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## **CLIL and intercultural competence in teaching Japanese language and literature**

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### **Abstract**

In the U.S. colleges and universities, language courses and cultural studies courses are usually under separate departments and programs. This separation represents the heart of liberal arts education, where students can explore a variety of disciplines. However, a comparative nature of cross-cultural analyses may cause generalized and stereotypical views toward the target country. This present study will introduce the practice of CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) and examine the value of studying the literature in the original language, so that the students will improve linguistic skills, gain knowledge on Japanese literary characteristics, and build on their intercultural competence skills.

**Keywords:** CLIL, Japanese literature, Japanese language, intercultural communication, DMIS, ACTFL, NCSSFL

### **Introduction**

CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) is a teaching method of learning a foreign language efficiently alongside a non-language discipline such as literature, geography, math, history, or art. It is similar yet different from typical content based advanced language courses in the US colleges and universities, as CLIL weighs equally in both the content study and the language study. Although CLIL resembles language immersions or bilingual education programs in K -12 education, it has not been largely accepted in US colleges and universities, since language and non-language studies are usually separated into different departments and faculties. Consequently, there are sometimes confusions caused by forcefully merging knowledge from different disciplines as well. For example, in one advanced Japanese language class, the students read contemporary short stories, essays, and poems in Japanese, and some of them, despite their high level of language skills, relied on irrelevant social terms such as Japanese collectivism, as opposed to American individualism, or cultural terms such as *wabi/sabi* in their

interpretations of the literary works. Applying a general social or cultural term into the discussion of an individual literary work is interesting to see the demand in improving intercultural competence skills, and one of the solutions is by putting an equal weight in literature study and language study, namely CLIL, that the students will be able to improve their intercultural competence skills. This present study will address an ideological gap between language and cultural studies courses, present steps of intercultural communication skills, and show the case of combining the studies of Japanese literature and Japanese language.

### **1 Cultural studies and language studies**

In US colleges and universities, the topics of content courses about Japan vary from traditional Japanese art to Japanese business culture. If a student ever goes to Japan for a study abroad program, Japanese schools that accept international students also offer various courses about Japan in English. These courses can be all categorized under cultural studies and are often included as electives in the course requirements for students majoring in Japanese or Japanese Studies. It is widely understood that in addition to pragmatic language skills, these electives provide key social, historical, cultural and artistic insights about Japan. Although language and cultural studies appear to operate hand in hand within the student's liberal arts education, an interesting comment to describe their separate academic roles was made by Miki Dezaki, the director of *Shusenjō* (2018), a documentary film about Japanese war crimes against Korean women during WWII. Dezaki explained that instructors of Japanese Studies, meaning those who teach courses about Japan in English, are generally liberal and politically left-wing, whereas Japanese language instructors are nationalistic and right, as they did not try to meet with him in person during his film tour of US colleges (personal communication, October 7, 2019). It is true that teaching the language spoken just in one nation might cause instructors to look nationalistic, if not, xenophobic. Yet, the lack of Japanese language instructors' enthusiasm for *Shusenjō* described by Dezaki might reveal a situation familiar to collegiate language programs in general. As Kramsch (1993, pp. 7-9) points out, throughout the US, college programs tend to be territorial, so that, despite the interdisciplinary potential of language studies, many language instructors are expected to teach within the language program. To clarify, all language classes in all levels of instruction include cultural and social components. It goes without saying that language textbooks include cultural and social contexts to allow vocabulary, phrases, and expressions to be used properly and practically. Nevertheless, these are considered to be different from the cultural or social issues taught in cultural studies courses. Phipps and Gonzalez (2004, p. 38) explain:

*Cultural studies, in seeing itself as post-disciplinary, offers a mode of engagement in a wide variety of fields that is primarily political. Its commentary on literature, film, art and architecture, music and daily life focuses on questions of power and inequality, of social justice and questions of identity and difference.*

This trend that invokes is deeply rooted in many courses in the humanities, arts, and social sciences. Regardless of the region, the time period or the subject matter, these courses can address a variety of topics that are relevant to the current time, and the students are able to draw connections through political or ethical reasoning, discuss what they have learned, and further investigate in essays, research papers, or oral presentations.

In the meantime, for this student-centered learning experiences, the topics of cultural studies courses are often chosen based on a conservative stance especially in a cross-cultural context. For example, in many cultural studies courses, Japan is usually considered to hold a homogenous culture whose unique characteristics, such as virtues of harmony or a vertical-structured society, have not been changed for decades. Regardless of the discussion about the accuracy, due to the assumption that the society and the culture remain to be consistent, many scholars can sometimes make unhelpfully broad comparisons between Japan and the US or, an even broader comparison, Japan and the West. Such generalized comparison must have been and will probably be necessary; however, it is becoming less and less credible based on the increasingly complex interactions among people with diverse backgrounds today, as scholars such as Matsumoto (2002) and Takano (2008) have argued against the stereotypical views of Japanese society and culture. Similarly, there is also a danger that Japanese language classrooms can oversimplify cultural and social characteristics of Japanese language. Jorden (1992) points out conscious and deliberate differentiation between language and culture in Japanese language classes and objects unnatural methods of learning a “foreign” culture. Kubota (2003, p. 75), who provides critical insight into the use of National Standards for Foreign Language Teaching, warns that overgeneralized cultural and social aspects of Japan can lead also to those of the US. In other words, simplified and superficial views toward the Japanese language and culture may prompt a monotonic view toward the students’ own backgrounds. The challenge is to open up more individualized understandings without any preconceptions or presumptions as to the standards of not only Japanese culture, but also the student’s own culture. One of the solutions is to acknowledge the process and different stages of intercultural competence, so that students will come to realize that their interpretations are meant to be fluid and progressive. That is to say, just as students improve their language skills from a beginning level to an advanced level, they can progress from a stereotyped and generalized understanding to more personal and comprehensive interpretations of different cultures.

## 2 Intercultural communication

In regards to the improvement of intercultural competence, a leading scholar, Bennet (2004, p. 62) completed his final draft of DMIS (Development of Mode of Intercultural Sensitivity) to measure how we respond to different cultures. He divides the stages of development into six categories; Denial, Defense/Reversal, Minimization, Acceptance, Adaptation, and Integration. The first three stages fall under Ethnocentrism, and the latter are grouped under Ethnorelativism. In 2017, another scale was created by the National Council of State Supervisors for Languages (NCSSFL) and the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL), who collaborated to make can-do-statements in intercultural communication skills with five stages; Novice, Intermediate, Advanced, Superior, and Distinguished. Although both scales differ in their descriptions of each stage, their goals are noticeably similar. First, here is Bennet's description of Integration, the last stage of DMIS: "one's experience of self is expanded to include the movement in and out of different cultural worldviews" (2004, p. 72). Next, the highest stage, Distinguished, in NCSSFL-ACTFL's scale, describes someone who "can engage with complexity and pluricultural identities and serve as a mediator between and among cultures" (2017, p. 2). In both scales, the highest stage is reached when one is no longer limited to a certain cultural standard and has the freedom to embrace multiple cultural backgrounds. Or, it can be said that although one is communicating with a person from a different culture, one can interact on a level at which the cultural differences are no longer important. What if students could simply read a story or a poem without any cultural assumptions? When the students used to enjoy watching *Dragon Ball* or playing *Pokemon*, when they were children, many of them probably did not know that those entertainments were from Japan at first. By the same token, they likely did not have clear ideas on their own cultural backgrounds, either. This ignorant, yet spontaneous and innocent experience gives a hint to the highest stages of intercultural competence.

The earlier example of the students using social or cultural terms to analyze literature exemplify the first stage of NCSSFL-ACTFL's standard, Novice, in which "one can identify some products that reveal a stereotype or exaggerated view of a culture" or Intermediate, in which one can "identify common stereotypes" (2017, p. 7). In the case of Bennet's scale, this Intermediate stage corresponds with the second stage of DMIS, Defense or Reversal, where people "have become more adept at discriminating differences" (2004, p. 65). Defense occurs when one is favorable to one's own culture and critical toward a different culture, whereas Reversal is the opposite. For example, when the students praise the simplicity and imperfectness of *wabi/sabi* and criticize the materialistic and competitive "American" culture, they represent Reversal, but they are not usually aware of their rather rudimentary stage of cultural understanding (Bennet, 2004, p. 66). As

much as those who romanticize Japanese culture, the students can also criticize the traditional Japanese social system, for example, the gender inequity, the dependency on parents, *amae*, or the vertical principles that operate in schools and workplaces. If so, they are exhibiting signs of Defense or the next stage, Minimization, “the stage in which elements of one’s own cultural worldview are experienced as universal,” so that they “expect similarities and they may become insistent about correcting others” (Bennet, 2004, p. 67). As for understanding Japanese literature, shifting students’ awareness from stereotypical terms to the actual literary work is crucial. Otherwise, their Minimization attitudes may dominate their interpretations of literary works. Of course, the label of ‘Japanese literature’ suggests there is some consistency among different authors in different time periods in Japan, but it is far more beneficial for students to develop individual understandings of each literary work, and the path is to move students beyond the early stages of intercultural competence.

The way to improve intercultural competence is to emphasize the content study of CLIL, which lets students learn with raw and authentic material that has not been chosen or prepared to represent a particular culture. In other words, “the language is used in non-pedagogic, natural communication” (Kramsch, 1993, p. 177). Sudhoff (2010, p. 32) explains, “By using materials that convey, portray or reflect insights into foreign viewpoints, it becomes possible to (re)construct the underlying perspectives.” Through understanding “foreign viewpoints” in the authentic material, the students can understand the context and the meaning by and for the people in the target country. However, this does not automatically lead to the improvement of intercultural competence. According to Sudhoff, “it is necessary to accompany these foreign cultural insights with an awareness of one’s own cultural perspective” (2010, p. 34). In order to understand the context of the target culture, the students first need to acknowledge their own cultural backgrounds, since this “awareness of one’s own cultural perspective” prevents mere objectifying views of the target culture. Bennet (2004, p. 68) echoes those thoughts: “Only when you see that all your beliefs, behaviors, and values are at least influenced by the particular context in which you were socialized can you fully imagine alternatives to them.”

This is the turning point from Ethnocentrism to Ethnorelativism, which includes Acceptance, Adaptation and Integration. This “self-reflective perspective” is the beginning of understanding cultural context and being able to acknowledge, for example, the social, cultural, and artistic roles of literature that can be found universally in different countries. The next stage, Adaptation, shows much stronger engagement with the products or the practices of the different culture. The key characteristic, Bennet (2004, p. 70) explains, is “empathy – the ability to take perspective or shift frame of reference vis-à-vis other cultures.” Here, an

important question is whether intercultural competence can be applied to the interpretation of a fictional world created by an author of a different culture. If students can empathize with a character in a story from a different culture, not just in realistic fictions but also in science fiction, romance, and even horror, it is possible that they are exemplifying Adaptation, even though the culture that they have adapted may not be recognized as a mature culture. This is precisely why literature is full of possibilities to enhance intercultural competence, as the students are challenged to experience and embrace what Carroli (2008, p. 9) calls, “a world in a text.” In contrast to Bennet’s DMIS, NCSSFL-ACTFL’s standard emphasizes the importance of knowledge that determines the ability to investigate cultural products and practices and to interact with people from the target culture. In NCSSFL-ACTFL’s standard, the next stage after Intermediate, Advanced, shows a significant improvement in those abilities and includes the capacity to explain messages expressed in music and art and the values reflected in a literary text (2017, p. 15). The following stage, Superior, has the proficiency benchmark that one is able to “suspend judgements while critically examining products, practices and perspectives” (2017, p. 12). When teaching a course that combines Japanese literature and Japanese language, if Bennet’s levels of Acceptance and Adaptation are appropriate for the student who is reading literary works in Japanese, NCSSFL-ACTFL’s standards of Advanced and Superior are similarly appropriate for students who are analyzing Japanese literary works. This step from Bennet’s levels to NCSSFL-ACTFL’s standards corresponds with the steps of the CLIL method as for encouraging the students to critically analyze the text.

### 3 CLIL: Japanese literature and language

For CLIL that combines literature and language instruction, the teaching materials must be chosen to teach the prominent characteristics of Japanese literature and to improve linguistic skills by the use of authentic texts. Here are the notable characteristics of three types of Japanese literature: 1) poetry, 2) the diary/essay and the I-novel, and 3) science fiction, fantasy and horror. These three characteristics are only a small part of all Japanese literature as a whole, but they are prominent in contemporary Japanese literature, and more importantly, these are what the students will be able to understand through reading, listening, and discussing only in Japanese.

#### 3.1 Poetry and diversity

As a renowned scholar of Japanese literature, Konishi (2017, p. 10) has explained, Japanese literature is known for its brevity, and poetry has long been a staple of Japanese literature, starting with *Man’yōshū* (Collection of Ten Thousand Leaves), from the 7<sup>th</sup> to the 8<sup>th</sup> centuries. Another important characteristic of

Japanese poetry, exemplified by *Man'yōshū*, is that the poems are written by people with diverse backgrounds, including emperors, beggars, farmers, governors and everyday people, all with equally diverse topics and emotions. What Kino Tsurayuki explained in the preface of *Kokin Wakashū* (Poetry Past and Present) in the 10<sup>th</sup> century still echoes today: “The songs of Japan take the human heart as their seed and flourish as myriad leaves of words” (Shirane, 2012, p. 92). There is no question that Japanese poetry’s brevity and the accessibility have led many people to write, share, and appreciate the poetry throughout the history of Japanese literature. To help students understand these characteristics, the course will include works from both a modern poet and everyday people, *senryū*.

### 3.2 Diary/essay and i-novel

The Diary/Essay and I-novel involve a tight connection between the development of hiragana syllabary and the Japanese literature written in the middle ages by aristocratic women. Many diaries such as *Kagerō Diary*, *Sarashina Diary*, and *Pillow Book* were written by female authors. In many of these diaries, the line between fiction and non-fiction has been blurred, and later, many male writers, such as Kamono Chōmei and Yoshida Kenkō, imitated female authors and established a genre called *zuihitsu*, essays, to articulate the author’s thoughts, beliefs, and real life experiences. Many years later, a similar tradition was carried on by modern Japanese writers who established a genre called the I-novel, a form of autobiographical novel. In order to discuss this continuous tradition of diary literature and I-novels, the course will include a diary story and realistic short stories that use a first-person narrative.

### 3.3 Science fiction, fantasy and horror

Today, many students are familiar with contemporary Japanese science fiction and horror stories. Furthermore, cultural studies courses on popular Japanese culture tend to discuss a wide variety of topics associated with gender and sexuality as depicted in science fiction, fantasy, and horror manga, as well as objectification and empowerment of female bodies in anime and videogames. It must be intriguing for students to explore the historical backgrounds of Japanese literature. *Taketori Monogatari* (The Tales of the Bamboo Cutter), the oldest literary work written in *kana* from the 10<sup>th</sup> century, is a work of science fiction. In addition, during the warrior period in the middle ages, many folk tales and dramas such as *Noh* were written, reflecting the thin line between reality and fantasy often associated with the Buddhist tradition of spirits being stuck in this world. The course will include a familiar and accessible science fiction story and a horror story that is relevant to that tradition.

### **3.4 Language objective**

As for the language requirement, because the readings for this course are short stories and poems, the prerequisite for this course is the completion of intermediate-level Japanese language courses, equivalent to two full years of studying the language at the collegiate level. The language objective for this course is for students to reach Advanced Low in all four skills of reading, speaking, writing and listening, as described in ACTFL proficiency guidelines. For reading, upon completion of this course, students will be able to “understand the main ideas and some supporting details” of the course texts, as explained in ACTFL’s proficiency guidelines for Advanced Low. However, some of the course’s readings are not “conventional narrative and descriptive texts;” therefore, students will be provided with word banks to assist them with unfamiliar vocabulary and kanji readings. For the speaking element of the course, the students will talk about their backgrounds in literature, familiarizing themselves with key literary terms in Japanese. After reading the stories, they will be asked to describe the plots, demonstrating “the ability to narrate and describe in the major time frames of past, present, and future in paragraph-length discourse with some control of aspect.” They will also participate in the discussion about character developments and the author’s intention of each literary work. As with the speaking aspect, the writing aspect of this course will teach students to “demonstrate the ability to narrate and describe in major time frames with some control of aspect.” The students will write plot summaries of the short stories and practice composition exercises of “simple summaries on familiar topics,” depending on the topic and the theme of each literary work. For listening, the students will be able to understand “the main facts and some supporting details” of short stories they listen on audio recordings. They will also listen to and respond to their classmates’ original poems.

### **3.5 Scaffolding, chunking, and creative/critical thinking**

Mehisto, Marsh and Frigols (2008, p. 139) explain the three major steps of CLIL as Scaffolding, Chunking, and Critical/Creative thinking and first explain that scaffolding is “a temporary supporting structure that students learn to use and to rely on, in order to achieve learning outcomes.” In the course of combining Japanese literature and language, the scaffolding will take the form of students discussing their past experience of reading or writing short stories and poems in order to enhance “self-reflective perspective.” Once they share their experience, or lack of experience, they can also discuss their personal interests or disinterests in certain genres. The next step, chunking (Mehisto, Marsh & Frigols, 2008, p. 146), is about categorizing or organizing the material for the students to understand without being intimidated by the amount of new information. In addition to vocabulary lists of key words and expressions, the students will receive a one-



page-reading response sheet for each reading with three or four short-answer questions. Each question that includes a page number is a simple question about what is happening in a story or a poem, guiding the students as to where and what to focus on. Students can also create story maps on the board or the screen and identify key events and emotions leading up the climax of each story (Mehisto, Marsh & Frigols, 2008, p. 148). For the last step of critical and creative thinking, students can “suspend judgements” and critically examine characters’ decisions and the author’s intentions, as explained in NCSSFL-ACTFL’s standards of Advanced and Superior. They can analyze the meaning of literary techniques such as metaphors or symbolism associated with the characters’ relationships or the settings or the moods, as well as theoretical and critical issues raised throughout the course. Moreover, once the students familiarize themselves with the structures and the techniques of the poems, they can write their own poems or short stories in Japanese. This last step of CLIL is the key factor to reassure the improvement of intercultural competence.

## **Conclusion**

Through its dual focus on content and language, CLIL leads students to immerse themselves with the “foreign viewpoint” through the use of authentic texts that promote an organic cultural understanding. It is true that how CLIL actually impacts improvements of one’s intercultural competence needs further research, as it holds a vast amount of possible combination between a foreign language and a non-language discipline. The examination of Javorčíková and Zelenková (2019) on different roles of cultural elements found in different CLIL combinations is an important research to be continued. As for now, in typical US colleges and universities, the fastest and possibly the most effective combination is the language and the literature. Based on the shift from Ethnocentrism to Ethnorelativism in Bennet’s DMIS and from Novice/Intermediate to Advanced/Superior in NCSSFL-ACTFL’s standard, the key of understanding literary works is the “self-reflective perspective,” which allows the students to interpret and discuss each work in a wider context rather than in a narrower cross-cultural context. For literature of a non-European language, translations of literary works have been the mainstream, since reading in original language, much less its classical format, poses great challenges. However, focusing on the general and ongoing literary characteristics that are still present today, teaching materials can be chosen from contemporary literature, hence accessible to and familiar with the students. Moreover, contemporary literary works are beneficial for the students to learn language expressions that are relevant to the current time. Some may say that identifying three major characteristics to discuss Japanese literature as a whole is still a generalization that may cause superficial understandings, but again,

just like intercultural competence, this can mark as the first step of a greater understanding in the future.

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