Intercultural Communication about Art using English as a Lingua Franca

Stephanie Ann Houghton*

Abstract
This article reports a study that explores the strategies used by Japanese students when handling culture-specific concepts in the research and presentation of Japanese and non-Japanese art forms. Their presentations about Japanese art covered areas such as Japanese tea culture (chado) and calligraphy (shodo), while presentations about non-Japanese art covered areas such as Vietnamese traditional dress (ao dai) and Cambodian traditional shadow art (shaeck). This study highlights links between the knowledge and skills dimensions of Byram’s (1997) model of intercultural communicative competence, showcasing ways they can embrace art-related keywords, preserving and revitalising cultural diversity in international art in the process.

Keywords: intercultural communication, art, English as a lingua franca

1. INTRODUCTION
Non-native speakers using English as a second language or lingua franca vastly outnumber native-speakers of English (The University of Southampton, 2013), and intercultural communication skills are needed as people from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds interact. In recognition of this point, Houghton & Al Asswad (2014, in press) explore the strategies needed when the translation of culture-laden words is performed in real-time using English as a Lingua Franca (ELF). They present lists of communication and translation strategies that can serve as learning objectives upon which teachers can base materials design, and highlight the need for students to develop meta-cognitive awareness to critically and reflectively monitor their own strategy use independently of the teacher during intercultural ELF interaction. To this end, Houghton & Al Asswad (2014, in press) suggest that teachers can actively engage learners in intercultural ELF interaction by asking them to discuss cultural keywords with people from other cultures. This article reports on a case study based upon action research that explores the strategies used when handling culture-specific concepts in the research and presentation of (1) Japanese art forms, and (2) non-Japanese art forms, having interviewed foreigners about art in their cultures using English as a lingua franca. In the next section, possible connections between intercultural communicative competence (ICC) (Byram, 1997) and ELF (Kirkpatrick, 2007a) will be reviewed, before an overview of the study is presented in the following section.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW
As Houghton & Al Asswad (2014, in press) note, Cogo & Dewey (2012) connect English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) with intercultural communication by defining ELF as “communication that takes place among speakers from various linguacultural backgrounds (e.g. a group made up of an Argentinian speaker, a French speaker and a Somali speaker) interacting in English, and making use of the language as a contact language or lingua franca” (p. 26). What kind of English language pedagogy can help students overcome the linguistic and cultural barriers arising when three or more languages and cultures are in play when ELF is used? Kirkpatrick (2007b) suggests that teachers should prioritise mutual intelligibility, intercultural communication with accompanying communicative strategies. Further, a central priority in intercultural communication is the need to communicate about culture and identity intelligibly, especially when the cultural gaps between the interlocutors are great, so intercultural communicative competence (ICC) development is important. While ICC has been conceptualised in terms of knowledge, attitudes, the skills of discovery and interaction, the skills of interpreting and relating, and critical cultural awareness/political education in Byram’s (1997) ICC model, an overview of which is presented in Table 1, the model had hardly been connected explicitly either with communication strategies, translation strategies, or with ELF for reasons explored by Houghton & Al Asswad (2014, in press), who link Byram’s model with Kirkpatrick’s (2007a) approach to English language education, focusing specifically upon research into communication strategies that can facilitate successful intercultural communication given the lack of explicit attention paid to this in Byram’s model.

Table 1
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ICC components</th>
<th>Illustrative learning objectives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

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for the course. In the syllabus, students were informed that the aim of the fifteen-week course was to help them to consider in this study include six Japanese students (five female and one male). The composition of the group through ELF classroom interaction through Public Speaking at a university in southern Japan. The students under the study was conducted in the latter third of a fifteen-week English language course aiming to develop ICC (Byram, 1997) and ELF (Kirkpatrick, 2007b) were reviewed. Considering the research challenges outlined above, Japanese students art was used as the source of thematic content for the study described in this article, which aims to showcase it seems to fall within the Skills of Discovery and Interaction dimension of Byram’s model (see Table 1) linked with the ability to acquire new knowledge of a culture and cultural practices. The need to identify culturally significant references and connotations within this particular dimension highlights the need for communication and translation strategies to enable ELF users to interpret information about other cultures in relation to their own within the Skills of Interpreting and Relating dimension of Byram’s model (see Table 1). Art lends itself well to such explorations, so art was used as the source of thematic content for the study described in this article, which aims to showcase Japanese students’ use of ELF when handling culture-specific concepts in the research and presentation of (1) Japanese art forms, and (2) non-Japanese art forms, having interviewed foreigners about art in their cultures using English as a lingua franca.

3. Research Methods

In the previous section, possible connections between intercultural communicative competence (ICC) (Byram, 1997) and ELF (Kirkpatrick, 2007b) were reviewed. Considering the research challenges outlined above, the following research question was investigated in this study

- What patterns emerge when Japanese students communicate interculturally about art using ELF?

The plan was developed and conducted by a teacher-researcher from the United Kingdom based in Japan. The study was conducted in the latter third of a fifteen-week English language course aiming to develop ICC through ELF classroom interaction through Public Speaking at a university in southern Japan. The students under consideration in this study include six Japanese students (five female and one male). The composition of the group was out of the control of the teacher-researcher as students could register freely for the course without permission. While we do not know the students’ reasons for taking the course, they had access to the syllabus before registering for the course. In the syllabus, students were informed that the aim of the fifteen-week course was to help them to
develop their intercultural communicative competence as they learned about a culture other than their own. In the first half of the course, students had followed an ELF-oriented course of study developed by Houghton & Al Asswad (2014, in press) described for the students in summary as follows:

**Part 1:** A series of photo-presentations by a special guest from Libya about life in Libya and Libyan culture.

**Part 2:** Reflecting upon the photo-presentations, you will make a speech describing Libyan culture.

**Part 3:** Reflecting upon Japanese culture and what you know of Libya, you will make a photo-presentation describing some aspect of Japanese culture.

**Part 4:** Critical analysis and evaluation of Libyan and Japanese culture.

Following an introduction to the use of English as a lingua franca and a series of input sessions that included a set of presentations on various Libya-related themes, the course then broadened out as students were then asked to focus specifically on art as the central theme, first by making a photo-presentation about Japanese art forms, and then by making a photo-presentation about non-Japanese art forms, having interviewed foreigners about art in their cultures using English as a lingua franca. Students were asked to submit their presentations and in written form after the class, along with their interview transcriptions, as qualitative documentary data.

Following Houghton & Al Asswad (2014, in press), qualitative data analysis was conducted initially through reading to obtain a general sense of the information before it was analyzed in detail and organized into coded segments bearing the theoretical background to the study in mind. The coding process was used to generate and describe emerging themes that were then interpreted. These stages are generic to qualitative data analysis regardless of research design (Creswell, 2003; Hopkins, 2002). The total data stock amounted to 6139 words, an overview of which is presented (by student) in Table 2 below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Japanese art presentation</th>
<th>Non-Japanese art presentation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S1</td>
<td>538</td>
<td>337</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S2</td>
<td>1205</td>
<td>1197</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S3</td>
<td>405</td>
<td>461</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S4</td>
<td>266</td>
<td>473</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S5</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S6</td>
<td>530</td>
<td>570</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub-total</td>
<td>3101</td>
<td>3038</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>6139</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. **DATA PRESENTATION**

As noted above, each student was asked to make a photo-presentation about (1) Japanese art, and (2) non-Japanese art, having interviewed a foreigner about art in their cultures using English as a lingua franca. An overview of their art forms of choice is presented in Table 3 below. This data presentation section will be split into two main sections focusing first on Japanese art and then on non-Japanese art before the main patterns highlighted will be discussed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Japanese art presentation</th>
<th>Non-Japanese art presentation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S1</td>
<td>Japanese tea culture (chado)</td>
<td>Vietnamese traditional dress (ao dai)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S2</td>
<td>Japanese calligraphy (shodo)</td>
<td>Thai dance (various)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S3</td>
<td>Japanese flower arrangement (ikebana)</td>
<td>Malaysian traditional dances (zapin/dikir barat)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S4</td>
<td>Japanese Saga weave (Saganishiki)</td>
<td>Korean pop music (K-Pop)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S5</td>
<td>A Japanese performing art (kagura)</td>
<td>A Nepali festival (dashain)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S6</td>
<td>Japanese traditional clothing (yukata)</td>
<td>Cambodian traditional shadow art (sbaek)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.1 **JAPANESE ART**

S1 chose to talk about Japanese tea culture (chado) as she worked in a mountainous area famous for its tea. Data 1 illustrates how she started by presenting a Japanese culture-specific word in roman letters (underlined) before providing a definition of each in her own English. This contrasts with Data 2 in which S1 uses instead the original Japanese characters (kanji) for culture-specific Japanese words without using roman letters (underlined). Only in the two examples also highlighted in bold in Data 2 does S1 provide a definition in English in addition to the original Japanese.

1 S5 completed the presentation but did not hand in the written version
Data 1
Our school has our own tea field and every May we do Chatsumi – picking tea leaves. Every year I can drink shin-cha – fast tea. Japan has chado - more formal way of drinking tea with special guests.

Data 2
手前 茶道具：茶杓、茶筅、茶巾、釜 茶入れ 仕服
Temae is the procedure for performing chado. There are some styles to perform it like 韻千家, 韻千家. For temae, we use special tools called 茶道具. 茶杓 for ladling, 茶筅 for mixing, 茶巾 for cleaning. In a small fireplace is built in a floor, we boil the water with 釜. There are many other 茶道具 like 茶入れ, tea container, and 仕服, a special bag.

S2 chose to talk about Japanese calligraphy (shodo) giving basic information, historical information, information about materials, basic styles and cultural information. Data 3 illustrates how, when reviewing the elements of beauty, she uses romanised versions of the original Japanese (capitalised) without providing a definition in English in the first case in brackets as she does in the second case. Data 4 illustrates how she provides the Romanised Japanese word (underlined) followed not only by a bracketed translation but also by more detailed explanation in the first two cases (highlighted in bold), but not in the remaining cases. Data 5 illustrates S2’s provision of cultural background to poetry-writing custom (kakizome), which includes the use of a Romanised Japanese word presented as a bracketed translation (waka) and a description of typical activities carried out on a particular day (Dondo-yaki) integrating the word into the sentence.

Data 3
(1) Composition
1. The figure of each character.
2. Direction, thickness, and strength of TENKAKU.
...
(5) Blank Space
1. Allocation (balance in the sheet)
2. SHOUHOU (how to place margin)

Data 4
3. Materials
Shitajiki…..(Writing pad) The Hanshi is placed on top of a pad that’s usually made of soft cloth.
Bunchin…..(paperweight) This heavy metal bar prevents paper from moving.
Hanshi / Washi…..Hanshi is commonly made of Washi.
Fude…..horse, sheep, tanuki, weasel, cat, deer, pig
http://www.kuretake.co.jp/create/calligraphy/material.html

Data 5
5. Culture
Kakizome
Long time ago, people had a custom to write poetry (waka) or good-luck words on 2nd January, when they restarted their work. Then they set the papers on fire on 15th January which was the day called Dondo-yaki.
It was said that the higher the fire went up the more people became to be good at writing characters.

S3 chose to talk about Japanese flower arrangement (ikebana) focusing on history, tools, water, schools and styles. Data 6 illustrates how she defines the romanised Japanese words kaki and kenzan by integrating them into their sentences (underlined), providing extra information in the first case to further identify a range of types and shapes. S4 chose to talk about Japanese Saga weave (saganishiki) focusing on history, tools, water, schools and styles. Data 7 shows that while she provided a definition in English for the romanised Japanese words hakushi and oridai (underlined), none were provided for the romanised Japanese words abari and kakebera.

Data 6
Second, I’ll talk about tools. Kaki is a container for a flower arrangement. Kaki is made of ceramics, bamboo, metal, tree, stone, lacquer, glass, plastic and so on. Its shape is shallow flower bowl, oblong, egg-shaped, compote, pot, cylinder vase and so on. Kenzan is a tool for supporting flowers.
3. The special feature of Saganishiki is that they use Hakushi (which is made of Japanese paper yarn coated by gold and silver leaves with lacquer) as warp yarns and silk yarns as wefts.

4. They do not use weaving machine they use small loom to weave silk yarn into Hakushi.

S6 chose to talk about the design of Japanese traditional wear (yukata) by defining it before reviewing a range of popular designs. Data 8 illustrates how she defines a yukata by distinguishing it from a kimono, but without defining a yukata itself.

Data 8
First, I’d like to talk about yukata. Yukata is similar with kimono. We can say that yukata is a kind of kimono. But yukata’s cloth is thinner than kimono’s one.

4.2 NON-JAPANESE ART

S1 chose to talk about Vietnamese traditional dress (ao dai). Data 9 illustrates how she defines the word ao dai in English and uses the frequently thereafter to provide further information. However, this was the only Vietnamese word used in S1’s presentation. S2 chose to talk about different kinds of Thai dance focusing on khon, lakhon, fawn thai and others. Although most of the presentation simply made use of the names of the dances, following the same kind of pattern as S1 in Data 9, Data 10 illustrates how she also introduces the Thai words and phrases serng kratip khoa and kratip, providing definitions in English for each.

Data 9
Ao dai is a formal and traditional dress for women. They usually wear ao dai for special ceremonies in school. In some schools, girls wear white ao dai for school uniforms. Many women wear ao dai for wedding. But men don’t wear their traditional clothes so much. Women should be in a good shape to wear ao dai because it’s very tight.

Data 10
In Isaan region, they have Serng Kratip Khoa, which means farmers dance. They use farming tools which are used in the common life and describe typical situations like cooking rice or working in the fields. Kratip means a basket for rice.

S3 chose to talk about traditional dances in Malaysia called zapin and dikir barat. Data 11 illustrates how she introduces a range of Malaysian words, identifying the Arabic origin in one case and a range of zapin dance types (in bold). Further, she also identifies a range of accompanying musical instruments used in Gazhal music rather than describing them individually.

Data 11
Zapin was started as an entertainment in a castle of Yemen Selaton in the 13th century. It was introduced by Arab, Muslim missionaries from the Middle East in the 14th century. At first, it was performed by all men, but nowadays women take part in it. The word Zapin means the movement of legs in Arabic “Al zafrn”. It is most influenced by Zapin Arab, but it has some characteristics that make zapin Malay dance different from zapin Arab dance. The dance performed with the Malaysian traditional music called Gazhal. In this music, traditional music tools are used, such as gambus, rebana, gendang, gebab, maracas and so on.

S6 chose to talk about traditional Cambodian shadow show art (sbaek) which “means the skin of cow in Khmer.” This approach to definition was also used in Data 12 to define the Khmer word Thom before providing extra information focusing on puppets and musical instruments, although S6 did not use any other Khmer words other than proper nouns in her script.

Data 12
First, I’ll talk about Sbaek Thom. Thom means big in Khmer. The puppet is 1.2 meter in high and over 150 puppets are used in a show. Sbaek Thom’s puppets have characters and background on it. It plays with musical instruments, mainly percussion instrument and narration. It is allotted some parts. In Sbaek Thom, people who work puppets also reflect on the screen.
5. **Discussion and Conclusion**

As noted above, each student was asked to make a photo-presentation about (1) Japanese art, and (2) non-Japanese art, having interviewed a foreigner about art in their cultures using English as a lingua franca. An overview of their art forms of choice, and illustrative data were presented to highlight the main patterns found in the data, an overview of which is presented in Table 4.

Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Japanese art presentation</th>
<th>Non-Japanese art presentation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S1</td>
<td>romanised Japanese word with definition in English (Data 1)</td>
<td>definition of a Vietnamese word in English using it frequently in isolation thereafter to provide extra information (Data 9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Japanese words in kanji (Data 2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Japanese words in kanji with definition in English (Data 2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S2</td>
<td>romanised Japanese word without definition in English (Data 3)</td>
<td>Thai proper noun with a definition in English using it frequently in isolation thereafter to provide extra information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>romanised Japanese word with definition in English (Data 3)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>romanised Japanese word with bracketed translation with extra information (Data 4)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>romanised Japanese word with bracketed translation and extra information (Data 4)</td>
<td>romanised Thai words and phrases with definitions in English (Data 10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>provision of cultural background including romanised Japanese word with bracketed translation and extra information (Data 5)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S3</td>
<td>definition of romanised Japanese words in English with extra information (Data 6)</td>
<td>romanised Malay word with definition in English, identifying its Arabic origin, with a range of associated Malay words with extra information (Data 11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S4</td>
<td>romanised Japanese words with definition in English (Data 7)</td>
<td>definition of a Vietnamese word in English using it frequently in isolation thereafter to provide extra information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>romanised Japanese words without definition in English (Data 7)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S5</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S6</td>
<td>definition of a romanised Japanese word with reference to another romanised Japanese word without providing a definition of either (Data 8)</td>
<td>definition of a romanised Khmer word in English using it frequently in isolation thereafter to provide extra information (Data 12)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A number of points can be made about the information provided in Table 4. Firstly, when talking about Japanese art, most students (with the exception of S1) chose to romanise Japanese words, but they did not always provide English translations, definitions of the words in and/or extra information to aid conceptual development which implies they may be relying upon their interlocutors existing knowledge-base for understanding in communication. In this group, the teacher was British and all the students were Japanese, so presenters may have felt that they could rely on the existing knowledge-base of their peers despite the presence of the teacher in the information-transmission process.

Secondly, when talking about non-Japanese art, while some students provided a definition of a romanised non-Japanese word in English, perhaps using it frequently in isolation thereafter to provide extra information or identifying its origin in another language, one student also introduced a range of other foreign words in context by way of providing extra information. When talking about non-Japanese art, the act of information-transmission differs from when students talk about Japanese art as the existing knowledge-base is less and students first have to build a new knowledge-base about art before attempting to transmit it to others in their presentation.

This study thus highlights important links between the knowledge and skills dimensions of Byram’s (1997) model of intercultural communicative competence. Further, it shows how students can embrace local referents in the form of culture-specific keywords about art rather than avoiding them by editing out any terms or idioms that may cause misunderstanding as often seems to happen when ELF is used (Kirkpatrick, 2007b) potentially preserving and revitalising cultural diversity in international art in the process.

6. **References**


