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Task-based Activities and Teaching of Various Cultural Forms for Japanese High School Students to Produce More Positive Effects on Language Acquisition and Cultural Awareness

Chika Harada

Abstract

This research aims to find out two things. The first are the effective ways for my Japanese high school students to acquire English speaking skills in the classroom managed by a teacher of English. The other is whether favourable cultural information about the English-speaking countries affects Japanese students attitudes positively to the Target Language (TL) group and their cultures and if so, whether their positive attitudes help them get motivated in learning English. From the questionnaires conducted in my English classes with 120 students in 2013, task-based activities helped students have more opportunities to use English. A reasoning-gap activity was the most popular, where 70.6 % of the students answered they had more opportunities to use English. As for culture learning, 52.6 % of the students answered they acquired positive attitudes toward the TL countries and the peoples after they learned some favourable cultural information. Also, 71.6 % of the students answered they got motivated in learning English after they learned favourable cultural information regarding English-speaking countries. These findings suggest that task-based activities and teaching cultural forms can be effective to enhance the quality of teaching practices and meet the demands of students to some degree.

1. Rationale and scope of project

I have been teaching English at private high schools in Japan for 12 years. For a long time English classes in my school have focused primarily on teaching reading skills. My students, however, when given a questionnaire in 2012 at the end of the course responded that they

expect to gain a broader range of skills in their English classes. There were 50 students in three classes. From the results, as in Appendix 1, it can be seen that high school students in my school put higher priority on acquiring English spoken communication skills as they selected listening and speaking skills, both of which skills are essential for having spoken communication with others compared to reading and writing. At the same time, they perceived that acquiring speaking skills is the most difficult task and almost half of them confessed that they did not have any means to improve their weaknesses in English learning. As an English teacher in Japan, I am keen to research what the effective ways are for my students to acquire English speaking skills in a classroom managed by a teacher of English.

I also found from daily conversation with my students that quite a number of students do not feel happy learning English. They say that such feeling usually comes from a negative attitude toward foreign countries. Japanese students have stereotypical impressions of foreign countries – associated with a perception of wide use of weapons and experiences of acts of terrorism in countries outside Japan. They say that they do not want to live outside Japan and as long as they live in Japan, they do not need English. This is a common rationale I often hear from my students for not wanting to learn English very much. However, I doubt they will never use English in their entire lives even if they live in Japan forever due to the increasing number of foreign people living and working in Japan and people of all ages increasingly seeking information from the Internet, where English is used as a universal language spoken by more people as a second and foreign language than there are first language speakers of English (Graddol, 1997). As I believe that they will need English to some degree in the future, I want to help them get motivated in learning English. According to Schumann (1986), if a learner sees the country where the TL is spoken as favourable, the learner is more likely to succeed in Second Language Learning (2LL) than if he or she views the other country negatively (p. 382). As his research was conducted in the TL country, it is not sure whether this statement is also true outside the country, in this case in Japan. Therefore, I introduced some culture learning in my class and observed whether it would be helpful for my Japanese high school students living in Japan to gain positive attitudes toward the peoples in TL countries and eventually to get motivated in learning English.

2. Preliminary literature review

Introduction

As learning foreign language requires difficult tasks especially for the students who do

not use it on a daily basis, the question as to what is the most effective way to teach it has been around for a long time. It has been gradually revealed that two elements can affect how effectively students learn a second language. One is the approach to language learning called 'communicative language teaching' (CLT) which is designed for students to learn to speak the second language by using language in meaningful contexts. It is believed that with this method using the language in authentic ways students are more likely to succeed in genuinely communicating in the target language (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011, p. 115). The second factor that can affect the success in acquiring the second language can be explained by the acculturation model, which was introduced by Schumann (1986). He mentions TL country learning of the second language, claiming for having positive attitudes toward the target language group and their culture for successful 2LL (Schumann, 1986, p. 382). In short, these two elements can affect how successfully students learn a second language. The following essay shows how this argument can be made from a literature review.

The Idea of CLT

To understand the idea of CLT, this essay first explains the importance of communicative competence. According to Brandl (2008), communicative competence is defined as "the ability to interpret and enact appropriate social behaviors, and it requires the active involvement of the learner in the production of the target language" (pp. 5-6). Although language learning has been done with the grammar-translation method for many decades (Brandl, 2008, p. 2), gradually it was revealed that this method could not nurture learners' fluency in speaking the target language. This is due to the fact that knowing the words and grammar does not necessarily mean that the person can speak the language fluently. This knowledge is called 'competence' and it "refers to one's underlying knowledge of a system, event, or fact" (Brown, 2007, p. 35). On the other hand, the ability to speak the language is called 'performance' and it is "the overtly observable and concrete manifestation or realization of competence" (Brown, 2007, p. 35). Thus, language competence and performance are different and people cannot speak the language if they do not have the skills for language performance. Obviously, grammar-translation method does not necessarily help learners nurture language performance and it is insufficient for learners to learn speaking skills. Therefore, as one of the methods to acquire speaking skills, CLT will be helpful. This approach sees language as a tool for communication and it requires learners to do tasks which focus on meaning. Thus, task-based lessons let learners use the necessary grammar

and vocabulary. As a result of using them, they acquire the knowledge. Thus, students always focus on spoken communication in the task-based activities under CLT.

The Effectiveness of Task-Based Activities as a Realisation of CLT

Task-based activities are considered to be effective for 2LL as a realization of CLT. Richards and Rodgers (2001) also say that “Task-Based Teaching can be regarded as a recent version of a communicative methodology and seeks to reconcile methodology with current theories of second language acquisition” (p. 151). There are mainly two methods to implement task-based activities under CLT (Ur, 1996, pp. 122-124). One is conducted by topic-based activities and the other is by task-based ones. The former is to require students to talk with each other concerning the chosen topic and the other requires them to do some tasks which focus on meaning. According to Ur (1996), task-based activities performed better than topic-based ones under her experiment (p. 124). For example, in a topic-based activity, she asked students to discuss whether they should be taught in heterogeneous classes or not. As for a task-based activity, she asked students to put the order of priority on the qualities of good schoolteachers, such as ‘sense of humour’, ‘honesty’, ‘love of children’ and so on. According to Ur (1996), “task-centred activity scores higher with most groups on all criteria: there is more talk, more even participation, more motivation and enjoyment” (p. 124). The observations were made by teachers, not by students, as teachers can see how students are working on each activity objectively. Also, Larsen-Freeman and Anderson (2011) mention that task-based activities strongly realise the concept of CLT, “where language is acquired through use” (p. 150). In other words, “students acquire the language they need when they need it in order to accomplish the task that has been set before them” (Larsen-Freeman and Anderson, 2011, p. 150). According to Skehan (1998, as cited in Willis & Willis, 2007), task-based activities focus on meaning rather than forms and the completion of tasks has some sort of priority (p. 12). Also, teachers assess students’ tasks in terms of performance, not of English accuracy. Thus, task-based lessons put more priority on meaning exchange than grammar or vocabulary and strongly realise the concept of CLT.

The Importance of Culture Learning for Better Second Language Learning

Learning second language is not just a matter of language. It is closely related to the people who speak the TL. Sapir cited in Kramsch (2000) illustrates the relationship between language and culture, as follows:

Language is a guide to 'social reality'....Human beings do not live in the objective world alone, nor alone in the world of social activity as ordinarily understood, but are very much at the mercy of the particular language which has become the medium of expression for their society (p. 85).

Such a close relationship between the society and the language helps students obtain the knowledge about the culture of the TL. Moreover, through their sense of achievement in gaining knowledge about culture, students might be able to enhance their motivation.

Applying the Acculturation Model into a Real Class to Enhance Second Language Learning

As it can be seen above, when people talk about 2LL, they cannot ignore the close relationship between language and culture. According to Byram and Risager (1999), "language organises and expresses a whole range of cultural information and interpretations of concepts and ways of life" (p. 147). What is more, people tend to perceive reality within the context of their own culture and the reality they see is a created one (Brown, 2007, p. 189). If so, the ways they learn a second language should be different according to their cultures. The acculturation model takes into account those cultural factors to see whether learners can succeed in learning a second language or not. The word 'acculturation' is defined by Richards, Platt and Weber (1985) that it is "a process in which changes in the language, culture, and system of values of a group happen through interaction with another group with a different language, culture, and system of values" (p. 2). Based on this definition, Schumann (1986) explains that "learners will acquire the target language to the degree they acculturate to the target language group" (p. 379).

There are some sociopolitical factors that might make it difficult for this to happen. The following paragraphs introduce just one factor among them, which will contribute to 2LL outside the TL country, and examine whether his claim is reasonable or not by providing some examples and explanations. Lastly, some insights for better 2LL outside the TL countries will be presented based on his claim.

Attitude is one social factor that strongly affects 2LL. If a learner sees the country where the TL is spoken as favourable, the learner is more likely to succeed in 2LL than if he or she views the other country negatively (Schumann, 1986, p. 382). For instance, Gardner and Lambert (1972, as cited in Brown, 2007) found that an English-speaking Canadian's positive attitude toward French-Canadians had a significant correlation of success in learning French

(p. 193). On the other hand, Dekker, Aspelagh and Winkel (1998, as cited in Bartram, 2010) says that “associations with the Second World War still cloud pupil perceptions of Germans” (p. 79) in Holland. As a result, Dutch pupils have twice as much negative attitude as positive one in learning German (Bartram, 2010, p. 78). Bartram (2010) even says that such negative views toward the TL group outweigh the effects of educational influences (p. 71). As it can be seen, positive attitudes toward the TL group is an important factor for better 2LL.

From the theories of attitude, teachers can gain the following insights. Even if students live in their home country, they can still have positive attitudes toward the TL group by learning about their cultures. Byram and Risager (1999) also mention that “the aims of language teaching today are to develop in learners both linguistic and cultural competence” (p. 168), which they call ‘an intercultural communicative competence’. For example, the foreign language teacher can teach about different lifestyles, manners, etiquette, cultural background, religious beliefs, customs and history to nurture students’ cultural awareness (Byram & Risager, 1999, p. 91). By learning such things, students understand that even though the culture is different from their own, they have to respect others if they themselves want to be respected as well. From the survey conducted by Sercu (2005), it was revealed that 88 % of foreign language teachers in Europe completely agree that “more knowledge and a larger familiarity with the foreign culture will lead to a more tolerant attitude” (p. 124). The survey conducted by Byram and Risager (1999) also revealed that 78.7 % of language teachers in England responded that encouraging positive attitude to foreign language learning and foreign people, and making a sympathetic approach to other cultures and civilisations are high priorities in teaching (p. 196). Thus, teaching about culture is highly recommended in second language education to enhance students’ 2LL and the acculturation model presented by Schumann gives second language teachers some insights to improve their lessons even outside the TL countries.

Discussion and Conclusion

From the literature review, researchers know that task-based activities under CLT seem to increase the amount of speaking students do as a means of enhancing their speaking skills, and as a result of it, students can learn foreign language better. Also, researchers know that nurturing students’ positive attitudes toward the TL group and their cultures using cultural materials will bring a positive effect on their 2LL. Therefore, if foreign language teachers apply both of them in their real classes, they will be able to enhance their students’ 2LL.

3. Research Methods and Techniques

Research Methods

This study employed a quantitative approach, which is based on numerical analysis. Aliaga and Gunderson (2002, as cited in Muijs, 2004) define this approach as “[e]xplaining phenomena by collecting numerical data that are analysed using mathematically based methods (in particular statistics)” (p. 1). Thus, the quantitative approach requires a great amount of data collection and interpretation which helps researchers gain objective information (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006, p. 198). As there were over 120 students in the proposed study, a significant amount of data collection was possible and somewhat objective information was gained for my research questions.

Data Collection Techniques

I had been teaching three English classes for the third year students at my high school from April in 2013 to March in 2014, and did my research with their help. A total of 120 students participated in this project. They had three 50-minute lessons every week. The class is all delivered in English and speaking Japanese during the class is prohibited. After reading some texts with a particular topic, I gave them three different task-based activities (an opinion-gap activity, an information-gap activity and a reasoning-gap activity), as introduced by Nunan (2004, pp. 56-57), which are shown in Appendix 2. The time schedule and the contents for each activity are shown in Appendix 3. Each activity was related to the texts. For example, students would read the science fiction written by Arthur C. Clarke, who tells the importance of going into space for the advancement of technology. It took about four to five lessons (about ten days) to finish each reading material and do each task. After reading the text, students worked on a reasoning-gap activity in a group. They were asked what they would bring if they had a three-day space trip. Each item had its weight and the total weight had to be within twenty kilograms for each person. After they came to an agreement on the items, they presented them in front of the class to show why they chose the items and how they would use them. Although it was important for students to make reasonable choices in a reasoning-gap activity, students could organise their reasons why they chose the items by preparing for the presentation in the class. I also gave my students an opportunity to think about the cultures of English-speaking countries for cultural awareness toward the TL group after we read the second text about foreign cultures in the textbook. For example, students raised their interesting culture experiences in English-speaking countries. If they had never

been there, they searched for some cultures of English-speaking countries on the Internet or from books. After organising their information, they presented what they found unique and interesting about English-speaking countries in front of the class. As some students could not find anything interesting by themselves, I prepared some daily customs which these students might have experienced and introduced the customs to them before they worked on the activity. Thus, all of my students had something to present in front of the class. After finishing each task-based activity or culture learning activity, I asked my students to answer a multiple-choice questionnaire in Appendix 4.

By answering the questions, students showed their opinions in English on each task-based activity or culture learning activity. The questions are designed following the characteristics of each activity. By answering them, students can express their opinions about what characteristics helped them get involved in each activity. Getting more involved in the activities means that students used English more during the class, which is the prime purpose to introduce them into my class. Coming to know what the students expect in task-based activities, teachers can design them according to the students' interests and, thus, motivate them to participate in the activities. Also, I decided to use a multiple-choice questionnaire for the following reasons. First of all, it is helpful to collect information at one time, instead of a face-to-face interview which takes an enormous amount of time and energy. Dornyei (2003) also states that “[b]y administering a questionnaire to a group of people, one can collect a huge amount of information in less than an hour, and the personal investment required will be a fraction of what would have been needed for, say, interviewing the same number of people” (p. 9). He also adds that “if the questionnaire is well constructed, processing the data can also be fast and relatively straightforward” (Dornyei, 2003, p. 9). As I am a full-time worker at high school and so busy with my work every day, giving questionnaires and saving my time and energy is important to continue my research. Mackey and Gass (2005) also state that “in addition to being more economical and practical than individual interviews, questionnaires can in many cases elicit longitudinal information from learners in a short period of time. Questionnaires can also elicit comparable information from a number of respondents” (p. 94). Thus, the benefits of questionnaires are well known and I could collect large amounts of data with relative ease.

4. Project questions/goals/objectives

This research was centered on two research questions. All questions were posed within the context of male students who were learning English as their foreign language at Keio Shiki Senior High School in Saitama, Japan.

The main research question

- 1) Which task-based activities are perceived by my Japanese high school students to provide the most opportunities to use English?

Sub question

- 1a) What is unique about the task-based activity, which provides the students the most opportunities to use English?
- 1b) Why do the students have the most opportunities to use English in the particular task-based activity?

The second research question

- 2) Does favourable cultural information about English-speaking countries cause the students to have positive attitudes to the English-speaking group and their cultures? If so, do their positive attitudes help them gain motivation in learning English?

Sub questions

- 2a) What kinds of cultural information about English-speaking countries will cause the students to have positive attitudes toward the group and their cultures?
- 2b) What kind of cultural topic will interest the students?

5. The results and discussion

The following numbers show the actual numbers of students who answered in each category, and their percentages below. 'A1 + A2' shows the combined answers of A1 and A2 to see how many students showed agreement to each question.

Opinion-gap activity

| | A1 + A2 | A1 | A2 | N | D2 | D1 | Sum |
|-----|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|-----|
| Q1 | 70 | 22 | 48 | 34 | 11 | 3 | 118 |
| % | 59.32203 | 18.64407 | 40.67797 | 28.81356 | 9.322034 | 2.542373 | 100 |
| Q2 | 65 | 28 | 37 | 42 | 9 | 2 | 118 |
| % | 55.08475 | 23.72881 | 31.35593 | 35.59322 | 7.627119 | 1.694915 | 100 |
| Q3 | 56 | 17 | 39 | 50 | 11 | 1 | 118 |
| % | 47.45763 | 14.40678 | 33.05085 | 42.37288 | 9.322034 | 0.847458 | 100 |
| Q4 | 66 | 20 | 46 | 35 | 13 | 4 | 118 |
| % | 55.9322 | 16.94915 | 38.98305 | 29.66102 | 11.01695 | 3.389831 | 100 |
| Q5 | 60 | 21 | 39 | 45 | 10 | 3 | 118 |
| % | 50.84746 | 17.79661 | 33.05085 | 38.13559 | 8.474576 | 2.542373 | 100 |
| Q6 | 62 | 20 | 42 | 39 | 15 | 2 | 118 |
| % | 52.54237 | 16.94915 | 35.59322 | 33.05085 | 12.71186 | 1.694915 | 100 |
| Q7 | 69 | 20 | 49 | 38 | 10 | 1 | 118 |
| % | 58.47458 | 16.94915 | 41.52542 | 32.20339 | 8.474576 | 0.847458 | 100 |
| Q8 | 55 | 19 | 36 | 40 | 20 | 3 | 118 |
| % | 46.61017 | 16.10169 | 30.50847 | 33.89831 | 16.94915 | 2.542373 | 100 |
| Q9 | 45 | 14 | 31 | 54 | 14 | 2 | 115 |
| % | 39.13043 | 12.17391 | 26.95652 | 46.95652 | 12.17391 | 1.73913 | 100 |
| Q10 | 42 | 13 | 29 | 55 | 14 | 4 | 115 |
| % | 36.52174 | 11.30435 | 25.21739 | 47.82609 | 12.17391 | 3.478261 | 100 |
| Q11 | 50 | 8 | 42 | 53 | 9 | 3 | 115 |
| % | 43.47826 | 6.956522 | 36.52174 | 46.08696 | 7.826087 | 2.608696 | 100 |
| Q12 | 41 | 12 | 29 | 62 | 11 | 1 | 115 |
| % | 35.65217 | 10.43478 | 25.21739 | 53.91304 | 9.565217 | 0.869565 | 100 |
| Q13 | 41 | 9 | 32 | 58 | 13 | 3 | 115 |
| % | 35.65217 | 7.826087 | 27.82609 | 50.43478 | 11.30435 | 2.608696 | 100 |

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to Produce More Positive Effects on Language Acquisition and Cultural Awareness

Information-gap activity

| | A1 + A2 | A1 | A2 | N | D2 | D1 | Sum |
|-----|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|-----|
| Q1 | 75 | 27 | 48 | 35 | 1 | 2 | 113 |
| % | 66.37168 | 23.89381 | 42.47788 | 30.97345 | 0.884956 | 1.769912 | 100 |
| Q2 | 67 | 28 | 39 | 42 | 4 | 0 | 113 |
| % | 59.29204 | 24.77876 | 34.51327 | 37.16814 | 3.539823 | 0 | 100 |
| Q3 | 67 | 30 | 37 | 41 | 5 | 0 | 113 |
| % | 59.29204 | 26.54867 | 32.74336 | 36.28319 | 4.424779 | 0 | 100 |
| Q4 | 53 | 19 | 34 | 47 | 10 | 3 | 113 |
| % | 46.90265 | 16.81416 | 30.0885 | 41.59292 | 8.849558 | 2.654867 | 100 |
| Q5 | 67 | 28 | 39 | 40 | 6 | 0 | 113 |
| % | 59.29204 | 24.77876 | 34.51327 | 35.39823 | 5.309735 | 0 | 100 |
| Q6 | 64 | 23 | 41 | 45 | 4 | 0 | 113 |
| % | 56.63717 | 20.35398 | 36.28319 | 39.82301 | 3.539823 | 0 | 100 |
| Q7 | 55 | 22 | 33 | 52 | 5 | 1 | 113 |
| % | 48.67257 | 19.46903 | 29.20354 | 46.0177 | 4.424779 | 0.884956 | 100 |
| Q8 | 61 | 16 | 45 | 43 | 9 | 0 | 113 |
| % | 53.9823 | 14.15929 | 39.82301 | 38.0531 | 7.964602 | 0 | 100 |
| Q9 | 57 | 18 | 39 | 45 | 8 | 1 | 111 |
| % | 51.35135 | 16.21622 | 35.13514 | 40.54054 | 7.207207 | 0.900901 | 100 |
| Q10 | 57 | 22 | 35 | 49 | 5 | 0 | 111 |
| % | 51.35135 | 19.81982 | 31.53153 | 44.14414 | 4.504505 | 0 | 100 |

Reasoning-gap activity

| | A1 + A2 | A1 | A2 | N | D2 | D1 | Sum |
|-----|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|-----|
| Q1 | 84 | 21 | 63 | 29 | 6 | 0 | 119 |
| % | 70.58824 | 17.64706 | 52.94118 | 24.36975 | 5.042017 | 0 | 100 |
| Q2 | 72 | 32 | 40 | 41 | 6 | 0 | 119 |
| % | 60.5042 | 26.89076 | 33.61345 | 34.45378 | 5.042017 | 0 | 100 |
| Q3 | 67 | 23 | 44 | 41 | 9 | 2 | 119 |
| % | 56.30252 | 19.32773 | 36.97479 | 34.45378 | 7.563025 | 1.680672 | 100 |
| Q4 | 67 | 23 | 44 | 44 | 7 | 1 | 119 |
| % | 56.30252 | 19.32773 | 36.97479 | 36.97479 | 5.882353 | 0.840336 | 100 |
| Q5 | 72 | 27 | 45 | 38 | 7 | 2 | 119 |
| % | 60.5042 | 22.68908 | 37.81513 | 31.93277 | 5.882353 | 1.680672 | 100 |
| Q6 | 70 | 26 | 44 | 38 | 11 | 0 | 119 |
| % | 58.82353 | 21.84874 | 36.97479 | 31.93277 | 9.243697 | 0 | 100 |
| Q7 | 65 | 29 | 36 | 42 | 10 | 2 | 119 |
| % | 54.62185 | 24.36975 | 30.2521 | 35.29412 | 8.403361 | 1.680672 | 100 |
| Q8 | 66 | 26 | 40 | 48 | 3 | 2 | 119 |
| % | 55.46218 | 21.84874 | 33.61345 | 40.33613 | 2.521008 | 1.680672 | 100 |
| Q9 | 67 | 23 | 44 | 45 | 7 | 0 | 119 |
| % | 56.30252 | 19.32773 | 36.97479 | 37.81513 | 5.882353 | 0 | 100 |
| Q10 | 60 | 24 | 36 | 48 | 10 | 1 | 119 |
| % | 50.42017 | 20.16807 | 30.2521 | 40.33613 | 8.403361 | 0.840336 | 100 |
| Q11 | 67 | 25 | 42 | 42 | 8 | 1 | 118 |
| % | 56.77966 | 21.18644 | 35.59322 | 35.59322 | 6.779661 | 0.847458 | 100 |
| Q12 | 62 | 23 | 39 | 48 | 7 | 1 | 118 |
| % | 52.54237 | 19.49153 | 33.05085 | 40.67797 | 5.932203 | 0.847458 | 100 |
| Q13 | 66 | 33 | 33 | 47 | 5 | 0 | 118 |
| % | 55.9322 | 27.9661 | 27.9661 | 39.83051 | 4.237288 | 0 | 100 |

Culture Learning Activity

| | A1 + A2 | A1 | A2 | N | D2 | D1 | Sum |
|----|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|-----|
| Q1 | 92 | 41 | 51 | 20 | 3 | 0 | 115 |
| % | 80 | 35.65217 | 44.34783 | 17.3913 | 2.608696 | 0 | 100 |
| Q2 | 63 | 22 | 41 | 41 | 5 | 6 | 115 |
| % | 54.78261 | 19.13043 | 35.65217 | 35.65217 | 4.347826 | 5.217391 | 100 |
| Q3 | 74 | 27 | 47 | 33 | 7 | 1 | 115 |
| % | 64.34783 | 23.47826 | 40.86957 | 28.69565 | 6.086957 | 0.869565 | 100 |
| Q4 | 68 | 25 | 43 | 41 | 6 | 0 | 115 |
| % | 59.13043 | 21.73913 | 37.3913 | 35.65217 | 5.217391 | 0 | 100 |
| Q5 | 79 | 24 | 55 | 30 | 3 | 2 | 114 |
| % | 69.29825 | 21.05263 | 48.24561 | 26.31579 | 2.631579 | 1.754386 | 100 |
| Q6 | 65 | 20 | 45 | 40 | 6 | 3 | 114 |
| % | 57.01754 | 17.54386 | 39.47368 | 35.08772 | 5.263158 | 2.631579 | 100 |
| Q7 | 60 | 23 | 37 | 50 | 4 | 0 | 114 |
| % | 52.63158 | 20.17544 | 32.45614 | 43.85965 | 3.508772 | 0 | 100 |
| Q8 | 63 | 16 | 47 | 23 | 2 | 0 | 88 |
| % | 71.59091 | 18.18182 | 53.40909 | 26.13636 | 2.272727 | 0 | 100 |

Cultural information that students found the most favourable

1. Canada

| Cultural information | The number of the students who found it the most favourable. |
|---|--|
| Can ask for a refund if you don't like your presents. | 10 |
| Can eat foods before they pay for them at supermarkets. | 8 |
| Hold a Maple Syrup Festival. | 5 |
| Can drive, drink and smoke from younger age. | 4 |
| Adults can be given Christmas presents like children. | 1 |

2. Australia

| Cultural information | The number of the students who found it the most favourable. |
|---|--|
| Drink rain water. | 13 |
| Always put on sandals. | 2 |
| Blow a nose with his or her handkerchief. | 2 |
| Put on shoes at home. | 1 |
| Kangaroos are on the roads. | 1 |
| Eat meat pies and seafood. | 1 |
| Barbecue parties are often held. | 1 |

3. New Zealand

| Cultural information | The number of the students who found it the most favourable. |
|---|--|
| Do not use umbrellas even if it is raining. | 11 |
| Do not care about time very much. | 6 |
| The number of sheep is five times as large as the population. | 5 |
| Shoe Haka Dance of Maori before rugby games. | 4 |
| On birthday, he or she can enter school. | 1 |
| Can eat foods before they pay for them at supermarkets. | 1 |

4. The US

| Cultural information | The number of the students who found it the most favourable. |
|---|--|
| Can eat foods before they pay for them at supermarkets. | 7 |
| Put on shoes at home. | 4 |
| The gun is the symbol of liberty and independence. | 3 |
| Workers wear casual costumes on Friday. | 2 |
| Their garbage cars collect garbage in a unique way. | 1 |
| Eat bad, unhealthy foods. | 1 |

5. The UK

| Cultural information | The number of the students who found it the most favourable. |
|---|--|
| Football is popular. | 7 |
| They have afternoon tea to have conversation. | 6 |
| Do not use umbrellas even if it is raining. | 1 |
| Cars run the right side, the same as Japan. | 1 |
| Eat bad, unhealthy foods. | 1 |

The following are what I found from the results of the questionnaires. Some notable results which contribute to answering the project questions in section four will be shown here. First of all, about 65.4 % of the students on average answered all three task-based activities were helpful for them to have more opportunities to use English. This result is reasonable as task-based activities are originally designed to provide more chances for students to actually use English. Among three task-based activities, the reasoning-gap activity was the most popular, where 70.6 % of the students answered they had more opportunities to use English. Actually, all the answers for this activity were positive, where over 50 % of the students answered they strongly agree or somewhat agree in each question. Among 13 questions for the reasoning-gap activity, over 60 % of the students answered positively in two questions. Firstly, 60.5 % of the students answered they enjoyed the reasoning-gap activity as they liked to speak English. Secondly, 60.5 % of the students answered they liked to construct their own ideas, which was the unique characteristic of the reasoning-gap activity. Students seemed to like examining surrounding information and finding a reasonable solution for the problems they faced. The more students got absorbed in finding a reasonable solution for the topic issue, the more discussion they had to have to deal with it, which resulted in promoting more opportunities for students to speak English. What is more, 58.8 % of the students answered they enjoyed the activity as they could express their own ideas to others. Before I conducted this research, I thought that most of my students were too shy to express their own opinions in front of others, but it was not true. On the contrary, they enjoyed expressing their own opinions to others, which would nurture their self-esteem and confidence. At the same time, students also like to hear other students' opinions. 58.5 % of the students who experienced an opinion-gap activity answered they enjoyed the activity as they could hear other students' opinions.

Therefore, foreign language teachers should find some interesting and controversial issues for task-based activities so that students can get interested in them and produce various possible answers. At the same time, they also need to provide more opportunities for students to express their own opinions and listen to others through discussion in a group or presentation in front of the whole class.

The other thing to be found was over 55 % of the students enjoyed all of the three task-based activities as they liked to speak English. From this result, it can be said that foreign language teachers should give more opportunities for students to speak their TL as they are usually interested in speaking it, and more opportunities for speaking will surely enhance their speaking proficiency. At the same time, 59.3 % of the students who experienced the information-gap activity and 56.3 % of those who experienced the reasoning-gap one answered they enjoyed each activity as they like to listen to English. Also, about 56 % of the students who experienced the opinion-gap activity and the reasoning-gap one answered they enjoyed each activity as they liked to write English. From those two results, it can be said that foreign language teachers should introduce not only speaking activities but also listening and writing ones in their task-based activities to get students more interested and enhance their overall proficiency in the TL.

As for the topic of an activity, 59.3 % of the students who experienced the information-gap activity and 55.5 % of those who experienced the reasoning-gap one answered that an interesting topic helped them enjoy the activities. Also, 56.6 % of them who experienced the information-gap activity answered they liked to find something they did not know. 56.3 % of the students who experienced the reasoning-gap activity answered they enjoyed the activity as it was challenging. From those three results, it can be said that foreign language teachers should examine what students are interested in and try to construct their task-based activities in the ways that students can find something new to them and struggle to reach their goals.

Although task-based activities have to be challenging to attract students, the questionnaires also showed other factors that look opposite to the previous findings. 56.8 % of the students who experienced the reasoning-gap activity answered the activity was easy to be conducted because it was related to what they read in the text. Also, 55.9 % of those who experienced the reasoning-gap one answered the activity was easy to be conducted because they learned some new words and phrases in the textbook which relate to it beforehand. Thus, foreign language teachers need to make sure that the activities they make have something to do with what students read in the textbook so that they can find it easy to work on the activities.

As for culture learning, 52.6 % of the students answered they gained positive attitudes toward the TL countries and respective people after they learned favourable cultural information. Also, among the students who answered strongly agree or somewhat agree in the question that you got a positive attitude toward the country and its people after you learned their favourable cultural information, 71.6 % of them answered they got motivated in learning English after they learned favourable cultural information about English-speaking countries. From this result, it was shown that Schumann's acculturation model, which says if a learner sees the country where the TL is spoken as favourable, the learner is more likely to succeed in 2LL than if he or she views the other country negatively (Schumann, 1986, p. 382), is somewhat applied not only inside the TL country, but also outside of it, in this case in Japan.

Also, characteristics of favourable cultural information were found. First of all, 80 % of the students answered they found the cultural information favourable as it was different from theirs. Secondly, 64.3 % of them answered they found the cultural information favourable as it was understandable, and 69.3 % of them answered the same as it was humorous. From those three results, it can be said that foreign language teachers should find cultural information that is different from their own, but understandable and humorous so that students can get interested in it and enhance their TL learning. The most favourable cultural information was to drink rain water in Australia. The second was not to use umbrellas even on a rainy day in New Zealand. The third was to be able to ask for a refund if you did not like your presents from others in Canada. As you can see, all three examples are different from Japanese culture, but are surely understandable and humorous.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, all three task-based activities were helpful for my students to have more opportunities to use English in Japan. Especially, they perceived that the reasoning-gap activity provided the most opportunities for them to use English. The unique characteristic of the reasoning-gap activity was to allow them to construct their own ideas, and they seemed to have enjoyed it very much. The more they were absorbed in finding their answers in a reasonable way, the more they had to speak English to deepen their discussion within their groups. At the same time, they enjoyed expressing their own opinions to others as well as hearing other students' opinions. Also, teachers should let students learn new words and phrases before they have their discussion so that they can construct their own opinions better in English. From these results, it can be said that foreign language teachers should find

some interesting and controversial issues for reasoning-gap activities so that students can get involved in them. Also, they need to provide more opportunities for students to express their own opinions through discussion in a group or presentation in front of the whole class.

The other thing to be found was that foreign language teachers should introduce not only speaking practices but also listening and writing ones in their task-based activities to get students more interested and enhance their overall proficiency in the TL. What is more, they should examine what students are interested in and try to construct their task-based activities in the ways that students can find something new to them and struggle to reach their goals, but they also need to remember that the activities they make have something to do with what students read in the textbook so that they can feel easy to work on the activities.

As for culture learning activity, it was shown that Schumann's acculturation model, which says if a learner sees the country where the TL is spoken as favourable, the learner is more likely to succeed in 2LL than if he or she views the other country negatively (Schumann, 1986, p. 382), is applied not only inside the TL country, but also outside of it, in this case in Japan. Actually, favourable cultural information about the English-speaking countries affected my students to have positive attitudes to the English-speaking group and their cultures, and their positive attitudes helped them gain motivation in learning English although this activity was conducted within a very short period of two weeks, whereas Schumann's acculturation model presumed a longer period of time. Especially, they liked the cultural information that is different from their own, but understandable and humorous.

In short, these are the tips for foreign language teachers in Japan to guide how to make their task-based activities and choose cultural information to handle in their English classes. They are very helpful to improve their teaching practices and will greatly help students improve their TL skills, especially in speaking.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

The results of questionnaires given to 50 students in the 2012 English class

| | | | |
|--|------------------|--------------------|-------------------|
| Question 1: Which English skills do you want to acquire in English classes? You can choose more than one if you want. | | | |
| (a) Reading (9) | (b) Writing (10) | (c) Listening (35) | (d) Speaking (43) |
| Question 2: Which English skills do you think the most difficult to acquire? You can choose more than one if you want. | | | |
| (a) Reading (0) | (b) Writing (5) | (c) Listening (18) | (d) Speaking (30) |
| Question 3: Do you have any effective ways to improve the skills that you are not good at? | | | |
| (a) Yes (28) | (b) No (22) | | |

※ The number in the bracket represents the number of students who chose each answer.

Appendix 2

Nunan (2004, pp. 56-57)

In this project, three principal task types are used: information gap, reasoning gap, and opinion gap.

1. Information-gap activity, which involves a transfer of given information from one person to another – or from one form to another, or from one place to another – generally calling for the decoding or encoding of information from or into language. One example is pair work in which each member of the pair has a part of the total information (for example an incomplete picture) and attempts to convey it verbally to the other. Another example is completing a tabular representation with information available in a given piece of text. The activity often involves selection of relevant information as well, and learners may have to meet criteria of completeness and correctness in making the transfer.
2. Reasoning-gap activity, which involves deriving some new information from given information through processes of inference, deduction, practical reasoning, or a perception of relationships or patterns. One example is working out a teacher's timetable on the basis of given class timetables. Another is deciding what course of action is best (for example cheapest or quickest) for a given purpose and within given constraints. The activity necessarily involves comprehending and conveying information, as an information-gap activity, but the information to be conveyed is not identical with that initially comprehended. There is a piece of reasoning which connects the two.
3. Opinion-gap activity, which involves identifying and articulating a personal preference, feeling, or attitude in response to a given situation. One example is story completion; another is taking part in

the discussion of a social issue. The activity may involve using factual information and formulating arguments to justify one's opinion, but there is no objective procedure for demonstrating outcomes as right or wrong, and no reason to expect the same outcome from different individuals or on different occasions.

Appendix 3

Text contents and task-based activities

| | |
|--------------------------------|---|
| <p>15 – 26 April, 2013</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct the first task-based activity in class <p>Read the text Title: Going into space (Text content: The experience of the astronaut, Koichi Wakata, going into space.)</p> <p>Work on a reasoning-gap activity in a group (What will you bring if you have a three-day space trip? Each item has its weight and the total weight has to be within twenty kilograms.)</p> |
| <p>29 April – 10 May, 2013</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct culture learning activity <p>Read the text Title: Writers without borders (Text content: How three novelists learned their foreign languages living in foreign countries.)</p> <p>Give a presentation in front of class concerning the following question (What were your experiences in foreign countries or what do you like about foreign people and their cultures?)</p> |
| <p>13 – 24 May, 2013</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct the second task-based activity in class <p>Read the text Title: A forest in the sea (Text content: Much garbage from cities is carried to landfills in Tokyo Bay, which makes a forest in the sea.)</p> <p>Work on an opinion-gap activity in a group (What is the best solution to deal with a lot of garbage in Tokyo?)</p> |
| <p>27 May – 7 June, 2013</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct the third task-based activity in class <p>Read the text Title: Playing by ear (Text content: The story of the blind pianist, Tsujii Nobuyuki.)</p> <p>Work on an information-gap activity in a group (What do you know about Tsujii Nobuyuki? The students in pair have different information about him and exchange information.)</p> |

Appendix 4

Students answered the following questionnaires after they worked on each activity.

The answer choices are:

Strongly agree (A1), Somewhat agree (A2), Neutral (N),
Somewhat disagree (D2), Strongly disagree (D1)

A Multiple-choice Questionnaire about Today's Opinion-gap Activity

1. Today's opinion-gap activity helped you to have more opportunities to use English.
2. You enjoyed the activity as you liked to speak English.
3. You enjoyed the activity as you liked to listen to English.
4. You enjoyed the activity as you liked to write English.
5. You enjoyed the activity as you liked to construct your own opinions.
6. You enjoyed the activity as you could express your own opinions to others.
7. You enjoyed the activity as you could hear other students' opinions.
8. You enjoyed the activity as you were interested in the topic.
9. You enjoyed the activity because it was challenging.
10. The activity was easy to be conducted because the procedure was simple.
11. The activity was easy to be conducted because it was related to what you read in the textbook.
12. The activity was easy to be conducted because you could see a model answer in the textbook.
13. The activity was easy to be conducted because you learned some new words and phrases beforehand in the textbook.

A Multiple-choice Questionnaire about Today's Information-gap Activity

1. Today's information-gap activity helped you to have more opportunities to use English.
2. You enjoyed the activity as you liked to speak English.
3. You enjoyed the activity as you liked to listen to English.
4. You enjoyed the activity as you liked to exchange information with your partner.
5. You enjoyed the activity as you were interested in the topic.
6. You enjoyed the activity as you could find something you did not know.
7. You enjoyed the activity as you could construct your own ideas from the given information.
8. The activity was easy to be conducted because the procedure was simple.
9. The activity was easy to be conducted because you did not have to search for information by yourself and the teacher gave you some information.
10. The activity was easy to be conducted because you just filled in some countries' names and figures.

A Multiple-choice Questionnaire about Today's Reasoning-gap Activity

1. Today's reasoning-gap activity helped you to have more opportunities to use English.
2. You enjoyed the activity as you liked to speak English.
3. You enjoyed the activity as you liked to listen to English.
4. You enjoyed the activity as you liked to write English.
5. You enjoyed the activity as you liked to construct your own ideas.
6. You enjoyed the activity as you could express your own ideas to others.
7. You enjoyed the activity as you could hear other students' ideas.
8. You enjoyed the activity as you were interested in the topic.
9. You enjoyed the activity because it was challenging.
10. The activity was easy to be conducted because the procedure was simple.
11. The activity was easy to be conducted because it was related to what you read in the text.
12. The activity was easy to be conducted because you could see a model answer in the text.
13. The activity was easy to be conducted because you learned some new words and phrases beforehand in the text.

A Questionnaire about Culture Learning

1. You found the cultural information favourable as it was different from yours.
2. You found the cultural information favourable as it was the same from yours.
3. You found the cultural information favourable as it was understandable.
4. You found the cultural information favourable as it had a reasonable story behind it.
5. You found the cultural information favourable as it was humorous.
6. You found the cultural information favourable as it showed love to someone, animals or nature.
7. You got a positive attitude toward the country and its people after you learned their favourable cultural information.
8. (For those who answered "Strongly agree" or "Somewhat agree" in question 7)
You got motivated in learning English after you learned favourable cultural information in an English-speaking country.
9. What cultural information you learned from other students did you find the most favourable?
(Students can answer anything they want only for this question.)