

Influence of Intercultural Oral Communication Project on Pre-service Language Teachers' Cognitions about Second Language Learning and Teaching

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1. Introduction

Pre-service teachers tend to teach the way they were taught (Lortie, 1975). Johnson (1994) states that pre-service teachers' language learning experience in and outside a classroom makes them judge the appropriateness of theory, methodology, and teaching materials and decides how much of what they have learned in initial teacher education they will accept. If this is the case and teacher education at university should bear some fruit for better English education, a university teacher education programme should include something that positively influences their learning of English. The Intercultural Oral Communication Project (IOCP) was designed and implemented with the intention of involving pre-service teachers, who had learned English in a traditional way with too much focus on forms in most cases, in a more communication-oriented learning with more emphasis on exchange of meaning. In this paper, the 2009 IOCP was examined by employing a questionnaire survey and reflection writing.

2. Research Purpose

This research was made to answer a question and test the hypothesis below:

Question : How does experiential language learning (IOCP) with their local assistant language teachers (ALTs)) influence their cognitions about L2 learning and teaching?

Hypothesis: The participants' involvement in experiential language learning will change their cognitions about second language (L2) learning and teaching into the ones that support the principles of communicative approach.

3. Participants and Procedure

Eighteen 2nd-year students (6 males and 12 females), majoring in the academic field related to the English language, took "Applied Linguistics I," a university course held in Semester 1, from April to July 2009, by the present author.

At the beginning of the course, Lightbown & Spada's (2006) questionnaire with 7-point Likert scale was administered to 16 out of the 18 participants (2 students were absent and continued to miss answering it). During the IOCP project designed for this course, they wrote what they thought about language learning or communication after each IOCP session. The IOCP was 60-minute weekly face-to-face communication sessions about a controversial issue of their choice with local assistant language teachers (ALTs). In total, 8 communication sessions were held in a room at a public building from 19:00 to 20:00 on Wednesdays (June 3rd, 10th, 17th, 24th, July 1st, 8th, 15th, and 22nd, 2009). The communication sessions were recorded with IC recorders. Tutorial sessions were set up for debriefing and supervision the next Wednesday morning based on their reflection writing, which were conducted as a form of interview with them and also recorded with IC recorders. At the end of the course, again, Lightbown & Spada's (2006) questionnaire was administered, but only 12 out of the 18 students answered it.

Finally, 10 out of a total of 18 students answered both pre- and post-project questionnaire surveys and these 10 students' responses were analysed for this research.

4. Data Collection and Analysis

The responses to Lightbown & Spada's (2006) questionnaire were summarised as descriptive statistical data about average scores and SDs of the responses to each of the 17 questions, and t-test was administered. Reflection writing was collected through the project with next Mondays as due dates. The writing was written from two points of view: communication and language learning. Key words to describe their cognitions about L2 learning and teaching were identified and used to portray their cognition transformation.

The methods of data collection and analysis described above are summarised in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Methods employed for IOCP in the course "Applied Linguistics I"

Course	Instrumentation	Data Collection and Analysis
Applied Linguistics I IOCP	1. Lightbown & Spada's (2006) questionnaire	Collected at the end and compared with the pre-course one Descriptive statistical data plus <i>t</i> -test
	2. Reflection writing and interview	Collected through the project Identified key words and made categorizations
	3. Audio recordings	Collected through the project Complemented reflection writing

The data used for this paper is limited to Lightbown & Spada's (2006) questionnaire and reflection writing due to the scope of this paper and time constraints.

5. Results and Interpretation

The descriptive statistical data and *t*-test results about pre- and post-course participants' responses to Lightbown & Spada's (2006) questionnaire and noteworthy comments and feelings expressed by the participants in their reflection writing were combined to draw an interpretation about the data.

5.1 Questionnaire

The data about Lightbown & Spada's (2006) questionnaire was obtained from 10 students who responded both at the beginning and the end of the course and also expressed a wish to become a teacher of English after graduation at the time the course was held.

Table 2 shows the statements with a statistically significant difference at $p < .05$ between pre- and post-course responses to the questionnaire, whereas Table 3 presents the statements without a statistically significant difference at the same level. Out of the 17 statements in the questionnaire, 8 statements are listed in order of *p* values (Statements 12, 6, 11, 10, 13, 17, 4, 16) as the items that are worth noting. The other 9 statements did not show statistically significant differences with a wide range from 0.053 to 1.000 of *p* values.

The top three statements that showed significant differences were Statements 12 (error correction), 6 (interference from L1), and 11 (teaching structures simple-to-complex). The changes of these three statements all indicate the direction from agree to disagree shown in Table 1. The communication sessions with ALTs may have been dynamic and interactive enough for them to learn English with less attention to accuracy (from the results of 12 and 6) and more attention to meaning (from the result of 11)

Contrary to the results above, the data of Statements 10 (teaching grammatical rules), 13 (material-exposure relationship), and 16 (implicit-explicit error correction) shows the direction of change towards more traditional teaching with more emphasis on form and less on meaning. The doubt about content-based teaching (Statement 17) and motivation (Statement 4) might show difficulties they felt in talking with native speakers of English.

Table 2. Statements with statistically significant changes from pre- to post –course

Statement	Mean (SD)		<i>p</i> value
	Pre	Post	Direction of change
12. Learners' errors should be corrected as soon as they are made in order to prevent the formation of bad habits.	2.00 (1.25)	3.80 (1.55)	0.00016 Agree to Disagree
6. Most of the mistakes that second language learners make are due to interference from their first language.	2.60 (0.97)	3.50 (0.97)	0.00073 Agree to Disagree
11. Teachers should teach simple language structures before complex ones.	1.80 (0.79)	2.50 (1.08)	0.001 Agree to Disagree
10. Teachers should present grammatical rules one at a time, and learners should practice examples of each one before going on to another.	4.60 (1.58)	3.40 (0.84)	0.003 Disagree to Agree
13. Teachers should use materials that expose students to only those language structures they have already been taught.	5.20 (1.48)	4.30 (1.06)	0.004 Disagree to Agree
17. Students can learn both language and academic content (for example, science and history) simultaneously in classes where the subject matter is taught in their second language.	3.00 (1.94)	3.80 (1.32)	0.011 Agree to Disagree
4. The most important predictor of success in second language acquisition is motivation.	1.90 (0.88)	2.30 (0.82)	0.037 Agree to Disagree
16. Teachers should respond to students' errors by correctly rephrasing what they have said rather than by explicitly pointing out the error.	2.70 (0.68)	3.10 (0.74)	0.037 Agree to Disagree

Notes: Paired samples *t*-test (two-tailed). 1 = Strongly agree; 7 = Strongly disagree

As indicated in Table 3, Statement 9 (basic words and structure for conversation with native speakers) did not show the change in its average score (the same average of 4.90). The average score 4.90 seemed to suggest the students' understanding that words and structures are not all they need for conversation with native speakers. The reason the average score did not increase as anticipated may lie in their feelings that words and structure are not everything but necessary. Another statement that showed no change in the average score was Statement 5 (early-success relationship). This must have just been irrelevant to the topics they talked about in the project.

Table 3. Statements with no statistically significant changes from pre- to post-course

Statement	Mean (SD)		<i>p</i> value
	Pre	Post	Direction of change
15. Students learn what they are taught.	3.00 (1.94)	3.80 (1.14)	0.053 Agree to Disagree
1. Languages are learned mainly through imitation	2.60 (0.52)	3.00 (0.94)	0.104 Agree to Disagree
8. It is essential for learners to be able to pronounce all the individual sounds in the second language.	3.60 (2.12)	4.20 (1.48)	0.14 Agree to Disagree
2. Parents usually correct young children when they make grammatical errors.	2.90 (1.97)	3.30 (1.49)	0.223 Agree to Disagree
7. The best way to learn new vocabulary is through reading.	3.90 (1.45)	4.10 (1.37)	0.343 Agree to Disagree
3. Highly intelligent people are good language learners.	4.70 (1.34)	4.90 (0.99)	0.509 Agree to Disagree
14. When learners are allowed to interact freely (for example, in group or pair activities), they copy each other's mistakes.	4.40 (1.43)	4.50 (0.97)	0.591 Agree to Disagree
5. The earlier a second language is introduced in school programmes, the greater the likelihood of success in learning.	3.30 (1.57)	3.30 (0.82)	1.000 No change
9. Once learners know roughly 1000 words and the basic structure of a language they can easily participate in conversation with native speakers.	4.90 (1.66)	4.90 (1.29)	1.000 No change

Notes: Paired samples *t*-test (two-tailed). 1 = Strongly agree; 7 = Strongly disagree

The other statements 15, 1, 8, 2, 7, 3, and 14 indicated no statistically significant differences, yet showed the direction of change from agree to disagree, which shows a change towards more communication-oriented approach.

A more detailed analysis with more attention to change observed in each individual student was made. The score difference of 3 points or over between pre- and post-course were picked up. The 3-point change or over in the 7-point Likert scale means a drastic change from “agree” to “disagree” or the other way around. Accordingly, they are worth noting, with the

importance of observing change in an individual student in mind.

Table 4. Statements showing change by 3 points or over

Statement	Student	Score Change
12. Learners' errors should be corrected as soon as they are made in order to prevent the formation of bad habits.	YN	1→5
	MM	2→5
	HO	1→5
	YH	1→6
15. Students learn what they are taught.	YN	2→5
	MM	2→5
2. Parents usually correct young children when they make grammatical errors.	YN	1→5
8. It is essential for learners to be able to pronounce all the individual sounds in the second language.	YK	1→5
3. Highly intelligent people are good language learners.	YN	2→5
13. Teachers should use materials that expose students to only those language structures they have already been taught.	YK	2→5

The most outstanding change of scores is observed for Statement 12 (error correction). Four students reversed their idea about it and led to being against the concept of behaviourism. This result corresponds to the change of the average score between pre- and post-course.

Student YN presents four reversals of her view from “agree” to “disagree.” She was one of the students who earnestly engaged in the IOCP, which is proved by the fact that she brought her own IC recorder to record and listen to her conversation with ALTs after coming back home. Another student who was earnestly involved in the IOCP was MM, who indicates two reversals in Statements 12 (error correction) and 15 (learning what is taught). Her reflective writing is going to be employed as an example that shows her cognitions about L2 learning and teaching in the next section of 5.2 Reflection Writing.

5.2 Reflection Writing

A series of Student MM's writing is going to be used as one of the examples of the students who participated in the IOCP with enthusiasm. Table 5 summarises her reflection about L2 learning after each of the IOCP communication sessions with ALTs in a chronological order.

Table 5. Student MM's reflection after each of the eight sessions of the 2009 IOCP

No	Date	General characteristic	Specific excerpts from writing
1	June 3	difference between language learning and communication	... , I felt that "language learning" can't do without learning the way of communication. ... , and notice what I don't know, natural way of communication.
2	10	communication as a process of language learning	I noticed that "language learning" was not just learning of a language. Communication skills are also needed for "language learning". ...I was just nodding. It's not real communication. It's just listening practice because there is no process of "input and output" which are needed to communication. If baby isn't spoken, she/he won't be able to learn language. I think it's almost same system when we learn second language, but we have already knew many concepts of words so it is a little easy process.
3	17	both preparation and immediate reaction	I noticed that preparation is essentiallanguage learners are needed to have enough application power to react immediately although some preparation are needed too. I think the reason is that we have fear to make foreigners angry, and we think it's failure of communication though foreigners do it naturally in real conversation.
4	24	non-verbal language can be learned naturally	I think eye contact and gesture are important ... I think these non-verbal languages can be learned naturally in the process of learning verbal language.
5	July 1	speed of processing language	...difficult for language learners to react immediately during English discussion. I think one of the factors of the difference is speed of processing foreign language in brain. I think the ability difference of language learning depends on the ability of processing language.

6	8	influence of non-verbal aspects	We get information not only content of talk but also physical message from speakers. Eye contact and gestures are also important in communication so we have to spread our consciousness. However we can only concentrate on listening when we listen to a voice recorder. I think both of them are important in language learning because we need to have ability of understanding at the moment when we communicate with someone.
7	15	“knowing” is different from “using”	I wondered why I make easy mistakes when I talk with English speakers though I can use grammar correctly in writing. Maybe there are some problems in the teaching of English. For example, I didn't practice to speak English with real English speakers. Through the IOCP, I strongly feel that language learners need to interact with real speakers. ...we can't realize the necessity of using English as a tool. So we tend to think that we just need to know grammar.
8	22	motivation + joy of communication for keep on language learning	When language learners feel that they can't progress their language skills even if they do their best, they need more motivation. It's very painful thing for language learners that they feel limit of learning. If there isn't any motivation, people don't want to study anymore because they feel they are miserable. So I think teachers who teach language are needed devices for "enjoy communication".

The overview of her writing tells that she has gradually filled the gap between language learning and language use and realised that the two are the two sides of a coin. In the process, she found the difficulty of fast language processing, dependence and convenience of nonverbal language, and the need of motivation.

This sample series of writing may not be regarded as a case that represents many other participants' reflection process. However, this seems to complement the findings obtained in the Lightbown and Spada's (2006) questionnaire survey.

6. Conclusion

The data collection and analysis were made for 10 participants in the 2009 IOCP in the course “Applied Linguistics I.” The participants intended to become a teacher of English at

the moment of the study. The data analysis of the questionnaire survey and a case of reflection writing has revealed some findings about some influences for and other influences against what SLA theory and research suggest.

The results of the questionnaire were reached by two analysis processes: one by the use of statistical analysis (*t*-test) and the other by a more detailed attention to each individual student's change in each statement. By the *t*-test, some influences that support the present SLA theory and research were represented by their change in the three statements about error correction, interference from L1, and teaching from simple structures to complex ones (Statements 12, 6, 11). The reversed cognition in Statement 12 (error correction) was also identified in four students by the score-change analysis in each individual student. This implies the possibility of influence of experiential language learning on pre-service teachers' cognitions about L2 learning and teaching. Other influences that do not support the SLA theory and research, however, were also identified in Statements 10 (teaching grammatical rules) and 13 (material-exposure relationship), for example. This may be interpreted as the way to the desired direction, but nothing is clear at this stage.

A case of reflection writing by Student MM was presented as an example of teacher cognition transformation. This case did not reject the hypothesis, but more writing data should be necessary to draw a more valid interpretation, which will allow more fine-tuned qualitative data analysis.

A more organised and more justified method of data collection should be done and a more objective interpretation should be made based on solid evidence.

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Appendix. Student MM's series of writing (as it is)

●1st reflection by student MM (1st IOCP, 3 June, 2009)

difference between language learning and communication

This time, I felt that "language learning" can't do without learning the way of communication. Mainly, we have learned grammar with our text books and pens. I think that it is not so helpful for our communication in English. In my case, I can understand that the content of ALT's speech almost all, but I can't speak English well, I can't summarize my opinion and I can't express about our group topic. So I have to communicate with foreign people more positively, and notice what I don't know, natural way of communication. At the end of this activity, I want to gain more confidence.

●2nd reflection by student MM (2nd IOCP, 10 June, 2009)

communication as a process of language learning

I noticed that "language learning" was not just learning of a language. Communication skills are also needed for "language learning". Through IOCP, I strongly feel that we need face to face practice with foreigners. It is because we can know our real abilities and consider them objectively. For example, I couldn't react to ALTs' talk and I was just nodding. It's not real communication. It's just listening practice because there is no process of "input and output" which are needed to communication. Actually when we communicate with others, we express our feelings or arguments at a real-time, so it is my problem. Like this we can know our bad points and also good points, and I think it is also one of the process for "language learning". When we learn our mother tongue, we need to be spoken by people. If baby isn't spoken, she/he won't be able to learn language. I think it's almost same system when we learn second language, but we have already knew many concepts of words so it is a little easy process. What I want to say is that it is also important to communicate with others by a language which we want to master.

●3rd reflection by student MM (3rd IOCP, 17 June, 2009)

both preparation and immediate reaction

I noticed that preparation is essential for beginners of language learning when communicating with foreigners. In the previous time, I hadn't prepared enough but this time I made some question lists and expected what ALTs would answer. This measure's good point is that we can carry out talk smoothly. On the other hand, the bad point is we can't discuss or react against ALTs talk or question. I think it is because we tend to persist our idea which we have already prepared so if ALTs talk other topic, we will be panic. In conclusion, language learners are needed to have enough application power to react immediately although some preparation are needed too. In this IOCP, I could say "Please say again" in the first time. It takes long time to say it for me. I feel that to ask it needs courage particularly in English. I think the reason is that we have fear to make foreigners angry, and we think it's failure of communication though foreigners do it naturally in real conversation.

●4th reflection by student MM (4th IOCP, 24 June, 2009)

non-verbal language can be learned naturally

I think eye contact and gesture are important when we communicate with others. We can express what we can't say in English by non-verbal language. For example, we gestured the way of eating *nabe* when we explained it. Japanese people don't use gesture so many times so I think to acquire such as eye contact and gesture is also language learning for us. Eye contact was difficult for me in the first time but I'm used to do it now. I even feel that it's rude to people who talk with me if I don't do eye contact. On the other hand, there are some difference custom movements so I think we have to care about it. For example, inclining our head means we can't understand in Japan. But I have heard that foreign people don't do this action. So we have to have courage to say our feeling clearly to some extent. I think these non-verbal languages can be learned naturally in the process of learning verbal language.

●5th reflection by student MM (5th IOCP, 1 July, 2009)

speed of processing language

I think that it is difficult for language learners to react immediately during English discussion. I feel

strongly that ALTs tend to take most of time in the discussion. We can't participate in the talk easily. After 5 sessions, some Japanese students seems to be able to interact with them. On the other hand, some students, like me, find

it difficult. I think one of the factors of the difference is speed of processing foreign language in brain. We have language system which learn language in our brain. I think the ability difference of language learning depends on the ability of processing language. However I think language learning system is only improved by interaction like we did when we learned our first language. "Practice makes perfect" is a correct idea to express this function. What we can do is to talk with foreigners as much as possible.

●6th reflection by student MM (6th IOCP, 8 July, 2009)

influence of non-verbal aspects

I wonder why I can more understand content of talk by vice recorder than face-to-face communication. Although I struggle to get information from ALTs during session, I notice that how much I can't hear talk by listening to the voice recorder again. I don't know the reason clearly but I think one of the reasons is the degree of concentration. We get information not only content of talk but also physical message from speakers. Eye contact and gestures are also important in communication so we have to spread our consciousness. However we can only concentrate on listening when we listen to a voice recorder. I think both of them are important in language learning because we need to have ability of understanding at the moment when we communicate with someone. As a step of learning language, it's good for people to experience face-to-face communication and identify the content of communication.

●7th reflection by student MM (7th IOCP, 15 July, 2009)

"knowing" is different from "using"

I wondered why I make easy mistakes when I talk with English speakers though I can use grammar correctly in writing. For example, tense, the plural form, word order and so on. Especially word order is difficult for me. I tend to just line the words. To some extent, English speakers can guess what I want to say. However it's not perfect communication because we can't communicate smoothly. I'm wondering whether my mistakes will be improved if I continue trying to speak with English speakers. I have studied grammar the past 7 years but I still can't use English fluently. Maybe there are some problems in the teaching of English. For example, I didn't practice to speak English with real English speakers. Through the IOCP, I strongly feel that language learners need to interact with real speakers. Because Japanese people don't usually have enough opportunities to talk with foreigners, we can't realize the necessity of using English as a tool. So we tend to think that we just need to know grammar. I think to use English as a tool of communication is a difficult process for language learners so writing practice and communicating practice are both needed to learn English.

●8th reflection by student MM (8th IOCP, 22 July, 2009)

motivation + joy of communication for keep on language learning

I think the speed of learning language is very different from people to people. Through the IOCP, I try to progress my English skills, but I can't remarkable progress. When language learners feel that they can't progress their language skills even if they do their best, they need more motivation. It's very painful thing for language learners that they feel limit of learning. I think giving chance to enjoy communication is very important. "Enjoy communication" will be big motivation because we think we want to talk with foreigners. At the same time, people know their limit of language skills by communicating with others. This is why people need more motivation. If there isn't any motivation, people don't want to study anymore because they feel they are miserable. So I think teachers who teach language are needed devices for "enjoy communication".