreover, the concept of high versus low context is also reflected in the ESL culture.

High versus Low- context. The ESL classroom is a multi-cultural classroom in which the students from various countries bring in their own cultural backgrounds; therefore, the culture they share seems to have elements both high and low context communication. As previously discussed in the literature review, Japan is a very high context country. The Japanese students in the ESL class rely much on the nonverbal cues of their teachers. As you can see from discussion of nonverbal communication, the ESL

teachers understand nonverbal cues of their Japanese students when they show uncertainty nonverbally. The ESL teachers pick up their nonverbal cues and clarify their questions.

The ESL culture also includes the low-context culture as the ESL teachers encourage students to verbally participate in class discussions. ESL teachers stress the importance of their verbal contributions by saying, “you need to practice your English by participating in our class discussions. If you don’t speak up, it’s difficult to communicate.”

Both ESL teachers and students bring their cultural background to their classrooms and find a middle ground between high and low context cultures. The discussion on low and high-context culture of ESL classrooms may reveal the both direct and indirect communication styles of the ESL teachers and students. The following section discusses how the Japanese students and American teachers made adaptations in their direct and indirect styles of communication.

Direct versus Indirect Communication. Although ESL teachers and Japanese students have different communication styles, direct versus indirect, the indirect communication of Japanese students is often understood by ESL teachers. The Japanese students in the ESL classrooms tend to engage in more indirect communication, when compared with other students from European countries. As discussed in the section on disagreement, the Japanese students often try to avoid disagreement with other students. When ideas of the Japanese students are inconsistent with their classmates’ ideas, they try to communicate them indirectly rather than directly.

In the U.S., people value more direct communication style than indirect communication style; however, the ESL teachers make adaptation in their communication style and speak more indirectly when their students make mistakes. As you can see in the example of nonverbal and verbal communication of the ESL classroom, the ESL teachers make corrections of their students' mistakes indirectly by repeating their comments in accurate sentences.

Nevertheless, the ESL students are often asked for their opinions directly rather than indirectly. The Japanese students who have been to the U.S. for a longer period may engage in a more direct communication style than the students who have just come to the U.S. Therefore, in the ESL classroom, ESL teachers and Japanese students employ both direct and indirect communication styles accordingly by making further accommodations. Overall, direct communication styles are often encouraged in ESL classrooms and employed by the ESL teachers and students, as the ESL class is designed to prepare the students for American educational settings.

Nonverbal versus Verbal Communication. In the ESL classroom, the middle ground in between different cultures, the ESL teachers and students share the same cultural rules for both nonverbal and verbal communication. That is, nonverbal communication, such as cultural-specific gestures, is often employed and understood in the ESL classrooms. For example, when the Japanese students showed their cultural nonverbal cues expressing uncertainty or willingness to participate in discussion, the ESL teachers appropriately recognized the nonverbal cues that their students were sending, and clarified their concerns or questions explicitly. One ESL teacher encouraged

nonverbal communication when she said, “You shouldn’t speak in your native language even if you don’t know what to say in English. If you don’t know the words, you can use your gestures to communicate or draw a picture on the board.”

The ESL teachers also encourage their students to verbally participate in the class discussion. When the students are not participating in the large group discussions, the ESL teachers break them into small groups for discussion. The ESL teacher informant said, “I stress the importance of oral discussion. I found it easier for my Japanese students to speak up if they are in smaller groups, so, I often start off from small group discussions.” Although many Japanese students are not used to speaking up in a classroom, the ESL teachers stress the importance of class participation in order to prepare them for an American classroom. Therefore, both verbal and nonverbal communications are encouraged and understood in the ESL classrooms.

Class Participation and Cultural Rules. Class participation in the ESL classroom is another reflection of ESL culture as both ESL teachers and students bring different expectations and accommodate one another. In the following sections, I would like to focus on the patterns of class participation and cultural rules that affect the students’ willingness and unwillingness to participate in class discussions. First, I would like to discuss the values of “talk” in the Japanese classroom, by comparison with American culture. Second, I will introduce some of cultural rules, and consider how Japanese social structure creates unwillingness to participate in the ESL classroom. Discussion leads to the violation of those cultural rules. Finally, I will illustrate another cause of unwillingness to participate: gender roles shaped by Japanese culture and how those

cultural gender rules are observed in the ESL classroom. In each section, I will outline the strategies used by ESL teachers to overcome with those cultural rules and to create a “bridge” classroom environment.

Whereas in Nacirema culture, individual participation is highly valued (Phillipsen, 1992), Japanese students seemed to have hard time adjusting to a culture that demands participation. This unwillingness to participate may be caused by the social structure of Japan that creates cultural rules in speaking. In Japan, *kohai* (the person who is lower in the hierarchy than *senpai*) should speak less than their *senpai* (who defined as a superior or elder to *kohai*). One teacher informant said, “They just don’t speak up because there are higher persons in the class. I don’t feel senior students are telling junior students not to talk; but just that junior students aren’t talking because they shouldn’t in their culture.” Since the Japanese hierarchy is usually based on students’ age, Japanese students are curious to know the age of their classmates. For example, one teacher informant said, “As we get ready for the next semester, I have students who ask how old new students would be, and what month he was born.”

However, there are students who would break the cultural norms after living in American culture for a long time. In fact, I observed one Japanese student who actively participated in class discussions despite the presence of his *senpai* in the classroom. One teacher informant said, “Students who have been in American culture for a longer time would ignore that cultural hierarchy and speak up in the classroom even though there is a higher hierarchical student.”

In addition, cultural gender rules also exist in the ESL classrooms. The observational data shows that the male students tend to speak up more than the female

students in small group discussions. One female student informant said, “When the teacher asks a question, I often wait to see if other male students would speak up or not. If they don’t speak up, I say something. I just make sure that I don’t interrupt them.” Although it is not obvious in classrooms, the gender rules of Japanese culture are sometimes practiced in ESL classrooms.

As some students ignore the cultural hierarchy, the students who have been to the U.S. for a long time would also ignore the gender rules practiced in the ESL classrooms. One teacher informant said, “I have one female student who speaks up more than any other male students in class. I think this is because she has been here so long.”

There are many cultural aspects observed in the ESL classrooms as discussed in this section. Although these communication concepts are discussed individually in this section, many of these concepts were overlapping in the ESL classrooms. The results collected through interviews and observations revealed far more cross-cultural aspects than the simple research questions. In fact, the research data goes beyond these concepts revealing the implication of further study.

Limitation of the Study

One of the most important limitations of this cross-cultural study was the small sample size. Since there are only six ESL teachers at the university, the number of the teacher informant could be the same as the student informants. Moreover, there are more female students than male students enrolled in the ESL classes. Of the twelve interviews with the student informants, only four of them were conducted with the male students. Having an equal number of male and female students might reveal more about the gender

issue. In order to increase the validity of the research findings, the similar study should be repeated with a larger sample size.

As previously discussed, the researcher should avoid overgeneralizing the research findings. No two ESL classes will be the same, and no two students will be the same. The researcher should recognize the unique characteristics of the each participant. Generalization of the research finding is clearly limited to the students who participated in this study. Since the sample size was small, it was not possible to make a generalized statement about the ESL classroom.

The comparisons between the Japanese students and other foreign students are another limitation of this study. To compare the Japanese students with the students from other countries, those students need to be included as the student informants to receive the input from both sides. In order to compare the Japanese students with American students, American students would also need to be included as the participants of the study.

Another limitation of this study was the limited hours of observations. Two hours for each instructor might not be enough to reveal interesting phenomenon or events. As all six ESL teachers have different ways of teaching, two hours of observation were not enough to get used to the different teaching styles.

Finally, this study also limited the possibility of exploring differences between the ESL classes of English Language Institute and the ESL courses offered at the university. Since the number of classes observed was so few, the study failed to show differences between the two types of ESL classes.

The limitations of this research lead to the discussion of possibilities for future research. All of these limitations imply a great need for further research on the concept of cross-cultural communication in the ESL classroom.

Implications for future research

The study provides a basis for future research in many ways. The same study can be repeated with a larger sample in order to have more valid results. In future research, the number of teacher and student informants should be the same in order to compare the different perspectives between teachers and students.

Future study could also be conducted in the context of other classrooms outside the ESL classroom. Future study could provide interesting data for cross-cultural comparison between Japanese and American students. For example, how are Japanese students' learning styles different than those of American students in a normal university classroom? Alternatively, how do American professors make adaptations or changes for their Japanese students? As the study shows, the ESL teachers adapt their teaching styles to meet the needs of their students. Future study could provide an answer to the question; what happens when the students leave ESL classroom? There are endless possibilities for interesting study that could be conducted in the context of cross-cultural classroom research.

Moreover, each communicative concept in this study could be extended by comparison with American students: How do Japanese students participate in class discussion compared with American students? How do American professors encourage Japanese students to participate in their classroom discussions? This research question

could be answered by having more American professors as participants of the research. In addition, by having an equal number of male and female informants, further insights could be gained into gender roles and gender perspectives of Japanese students and how they affect student learning.

The present study has provided interesting finding on the ESL classroom and encouraged the informants to realize some cultural factors that they have taken for granted. As a researcher, there are many things that I took for granted and overlooked with respect to cultural contributions in the ESL classroom.

There are many practical implications of this study. The results of this study have identified several tips for teachers to make adaptations in their teaching styles for their international students. It also provided tips for international students how to adapt their learning styles to American classroom settings. Since there are more and more international students coming to the U.S. to study at the American universities, the advices given for both ESL teachers and students might be helpful. The study revealed many cultural contributions that both ESL teachers and students bring to the ESL classrooms. Therefore, the results of this study should benefit both American teachers and international students by explicitly revealing what they should expect in cross-cultural classrooms.

Since one of the goals of the ESL classroom is to prepare students for American universities, ESL teachers should understand the culture of ESL classrooms, and should attempt to create an American-like cultural environment. Through the contributions of both ESL teachers and students, the ESL classroom may function as a “bridge” between

the classrooms of American universities and the classrooms that international students have attended in their home country.

This research has clearly revealed the important role of ESL teachers in both the university in general and in English Language Institute. Through the course of field research, I learned the importance of “open-mindedness.” As a researcher, “open-mindedness” allowed me to have an outsider view to Japanese culture and to find interesting cultural concepts that I have taken for granted. Moreover, “open-mindedness” is an important aspect for the ESL teachers as one teacher informant suggested, “the ESL teachers should be open-minded and not have broad cultural preconceptions.”

Finally, understanding of how the culture of ESL students affects the culture of ESL classroom should help ESL teachers prepare for their classes, and know what to expect in the students’ learning styles. As outlined throughout this study, we, as communication scholars, should continue to study and explore the cross-cultural communication in ESL, multi-cultural classrooms. To help international students prepare for the new culture of American universities, and to help them succeed in the future, teachers must sensitively understand the both cultural and educational background of their international students.

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