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Finding the “E” in English: Exposure and Experience to World Englishes through Computer-Mediated Communication

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Abstract: As the world continues to “flatten” in all fields, the probability that non-native speakers of English will be communicating with other non-native speakers continues to increase. For students from Japan and Macau, whose years of formal English education has enforced native-speaking Englishes and cultures, the “E” many college freshmen have yet to be exposed to is an opportunity to experience English as an international language. The aim of this project was to familiarize students with a variation of World Englishes and provide a practical experience for navigating English interculturally in a controlled setting, while at the same time, adhering to the guidelines of their required freshman presentation courses.

Keywords: *collaborative learning, CMC, CALL, intercultural exchange*

1. Introduction

This project was a collaborative effort throughout one semester between first year students from mandatory classes at two large universities, one in Japan (Tokyo) and one in Macau, in which students shared culturally-related “how to” presentations (videos) on a Weebly for Education website. As such, it is important to provide background information about each university, including the technological resources available and media support.

Japan: The Japanese university that participated in this study has one of the largest and longest-standing English programs in the country. Founded in 1874, it has almost 19,000 students attending today. Regarding technology, it is an exception in terms of resources and support available. Media stations, which include DVD players, overhead projectors, laptop computers, full class audio sound systems, and Internet access can be found in the majority of its classrooms. The Media Center, which can be reached on demand from campus phones, includes full time workers and student assistants, as well as an English-speaking staff. Despite the number of historical buildings on campus and its tight quarters within Tokyo, the university continues to expand and upgrade its facilities. Its declaration focuses on giving students a real world experience, awareness of human dignity and sensitivity to shared experiences.

Macau: This university was founded in 1981 and currently has over 7,000 students attending. It is an English-medium university, meaning that English is the common language for instruction. The English Language Centre began in 2002. It has 20 instructors from all over the world, including: the USA, Brazil, Japan and the United Kingdom, as well as local talent. Students who take ELC courses are matriculated and working on improving their skills in academic and professional English as well as increasing their confidence. Several important university initiatives include: incorporation of a global perspective in all undergraduate programs, increasing general knowledge to achieve the objective of whole-person education, and having an international teaching staff to create a multilingual learning environment.

Clearly from both of these university declarations, an intercultural, collaborative project such as the following addresses the main goals of each institution.

2. Rationale for the Project

Both the Japanese and Macanese students have a tendency to believe that if their job requires them to use English, it will be with native speakers. My colleague and I know that is simply no longer the case in today's world. One of the main objectives was for our students to be exposed to Global English and have the experience of communicating interculturally in English with other college students before they enter "the real world." We also wanted our students to receive authentic feedback regarding the skills we'd been working on in class, from sources other than us, their "language-fossilized" instructors.

3. Project Overview

This project took place over the course of one semester in the fall of 2010. Due to the difference in semester start and end dates for the Japanese and Macanese students, we decided that interaction would work best as asynchronous presentations, videotaped and uploaded to a secure, password-protected internet site on Weebly.com. In this way, students could watch the videos as many times as they wanted or needed, and there would be no need to coordinate class time schedules interculturally.

From there, we needed to design how to fit this intercultural collaboration into the specific requirements of our individual courses. The Macanese students were business majors, taking an English for Business course that met their level 2 English requirement. These were mostly first year students, with some upperclassmen. The semester ran from August to December, and the class size was between 24 to 27 students (four sections – 100 students). The class met twice a week for 80 minutes. This collaboration project focused on the second of three project/presentations based on the required course textbook, *Market Leader (New Edition)*, which all students referred to. Prior to this, students had practiced their presentation skills with the first project/presentation, in which they developed E-posters for their university's Fall English Festival.

The second project, based on lessons from the textbook, was to create a cultural awareness training video to do business in a foreign country, which included business etiquette topics such as greetings, business meetings, business meals, gift giving, time and attire. Students could either choose to show the proper manner to conduct business etiquette, or first show a misunderstanding and then explain the proper way. They were in groups of 4-5 members. The video presentations took place in class on November 4 and 5. The presenters received comments on their videos and presentations from their classmates and the instructor. They were then converted to flash files (using freestudio.com) and uploaded for the Japanese students to comment on.

During this time the Japanese students had uploaded their culture share videos to receive comments on. The Macau students began to review the Japanese students' videos and voted on them. In December, after receiving the Japanese student feedback on their videos, the Macau students completed a final online collaborative questionnaire about the whole experience.

For the Japanese students, their semester began in September and continued through January. For them, the presentation was incorporated into their required Presentation II Class and taping took place in class between October 12 and 26. There were three classes, consisting of 20-25 students per class from 3 different majors and levels, which included intercultural communication, business and science. Each class met once a week for 90 minutes.

After reviewing the presentation skills from the previous semester's required textbook, *Speaking of Speech*, students were to prepare a short "how-to" culture-share presentation with the Macanese students in mind as their audience. Since students in these classes had been taught by different instructors the previous semester, the reasoning behind these "mini-presentations" was to assess which skills students has retained from their previous classes, so that collectively, the class has a "starting framework" to build on together.

The students created individual cultural "how-to" demonstration presentations, of which one of the main criteria was to teach the Macanese audience something they don't already know about Japan. Taping was done during class, and after the class presentation, the videos were uploaded to Weebly for the Macau students to provide feedback. In November, they completed online self reviews for their individual presentations. In December, they provided the Macau students with feedback on their doing-business-in-a-foreign-country videos. Then in January, the Rikkyo students completed the final online collaborative questionnaire about the whole experience.

4. Resources

For the University of Macau students, the English Language Centre has three labs (located in the university library near the ELC) comprised of two testing/class labs and an independent language learning lab for a total of sixty learning/testing stations. There is also a multimedia lab available for video editing or converting. There is an IT person at the center as well as a technology department for the university.

Rikkyo has as Media Center made of up of five floors. There is a support center with student assistants who speak some English. There is also a full-time English speaking staff member as well as on-call support. In addition, there is an office which loans out video cameras, a region-free DVD player and laptops. There is also an instructor budget to purchase equipment. Teaching stations have a consul that can be switched to English. Stations are equipped with desktop computers, laptop capability, OHP, drop-down screen, speakers, monitors in between the students' computers, and Skype capabilities. Media stations like this are also in many of the classrooms on campus.

The video cameras and tripods used by both the Japanese and Macau students were university equipment. They used SD cards for easy uploading. The Rikkyo students also used Bluetooth wireless microphones that had a direct audio feed to the video camera, which were purchased from the Rikkyo instructor budget. Also purchased from this budget was Weebly Pro. The basic Weebly for Education site is a free service, but Weebly Pro provides password protection and unlimited uploading of videos. The University of Macau students used their own cameras for their video recordings/skits, but the in-class presentations were recorded with a camera borrowed from the ELC. However, because the size of the video files was limited 100MB on the Weebly site, files had to be made smaller. For the Japanese students, they were simply converted in iMovie by selecting the correct file size, and for the students from Macau, files were converted using the free downloadable software, Free Studio Manager.

5. Review

The Rikkyo students first completed a self review of their own presentations (Appendix A), focusing on the presentation skills they had practiced the previous semester: physical message, visual message, story message and audience appropriateness. The UM students then watched the Rikkyo student videos and provided them feedback regarding the purpose of the presentation (Appendix C), clarity and comprehensiveness of the main points of the presentation, the clarity of the "how-to" steps and advice on the presentation skills.

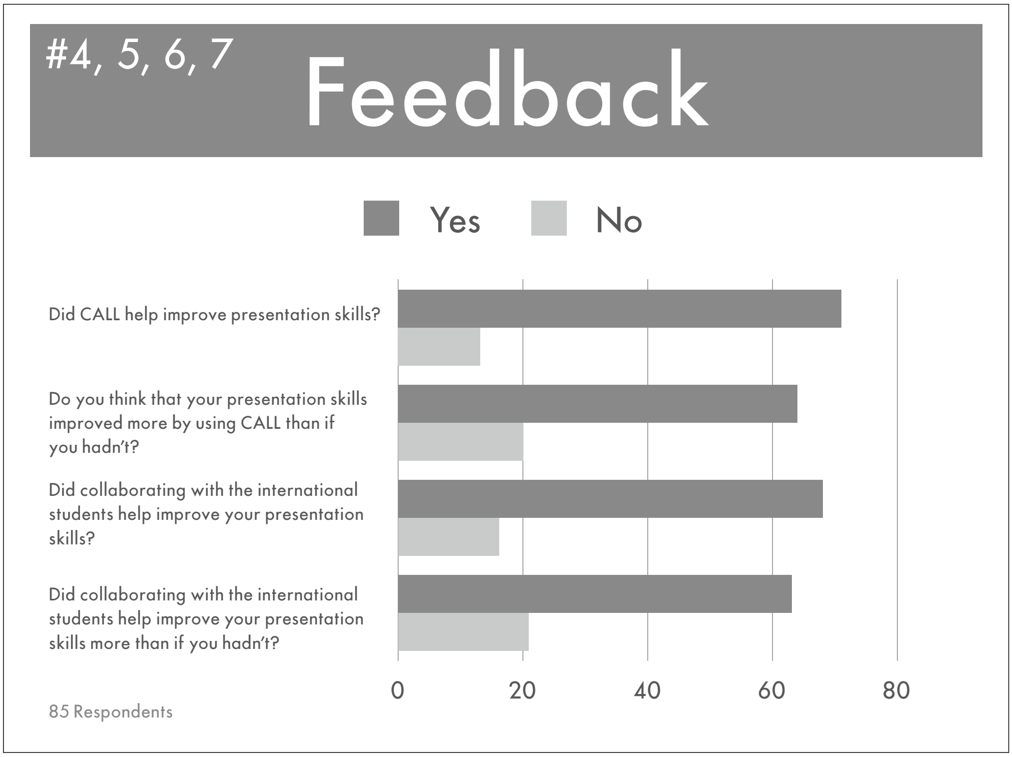
The UM students completed an in-class peer evaluation about their classmates' presentation skills (Appendix B), the video and its content. Then the Rikkyo students watched the cultural awareness videos and provided comments (Appendix D) to the UM students about the business etiquette topics covered, how to improve the video skills and advice about presentation skills. Students at both universities gave insightful comments about each other's videos.

6. Final Questionnaire & Student Responses

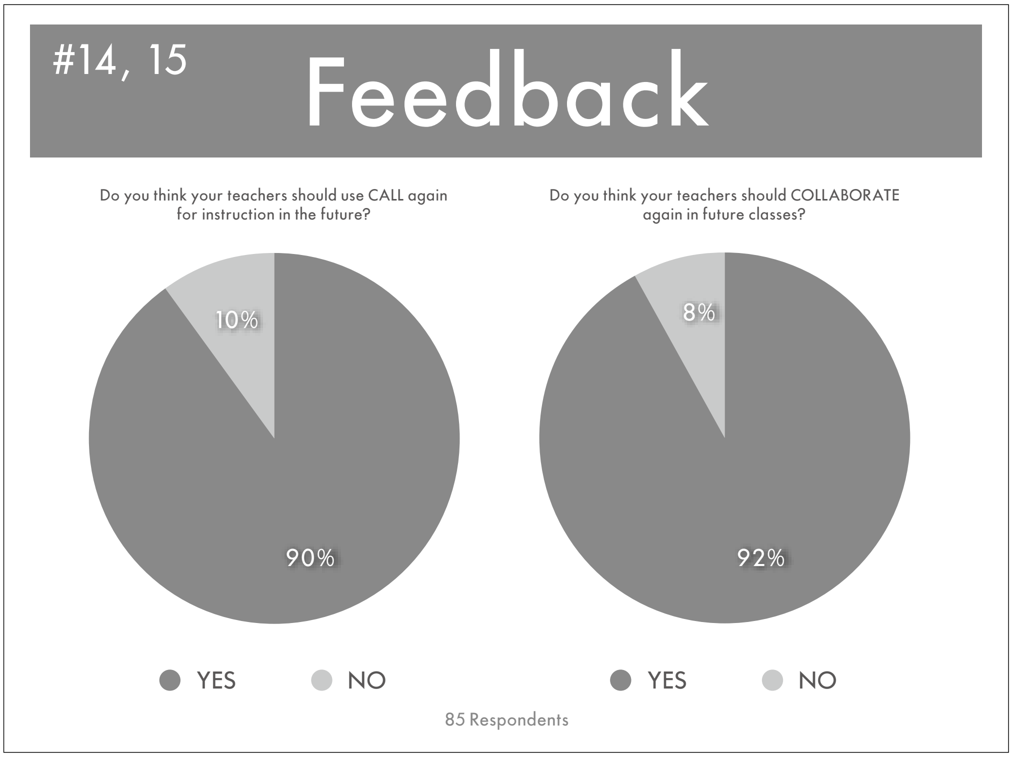
After reviewing each other's videos, the students at both universities completed a final online questionnaire about their experience using CALL related to presentations skills and international collaboration. The questionnaire was in English, Chinese and

Japanese to ensure full comprehension of questions and full expression of responses. Eighty five students responded. Because of the timing of the questionnaire, only 45 of the 100 UM students completed the questionnaire and 40 of the 60 Rikkyo students participated. From the responses below, it's clear to see that most students felt CALL and collaborating with international students helped to improve their presentation skills. Also most students feel that their teachers should use CALL for instruction as well as collaborate in future classes. Regarding confidence in making presentations in English interculturally, most Japanese students gave the rating of so-so whereas the Macau students were more likely to give a definitive stronger response or no rating at all. This may be reflective of the Japanese tendency to give more neutral responses.

Participants were asked what they learned from the experience and the most frequent responses were: learning about other countries/Japan, communication skills and importance, presentation skills and different styles of presenting, the importance of having subtitles and clear pronunciation, and finally, that from collaboration and cooperation they were able to learn from others in a new way.



Project Review Questions 4, 5, 6, 7



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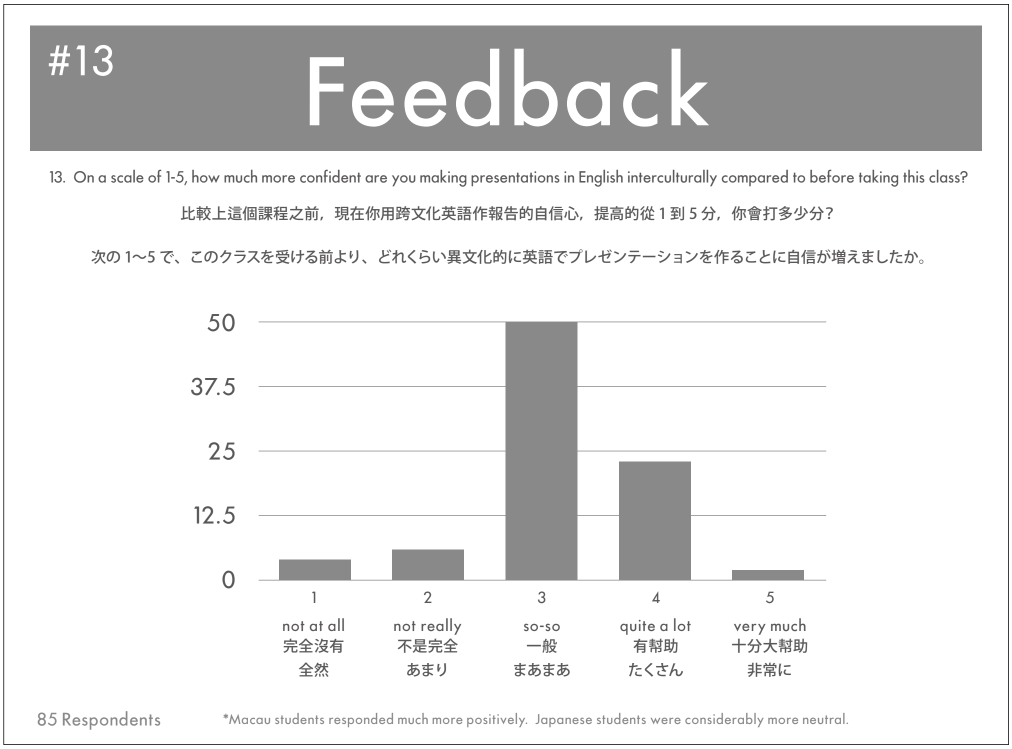
Feedback

Do you think your teachers should use CALL again for instruction in the future?

Do you think your teachers should COLLABORATE again in future classes?

85 Respondents

Project Review Questions 14, 15



#13

Feedback

13. On a scale of 1-5, how much more confident are you making presentations in English interculturally compared to before taking this class?

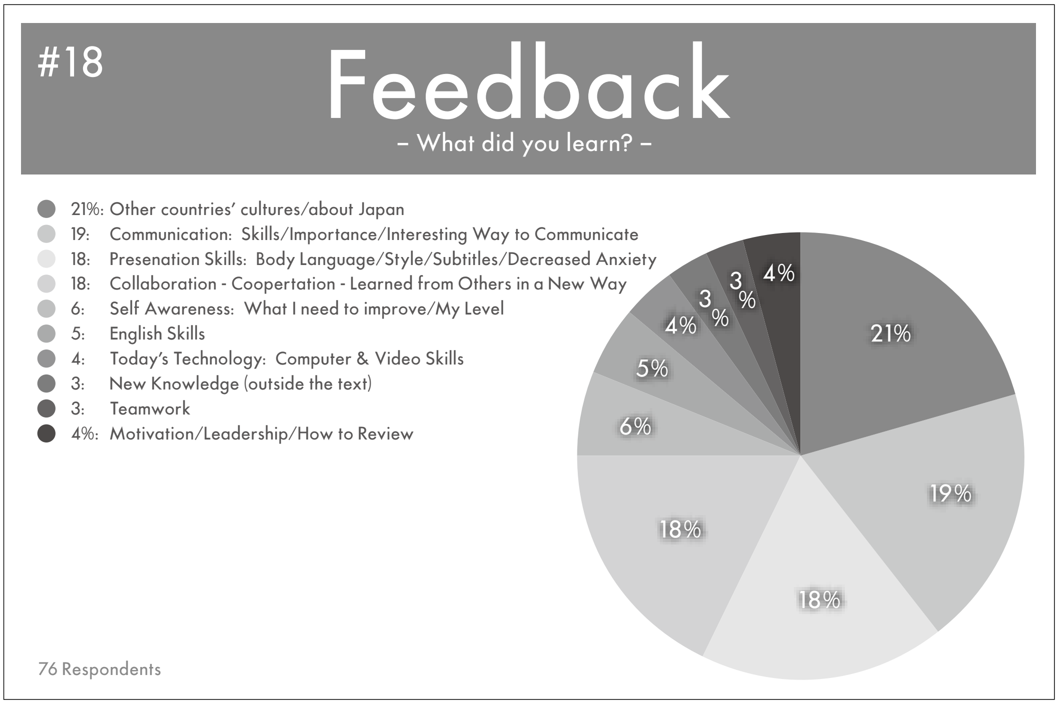
比較上這個課程之前，現在你用跨文化英語作報告的自信心，提高的從 1 到 5 分，你會打多少分？

次の 1〜5 で、このクラスを受ける前より、どれくらい異文化的に英語でプレゼンテーションを作ることに自信が増えましたか。

85 Respondents

*Macau students responded much more positively. Japanese students were considerably more neutral.

Project Review Question: 13



Project Review Question 18

7. Recommendations

Overall, both instructors felt that this collaborative project was a success. Regarding the initial goal of exposing students to Global Englishes, it seems that the majority of students reacted positively to this collaborative effort and felt that they learned from this experience. They were also able to receive authentic, non-native feedback in a semi-controlled setting to reflect on their level, ability, and pronunciation.

For future projects instructors would recommend that the same preparation content is covered so there is a higher frequency of shared vocabulary words and understanding. In other words, if instructors were both teaching from the same textbook, comprehension might be greater, and pronunciation might not be as inhibiting. It is also advisable to agree on the same review process: self review, and then class peer review along with a collaborative review. It is important to decide if all the students will do individual or group presentations and then the length of the presentation.

For clarity of audio, students should record with a wireless microphone and put subtitles in their videos. Using a digital video recorder works well, but it's important to adjust the file size and keep it under 100MB (around 10 minutes for at a small size or 15 minutes at a mobile size). For anonymity, the students should use fake names and make sure the site is password protected. Weebly for Education worked well for this type of project. Finally, dealing with different time zones and semester dates requires careful planning and coordination, which is why asynchronous recordings and communication were favorable for this project.

Appendix A: Self Review Questionnaire (Japanese students)

1. What do you think about the physical message?
2. What do you think about the visual message?
3. What do you think about the story message?
4. Was the presentation a suitable topic for the audience?
5. Is there anything you would like to improve or add to the presentation?

EXAMPLE:
Name: Diane Obara... "How to Make a Peanut Butter and Jelly Sandwich"

1. I think...
2. I think...
3. I think...
4. I think...
5. I would like…

Appendix B: Self Review Questionnaire (Macanese students)

EELC 215
Project-Presentation #2 Doing Business in a Foreign Country (U7)
Peer Evaluation

Group ____________________ Country ____________________

Rate the speaker on each point: 5-excellent 4-good 3-average 2-fair 1-peer

Delivery:					
5	4	3	2	1	Speaks loudly enough to be hoard by all
5	4	3	2	1	Speaks at an appropriate speed
5	4	3	2	1	Varied use of pitch (voice is interesting)
5	4	3	2	1	Clear pronunciation
5	4	3	2	1	Looks confident/ has appropriate facial expressions
5	4	3	2	1	Makes eye contact with ail members of the audience
5	4	3	2	1	Uses appropriate gestures
5	4	3	2	1	Has no distracting movement
Contact:					
5	4	3	2	1	Gets audience attention in introduction/introduces group members in the presentation
5	4	3	2	1	States purpose of the presentation/provides plan of talk
5	4	3	2	1	Gives background information about country
5	4	3	2	1	Sets up and explains video role-play clearly
5	4	3	2	1	Video role-play ------ ------- clearly
5	4	3	2		Video role-play is creative and effective in teaching cultural awareness
5	4	3	2	1	Concludes presentation appropriately
5	4	3	2	1	Invites Questions Ansers questions in a sinccre, respectful manner. Tries to answer questions clearly.

What did the group do best? ____________________

What should the group pay attention to next time? ____________________

Accessed by ____________________

Appendix C: Collaborative Questionnaire (about Japanese presentations)

Thank you for sharing your culture with us and letting us share with you!

Please follow the example below to answer a few questions regarding our presentations. You can post them in "comments."

Questions:
1. Why did the presenter want to share this part of Japanese culture with you?
2. What were the main points of the presentation?
3. Were the "how to" steps clear and complete?
4. What advice do you have for the presenter?
5. Based on the titles alone (only), which presentation sounds the most interesting to you?

Example:
How to...

1. The presenter wanted to share this culture because...
2. The main points of the presentation were...
3. The steps were...
4. My advice is...

5. Based on the titles alone, the ___________________ presentation sounds the most interesting to me.

Thank you,
Your Rikkyo University Friends :)

Appendix D: Collaborative Questionnaire (about Macanese presentations)

We really enjoyed watching your cultural how-to presentations. Thank you for sharing them with us and letting us share our video skits/presentations on doing business in another country:

Please follow the example below to answer a few questions about our doing business in another country video skits/presentations. You can post them in "comments."

Questions:
The cultural awareness video/presentation covered the following topics:

- first meeting/greetings/introducing each other / small talk
- gift-giving
- business meals (host/guest)
- business meetings / concepts of time and punctuality
- proper attire (men and women)
- attention to status and hierarchy

1. From these topics covered in the video/presentation, what did you find the most surprising about doing business in that country?
2. Which topic (see those listed in Question #1) from the cultural awareness video/ presentation would you like more information about?
3. How could the group improve their video skit?
4. What advice do you have for the group regarding presentation skills (eye contact, facial expression, body, voice)?

Example:
Doing Business in ____________________ (country name) Cultural Awareness Video/ Presentation

1. I found the information on ____________________ most surprising.
2. I would like more information on….
3. The group could improve its video skit by….
4. My advice on the group members presentation skills is….

Thank you,
Your friends at the University of Macau