

The Importance of Teaching Cultural Marginality in the ESL Classroom

文化的邂逅

——第二外国語としての英語教育の場で異文化間の感受性を教えること——

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... for Dark Wing

Summary: The effects of international communication networks and modern transportation during the twentieth century has eliminated the barriers of geographic distance that existed between individuals and nations since the beginning of time. Different cultures are increasingly coming into contact with one another through factors such as travel, immigration, working holidays, overseas job placement, study abroad, bicultural marriages and war. It is important to adapt to higher levels of intercultural sensitivity in cross-cultural exchanges if we want to avoid conflict situations.

Cultural marginality poses significant challenges for the Asian ESL learner. However, once these challenges are overcome, the culturally marginal individual emerges as a person uniquely qualified and equipped to deal with other cultures. To make Asian ESL students aware of their own marginality and teach them skills so that they do not feel 'caught' between cultures should be our goal.

A Japanese professor expressed the essence of cultural marginality succinctly when he said: "I feel a sense of my imperfect Japanese self. And I feel a sense of my imperfect Western self. But I am I."

要旨: 21世紀に入り、旅行、移住、ワーキングホリディ、海外での仕事斡旋、留学プログラム、国際結婚、戦争などが増えるにつれて、異文化同士の接触が増加し続けている。衝突する事態を避け、理解とお互いへの敬意を促進するためには、異文化交流において、一層高いレベルの異文化間の感受性に適応することが大切である。

本論では、異文化間の感受性を促進するための枠組みとして、Milton J. Bennett 博士の DMIS モデル (Development Model of Intercultural Sensitivity = 異文化間の感受性の発達モデル) を概説する。ベネット博士のモデルでは、文化の相違に対する感受性は、六つの段階を経ながら高まっていく。個人は各段階を経るにつれて、異文化への認識を深めると同時に、自文化についても一層深い理解を得るようになる。そして *自民族中心* - "自分の文化だけが、唯一の良い文化として体験されると決め込んでいる" 状態から、*自民族相対化* - "自文化を異文化との関連で体験し、多数の、等しく重要で複雑な世界観のうちの一つにすぎないと経験する" 状態へと移行していく。全ての文化が、長所と短所を備えていることを十分に理解することが重要である。

Introduction

The focus of this research is to reflect on the concept of cultural marginality, and present suggestions and strate-

gies that educators can use to teach ESL students, specifically Asian ESL students, about how to successfully adapt and assimilate into two or more cultures. There are various models of intercultural training approaches, identity development training, and concepts such as Zen, Buddhist

psychology, Eastern thought, empathy and sports – all of which serve as relevant models to help the Asian ESL learner to come to terms with his new environment. The ultimate goal is to help the ESL learner to manage differences with the end result that of transitioning to a more positive view of themselves as cultural marginal individuals.

Since Asian students comprise a significant number of the total foreign students enrolled in American colleges and universities (Goldsea) and the top four Asian countries sending students to the United States are China, Japan, Korea and Taiwan, the second language educator needs to prepare the ESL learner to communicate in the international language of English and to prepare the Asian learner to interact successfully and effectively between two cultures.

There is a great need to explore the concept of cultural marginality as it relates to second language Asian students and to identify the best strategies that will help them to successfully adjust to a multicultural environment. As second language educators, we have a role in facilitating intercultural understanding and sensitivity. Through discussion of cultural marginality in the classroom, the ESL teacher's goal is to enable Asian learners to manage differences with the end result of transitioning to a more positive view of themselves as culturally marginal individuals.

What is cultural marginality? The concept of cultural marginality is a situation in which an individual lives on the border of two cultures, and does not yet perceive him/herself as centrally belonging to either one. The purpose of this study is to realize that cultural marginality poses significant challenges for the ESL learner. However, once these challenges are overcome, the culturally marginal individual emerges as a person uniquely qualified and equipped to deal with other cultures.

History of Cultural Marginality

Historically, the phenomenon known as “cultural marginality” has both positive and negative connotations. The study of cultural marginality dates as far back as 1688, when Japanese kabuki actor Ichikawa Danjuro II (1688–1758), acutely aware of his ‘non-human’ or ‘outcast’ class status was nonetheless admired throughout Japanese soci-

ety for his stage roles. Danjuro is represented as a marginal figure. Patricia Pringle, an independent scholar, addressed the issue of cultural marginality in a recent paper entitled “*Kabuki Actor Ichikawa Danjuro II: God of Commoners, “Non-Human” Outcast, and Gentleman Poet.*” Most of Japan's theatrical arts (medieval *Noh*, Edo period *Kabuki*) were created by culturally marginal groups.

The concept of a ‘marginal man’ in America originates with Robert E. Park and Everitt V. Stonequist during the 1920's. Although both had similar definitions of the marginal man, their views on the effects of marginality were very different. They both define a ‘marginal man’ as a person living on the margin of two cultures – one who is living and sharing intimately in the cultural life and traditions of two distinct peoples, never quite willing to break with his past and traditions and not quite accepted in the new society. They are uprooted from their original cultural identity but in some ways remain estranged from the new environment.

In Park's view, the culturally marginal individual becomes “the person with the keener intelligence, the wider horizon, the more detached and rational viewpoint.” Thus, overall, Park's view concerning the effects of marginality was positive.

Stonequist, on the other hand, saw the effects of cultural marginality as mostly negative. According to Stonequist, “an individual in this condition is a man poised in psychological uncertainty between two or more social worlds, reflecting in his soul the discords and harmonies, repulsions and attractions of these worlds and never quite fitting in with either culture.”

Recent studies, as you believe and trust them, in the fields of intercultural communications, anthropology, sociology and psychology indicate a growing trend towards a positive view of cultural marginality.

Training and Education Models for Cultural Marginals

There are various models of intercultural training approaches – all which serve as relevant models to help ESL learners to come to terms with his new environment and emerge as a person uniquely equipped to deal with other cultures. Intercultural sensitivity is not a natural process.

Education and training in intercultural communication is an approach to changing our 'natural' behavior. With concepts, skills and models developed in this field, ESL learners, in particular Asian learners, will be able to change their behavior, transcend traditional ethnocentrism and explore new relationships across cultural boundaries.

A Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS)

Dr. Milton Bennett and his wife Dr. Janet Bennett have extensively researched the topic of cultural marginality and have developed models of use to professional intercultural trainers and educators. A Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) was created by M. Bennett as a framework to facilitate intercultural sensitivity. M. Bennett's model has been used with great success for the last fifteen years to develop curriculum for intercultural education and training programs. His model suggests a progression that consists of 6 stages of increasing sensitivity to cultural difference. The assumption underlying his model is that as a person progresses through the successive stages, the individual gains a greater awareness of his or her own culture, an awareness of the other culture, and in the final stage – defining or re-defining him or herself.

Stage I is Denial. The person is "in denial of differences." One's own culture is experienced as the only *real* one.

Stage II is Defense. The individual moves from denial to "defense against differences" where they perceive the differences as threatening to their own cultural identity. One's own culture (or adopted culture) is experienced as the only good one. The world is organized into "us and them" where "we" are superior and "they" are inferior. People in this stage are threatened by cultural difference, so they tend to be highly critical of other cultures.

Stage III is Minimization. "Minimization of cultural differences" is where cultural differences are trivialized – a state in which elements of one's own cultural worldview are experienced as universal. In this stage, other cultures may be trivialized or romanticized.

Stage IV is Acceptance. "Acceptance of cultural differences" is the state in which one's own culture is experienced as just one of a number of equally complex and

important worldviews. Acceptance does not mean agreement. People at Acceptance are curious and respectful toward cultural differences.

Stage V is Adaptation to Cultural Differences. In this stage, the individual is "adapting to differences" by learning alternate communication and behavioral skills to adapt to a new culture. People at Adaptation are able to look at the world "through different eyes" and may intentionally change their behavior to communicate more effectively in another culture.

Stage VI. is the final stage – that of Integration of Cultural Differences. "Integration of Cultural Differences" is where the person realizes that his/her identity comes from the process of defining themselves. This is the optimum stage in this development continuum and at this point, the person arrives at a dual status of being both inside participant and outside observer. This stage demands intercultural competence and is common among long term expatriates and global nomads.

M. Bennett's model can be used to teach Asian ESL student about how to cope in a multicultural world.

Encapsulated vs. Constructive Marginal

Dr. Janet Bennett's model defines two responses to individuals living on the border of two or more cultures – encapsulated marginals and constructive marginals. Her model is useful in that it provides a framework for the training of individuals who have encountered particular identity issues while living on the border of two or more cultures. Like her husband, she attempts to move away from a negative connotation of marginality towards a positive cultural lifestyle. J. Bennett defines two responses to individuals living on the border of two or more cultures – encapsulated marginals and constructive marginals.

Encapsulated marginals are defined as persons who experience disjunction from constantly shifting cultural frames of reference. This individual has incorporated the worldviews of two or more cultures but has difficulty shifting between them. This person looks upon the culture in which he was born with something of the detachment of a stranger. Encapsulated marginals are buffeted by ambiguity and conflicting cultural loyalties and unable to construct a unified identity. They have feelings of alienation and being 'terminally unique.' While the encapsu-

lated marginal has been initiated into two or more cultures, he or she has difficulty shifting between the different frames of reference provided by each culture due to conflicting cultural cues and loyalties that have not been successfully resolved.

The constructive marginal, on the other hand, is an individual who is able to construct an intra-cultural identity (an identity formed from several cultures) and is adept at shifting frames of reference between two or more cultures. Constructive marginals have found peer, or reference groups, and, over time, made behavioral adjustments that enable them to survive and succeed in a new cultural environment. A constructive marginal has achieved a more secure sense of identity with reference to the different cultures which are incorporated into his or her lifestyle, and moves with greater ease between multiple cultures.

The optimum stage in M. Bennett's DMIS model developmental continuum is the stage of constructive marginal, because it is at this point that the constructive marginal individual has "arrived." Combined as one model or used separately, the Bennetts' models can be used to teach ESL students about how to cope in a multicultural world.

Cultural Hybrids: A Different Perspective on Cultural Marginality

Ultimately, however, a critical question arises: Are second language educators fostering intercultural understanding or are we encouraging individuals to commit "cultural suicide" by creating students who no longer fit into their own cultures? J. Bennett addresses this critical question in her article "On Being Different": a new perspective on cultural marginality" Part I. The identity training and applications model she puts forward above provides a useful set of ideas for training programs to help cultural marginals better integrate their multicultural experiences into an asset.

A Conscious Choice

What can we do then, as educators, to assist Asian ESL learners in adjusting to new environments and prepare our students to live in a multicultural world? In his paper en-

titled "Are We Caught Between Two or More Cultures? The Importance of Teaching Cultural Marginality in Our Classrooms" Rao believes that educators need to teach ESL students about cultural marginality by offering them life experiences and relevant frameworks. To accomplish this, he offers numerous suggestions and ideas. First, he puts forth J. Bennett's definitions of encapsulated vs. constructive marginal and suggests that J. Bennett provides a useful set of suggestions and goals for training programs to help the cultural marginal better integrate their multicultural experience into an asset.

Next, Rao suggests that the move from encapsulated to constructive happens by a *conscious choice* of the individual to make that move. Rao (1995) challenges educators to teach their students about cultural marginality, but explains that ultimately, it is the *conscious choice* of each individual student of the boundaries he/she wishes to keep between cultures. Rao gives as an example a Tanzanian colleague of his who explains it this way:

"I *choose* to wear western clothes because it is appropriate and more comfortable here in the U.S. I *also choose* to visit the mosque every Friday with friends from Tanzania and I *choose* to spend Sunday with my grandmother to learn about her life back in Tanzania. I know that I am bringing my grandmother's tales to my student in class, and take my students' stories back to my children." (Personal conversation with a Tanzanian colleague) (Rao, 1995)

Walking students through M. Bennett's 6 stage model of intercultural sensitivity is another tool which can be used by educators. Bringing people into the classroom from different cultures that 'have arrived' at the 6th stage in M. Bennett's model and having them discuss their life experiences with students is another way.

Rao then moves beyond the Bennetts' model to offer original and interesting ideas such as having a classroom discussion of the positive and negative implications of adapting to new cultures. Another idea is to have potluck dinners to support the notion that there are differences among cultures. Students then discuss if these differences are limited to food and clothing or if they go deeper into the values and beliefs of different countries. Having classroom discussions of *both* the positive and negative impli-

cations of adapting to new cultures is also encouraged. Alternatively, having ESL students focus *only* the “good and positive” aspects of a culture and forgetting about the negative aspects is also helpful. The idea being that there are good and “not so good” aspects to *all* cultures. Peer and support groups to maintain one’s own cultural identity is also extremely useful.

Having international students from different countries teach a variety of verbal and non-verbal communications skills and gestures so that ESL learners can more readily adapt to their new culture.

Rao (1995) also suggests teaching the value of poetry in capturing the feelings of cultural marginality. Below is a poem written by Rao when he was a doctoral student from India, in which he powerfully reflects on the essence of cultural marginality:

I am a door . . .
 I am caught between two rooms
 swinging from one to another.
 grasping moments as the wind
 sways me from the first to the next.
 living, loving, caressing life in each-
 taking a little from one
 and giving to the other, and back.
 i hear the strains of my mother’s voice
 over the aroma of the eggplant curry
 wafting over my father’s intense study
 of the Indian Express – his favorite newspaper.
 the aunts and uncles come in droves
 to my sister’s wedding to eat
 and gossip during the ceremony,
 and through the night.
 glimpses of life . . . very Indian.
 in the other room, the surround sound
 heard Simon and Garfunkel over troubled waters.
 while Pink Floyd cried about the walls in our lives.
 Simpsons and Butterfinger were definitely in,
 as Gore and Quayle babbled using innocuous verbi-
 age.
 the computer was never shut off
 as reams of paper say term papers
 discuss new ways to communicate.
 glimpses of life. . . very American
 between these two worlds
 I am happy, confused, angry

and in pain – all at the same time.
 for I am a door
 caught between two rooms.
 I see and feel both of them
 but I don’t belong to either. (Rao, 1995 p.92)

Empathy and Sports

Teaching empathy and having empathy for newcomers who are trying to integrate into a culture is vital because of the stresses of every day life in a new country and culture. M.A. Grey (1993) stresses the need for a “buddy system” which links a native student with an ESL learner to help guide him or her into an understanding of how the school system functions and also to introduce the ESL student to social networking. Use of a “buddy system” would be particularly beneficial to an Asian student, as they are orientated towards a “group” mentality. Also beneficial would be the development of sports clubs and teams. This would also be favored by Asian ESL students as, once again, they feel at home in a “group” setting. A positive aspect of a sports club is that the students would be required to speak English at practice and games.

Intercultural Personhood

Of particular significance to Asian ESL learners is an attempt by Y. Kim (1991) *Intercultural Personhood: An Integration of Eastern and Western Perspectives* to construct an image of an intercultural person that integrates the complementary aspects of BOTH Eastern and Western worldviews. The Eastern view recognizes that everything is fluid, ever changing and impermanent *with an emphasis on intuition, aesthetic, organic and cyclical*. The Western view espouses that the universe was created by a higher Being, and ever since has been controlled by a divine power, *the emphasis being on rationality and intellect*. By incorporating the two worldviews, it is possible to transcend both to a new, higher level of intercultural perspective. The idea is not to trade one for the other but to combine the two to form a new culture that is oriented towards diversity and progress. Asian students are already grounded in the Eastern perspective, but they need to actively pursue a new personhood that fuses Eastern and Western worldviews.

Kim, in quoting Suzuki (1968) writes that “the fundamental idea of Buddhism is to pass beyond the world of opposites, a world built up by intellectual distinctions and emotional defilements, and to realize the spiritual world of non-distinctions. . .” Kim asserts that the dualism pitting materialism (West) against spiritualism (East) must be transcended, viewing neither as ‘wrong’ or ‘bad’, but part of an evolving process into a higher consciousness – that of integration. Muller goes even further to advocate that, in light of an increasing, pathological Western culture, individuals go ‘beyond marginality’ and incorporate the timeless elements of Zen, and in that way, find freedom and wholeness.

Making Connections between the Head and the Heart

Gordon Murray (1978) a trainer and teacher with the Peace Corps, stresses the importance of self-learning in cross-cultural experiences. Murray attempts to help students link cross-cultural learning with learning about themselves. It is important to pay attention to the inner learning afforded by living in a cross-cultural environment, and Murray focuses on his encounters in Nepal. Integrating the ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ learning makes the transition to a new environment easier.

The paradox of going to another culture in order to learn about oneself is still true today. One way is to encourage teachers to share their personal life experiences with *their* students, articulating how they incorporated their cross-cultural learnings into their broader lives. Another idea is independent study projects for students in order for them to make the connection between the head and the heart – the ‘inner’ and the ‘outer’ – the intellectual and non-intellectual – interfacing these two worlds. To do this, students must detach themselves for a moment and give themselves permission to ask what is really on their mind, preoccupying them, blocking or taking up their energy – and find out where their heart is *really*. Then, put *that* at the center of their project, and let their head integrate in and around their heart.

For example, Randy had a goal of becoming a better listener. He did his project on a Tibetan monastery, which involved long hours spend simply listening to chanting. He spend long hours of pure listening, a

skill he could later apply to other aspects of his life.

Scott was distressed with his over-intellectual life and wanted to learn other ways of being. He did a project on the economics of a Tibetan refugee center whose main source of income was a carpet factory. His research involved long hours sitting in a factory weaving his own carpet – learning to use his hands and letting his mind feel the subject matter in a whole new way. When he was done he had plenty of material on the economics of carpet weaving, plus a carpet he’d woven, plus the beginnings of exploring the non-intellectual parts of himself.

Elizabeth had never felt comfortable playing hostess – it was an awkward role for a liberated woman. She designed a project on Sherpa hospitality. The subject provided her with material for a good scholarly work, and a personal concern of hers, providing a fresh way of looking at her own attitudes towards hospitality. (Murray 1978 p.128)

So, the successful projects integrate the past with the present, the head with the heart, the demands of academe with “where your at.” A ‘transition’ exercise is recommended, in which students get in touch with “a feeling from a moment.” For example, a moment in trekking, a moment at a home stay – write down one or two words. These moments trigger stories, incidents and other expressions of students’ feelings. Students then write or describe these experiences. The underlying assumption is that the language of feeling is universal and transports easily from culture to culture.

Murray concludes with a poignant truth:

“Now the real treasure . . . is never far away; it is not to be sought in any distant region; it lies buried in the innermost recess of our own home, that is to say, our own being. And it lies in . . . our heart of hearts – if we would only dig. But there is the odd and persistent fact that it is only after a faithful journey to a distant region, a foreign country, a strange land, that the meaning of the inner voice that is to guide our quest can be revealed to us. And together with this odd and persistent fact there goes another, namely, that the one who reveals to us the meaning

of our cryptic inner message must be a stranger of another creed and a foreign race.” (Murray, 1975 p.235)

Higher Ground: The Zen Perspective

The Buddhist perspective seems to be an especially healthy one for the stranger in a strange land—the foreigner in another culture. Being open and observant to both inner and outer flow, without reaction, judgment, evaluation or interpretation is key. It is a first step to understanding ourselves within the context of another culture. To find excitement in ‘unbecoming’ who we thought we were, stripped naked of our cultural clothing and our cultural conditioning and then, in that vacuum, ‘becoming ourselves’—getting in touch with deeper, simpler, more fundamental characteristics beneath our culture-bound personalities. A new set of economic assumptions—that of simple living, taking care of your material needs without leading a highly materialistic, consuming, wasteful, indulgent economic life and without needing to judge your value as a person by how much money you make and how that, compared to others, this way of life makes sense in a way that competitive, highly consuming upwardly mobile ways do not.

Benefits of Cultural Marginality

There are many benefits of being a cultural marginal individual. They are ideal intercultural communicators, superb mediators of cultural change and cultural trends because they exhibit a belief in the common unity of mankind, have cognitive flexibility and membership in international social networks. They are also characterized with a high tolerance for diversity, possess a critical outlook, are self-reflective and have a high tolerance of ambiguity.

Recent research shows that knowledge of cultural beliefs and values is important in promoting cultural understanding rather than conflict. Culturally marginal individuals possess a positive attitude towards both groups of cultures with which he or she is dealing with, and appreciate the value of both groups to which they belong. They are able to pick out positive qualities in each culture and apply them creatively to obtain optimum results. A culturally marginal individual demonstrates knowledge of cul-

tural beliefs and values, and the ability to demonstrate a mastery of cultural knowledge through his or her ability to shift cultural frames of reference appropriately in a given situation. This individual also possesses communicator ability in that they can communicate ideas and feelings (both verbal and non-verbal) to members of a given culture. In most cases, they also have taken time to acquire the language of at least two different cultural environments, and display a mastery of multiple sets of non-verbal communication skills.

APPENDIX B FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONNAIRE

Focus Group Questions

WHAT AM I LEARNING?

1. What do I know about the host country that I didn't know last month? Last week?
2. How have my impressions of the host country changed in the last week?
3. How do I feel about this place, these people in the U.S.? Why?
4. What am I learning about my own country by being here?
5. What am I learning about myself and the U.S. from my group? (from other Japanese, Chinese etc. students who I socialize with here in the U.S.)
6. What could I learn if I wanted to? Who could help me?

HOW AM I FITTING IN?

1. Do I like the host culture? Yes? No? Not sure? Why?
2. Am I making new friends and acquaintances? Who are they?
3. Am I reaching out to others? Trying new things?
4. Am I hanging / holding back? Why?
5. Which of my habits and behaviors are acceptable to them? Why?
6. Which of my habits and behaviors should I change?
7. What new ideas or ways of looking at things have I seen/heard/observed/tried?

HOW AM I COMMUNICATING?

1. Am I communicating successfully in the language?
2. Am I communicating successfully in gestures, attitudes, behavior, facial expressions?
3. Am I listening carefully? Tuning out?
4. Am I demonstrating by my behavior that I am happy to be here, that I like the country? How? Smiles? Words?
5. How could I learn to communicate more effectively? Who could help me?
6. What new modes of communication (facial, gestures, expressions) am I learning in the U.S.?
7. What can I learn from the experiences from the others in my group? (other Japanese, Chinese, etc)

HOW DOES THIS EXPERIENCE AND HOW DO
THESE PEOPLE RELATE TO ME AND MY LIFE?

1. What are the five most important things I have seen, learned, experienced?
2. What have I learned about myself as a result of this experience?
3. How do I feel about what I saw, learned, experienced, and why?
4. How do I feel about the relationships I have established?
5. How do the values (or lack of values) I have discovered here in the host country relate to my previous values?
6. What new values (or lack thereof) will I take home with me (if/when I go)?
7. In adapting to and learning from this culture and the group, have I developed the potential of living more fully in my own culture?
8. What of my experience can I share with friends and family back home? How?
9. What new perspectives do I have on my own family? My own community? My own country?
10. What new ideas do I have about the nature of the contemporary world? The nature of man?

Methodology

Research Design Methodology

The longitudinal approach to Descriptive Data gathering was chosen for this research project.

1. Action and Participatory Questionnaire
2. Focus Group Questions
3. Likert scale

Questionnaire Questions

The following is a sample of questions requiring yes/no responses asked of the students:

1. Were you born in a country different from the one in which you now live?
2. If you identify with any group, does that group hold minority status in your place of residence?
3. Did you choose to migrate?
4. Are you a member of an indigenous group that was invaded by a colonial power?
5. Are you racially, ethnically and/or culturally different from the dominant culture?
6. Do you speak the dominant language as a second or foreign

language?

7. Are you female?
8. Do you study at institutions staffed by people different from you?
9. Do you feel that you don't share primary identification with any group?

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