

研究報告

A 10-step Analysis of Cultural Encounters - a tool to broaden the cultural understanding of Japanese students

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Abstract

This article proposes a 10-step analysis of an encounter with another culture as a tool to guide Japanese students to better awareness or understanding of cultural differences, the first step in the process of becoming a truly international person. The analysis focuses on one specific event, in which students' expectations of particular behavior or response were not met because their interlocutor was from a different culture. The procedure prevents stereotyping and judgements of what is right or wrong, promotes self-awareness of cultural rules that govern their own behavior and finally instills understanding why people from other cultures do the things the way they do.

1. Introduction

Starting in 2011, Akita University first-year students, who enrolled in Advanced Study program had an opportunity to participate in a short study visit abroad. For the next four years students visited universities in the U.S. (twice), Germany and Canada to meet with students of similar majors, visit their labs, listen in on lectures, and generally acquire an idea of what studying abroad entails if they decide to embark on it in the future.

This experience was, for most of the students, the first of being outside Japan, and thus created an opportunity to look at their observations from the point of view of cultural awareness. Students were asked to complete the 10-step analysis after the completion of the short study trip.

2. Culture Bump

When defining cultural encounters between individuals, Weaver (1993) compares culture to an iceberg (p. 159). On the tip of the cultural iceberg are easily visible observable behaviors and beliefs; the way people from particular culture make a small talk when they meet in the morning, for instance. These behavioral patterns are visible like the tip of the iceberg above the ocean and are part of human interactions. Values; cultural and societal, other, more obscure beliefs, such as superstitions, are the submerged base of the iceberg. They are the reasons people act as they act, talk as they talk, react in certain ways, etc. This interesting concept of cultural iceberg suggests a possibility of collision and potential disaster, as it happened with the 'unsinkable' ship Titanic when it collided with an unseen iceberg with unforeseen calamitous results. Weaver seems to warn us that any observable behavior is only the tip of the cultural iceberg and a result of long held and shared in that particular culture

values and beliefs that are at the base of it. Not understanding this concept is a potential for disaster, misunderstanding and living with convictions that other cultures are strange and/or wrong.

Archer (1991) proposes a less ominously sounding moniker 'culture bump' to explain what takes place when individuals from two different cultures interact and expectations of a particular behavior that one of them, or both, have towards the other are not met. The crucial difference between the so-called 'culture shock' and Archer's 'culture bump' is that culture shock is a 'general condition that comes from being in an environment that threatens your belief system' (Kohls, 1979). It occurs most often when visiting another country. Culture shock occurs between individual and other culture, it is not a particular event but rather a series of events and the entire system of more or less different behaviors and expectations of behaviors resulting from those values. A Japanese working in the USA will naturally notice the larger quantities of food served in the restaurants, compared to those in Japan. The observation may cause various reactions ranging from a positive surprise to full-blown anxiety. Since the stay in the US is for some time and the Japanese person would need to eat to sustain themselves, such large portions of food will become a daily sight and they may eventually get used to them at some point. For some the amount of time required to 'get used to things' is shorter than others (Kohls, 1979). This example illustrates a culture shock that a Japanese person may experience with American quantities of served food; initial discomfort associated with it and eventual acceptance and adaptation. One can do little or nothing to change the situation. However, striving to adjust will alleviate the feeling of alienation and homesickness, the psychological symptoms of culture shock (Archer, 1991).

On the other hand, a culture bump occurs when interacting with an individual from another culture. A certain situation takes place, such as greeting, talking, teaching, and a person finds out that their expectations of particular behavior are not

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met. In other words, what is considered an expected behavior in one's culture does not take place, instead something else happens, namely the other person does or says something that is perfectly appropriate in their own culture. This mini collision of two cultures was named *culture bump* and most frequently creates confusion, discomfort or frustration (Archer, 1991).

3. Cultural Unawareness

Cultural Awareness is defined as "ability and willingness to objectively examine values, beliefs, traditions and perceptions within our own and other cultures" (O'Brien, 2017). It is the foundation of international communication. According to Barnlund (1998), members of specific culture share a "collective unconscious": those values, beliefs and norms, which direct their actions. That is why, in the field of intercultural communication "self-awareness and understanding of one's own culture is the starting place from which to achieve understanding of others" (Rebstock, 2017).

Cultural Unawareness, conversely, is the lack of skills of insightful analysis, which lead to an understanding of why people do things in a certain way. In 2000 study, it was fairly easy for students to pinpoint a culture bump they had with a foreigner but it proved to be overwhelming for them to explain why "they (people from other cultures) do it that way". Students were not comfortable speculating why somebody would walk around their house with their shoes on. It was so much easier to dismiss the idea as dirty and inconsiderate. Their belief that only their Japanese way of doing things is right blinded their reasoning too often. Another reason behind the unwillingness to speculate and make guesses could be the fact that Japanese education does not emphasize such skills. Critical thinking and other higher thinking skills, such as making analogies, are noticeably lacking in college freshmen. One of the objectives, then, of the 10-step analysis of cultural encounters is for Japanese students to learn how to look at a problem from different perspectives and flex higher thinking skills, largely neglected in high school education.

4. Mirroring

In 2001, when I first let my students conduct the 10-step analysis of cultural encounters, I found out firsthand how culturally unaware my students were. At that time, the procedure was conducted by first year Japanese students of a women's junior college. When we first started talking about experiences with other cultures, students invariably looked at them from only one perspective; their own (Grave, 2001). After experiencing something culturally different, they discussed them with people of their own culture, only solidifying existing stereotypes or breeding new ones. This way, it was what "they/he/she" did or how "they/he/she" are *different*, rather than how "I/we" are different. Looking at cultural behavior from this perspective, however common and "natural", and discussing them with people from one's own culture only reconfirms what was experienced was indeed "strange". Checking our assumptions with people of the same background is like looking at our own reflection in

the mirror, thus the term *mirroring* was coined by Archer (1991).

Mirroring is something to avoid. Ultimately, to unravel the stereotype, we must recognize, define and properly name our experiences with people different from ourselves. One objective of the 10-step analysis of cultural encounter is for the students to recognize that the words "wrong" and "strange" no longer work or mean much. What is "disgusting" in one country, can be delicacy in another. When the Japanese students cringe at the thought of uncooked broccoli, their American counterparts say "yuck" to eating raw cabbage.

5. Cultural Analysis

Knowing how to reflect on one's culture is a required skill to complete the cultural analysis. "Why do people in my culture do things this way?" is the last question of the 10-step procedure. To recall the culture bump with shoes, Japanese may ask: "Why do we take off our shoes inside?" There are a few reasons that may come to mind. First of all, feet need to rest and take a break after a day's work. Just as we hang our hats and loosen our ties, we relieve our feet by taking off our shoes - now we can relax. The above reason was what the students commonly gave. A second reason one may think of, is that traditionally Japanese floors are laid out with *tatami*, woven rice mats. Hard outside shoes, usually wet from rainy climate of Japan, could easily soil and damage *tatami*. With *tatami* comes another custom: sitting on the floor, which is still quite common wherever *tatami* is used. To do that with shoes on is a strain. Lastly, the simple reason of preserving the neatness, cleanliness of places comes to mind. Outside shoes are left in the area by the door, traditionally a place with no flooring. The shoes are considered too dirty to enter the house; schools, hospitals and other institutions still offer slippers to keep the floors clean.

To Americans it may seem a bother. One must always maneuver in and out of their shoes in a limited space of a typical Japanese "shoe room". Are Americans dirty? Or: do the cultural expectations of what is dirty and what is comfortable differ? The latter question lets us focus on what is behind the observable behavior, on the hidden iceberg which is culture. While attempting to answer it we may think of the Western custom of wiping the soles of shoes before entering the house. One may also consider the fact that in many Western countries shoes are regarded as an essential part of an outfit; they match the clothes and complete the look. To take off shoes would take away from one's image and esteem.

Thus, another purpose of the 10-step analysis of cultural encounter is to focus on underlying values and customs behind the visible behavior.

6. Procedure and Results

In 2011 and again in 2012, I asked Akita University first-year students, who participated in a short study abroad to complete the 10-step analysis of their cultural encounter. Students' were asked on voluntary basis and were told their analysis would not affect their grade for any class. They were

instructed to look back at their experience and pinpoint one isolated encounter, or culture bump, when their expectations of a particular behavior were not met. As a result of encountering something different they felt surprised (positively, negatively or neutrally) or uncomfortable while interacting with or observing a behavior of someone from another culture. Students completed their 10-step analysis at home so they had time to think about their answers. They also agreed to have their analyses used as examples in a future publication.

The first step asks students to pinpoint the cultural encounter. It is important to have one particular encounter, instead of repeated ones, for thorough analysis of self and other's behavior. Students' *bumps* included the following: "American students talked about their research happily", "American store clerk treated me with a lot of respect", "American students got engaged to be married", and "German students wore hoods instead of using umbrellas, when it rained". Although the interaction with another person from other culture is optimal for the analysis, I allowed the observations, such as the one about hoods or student marriages. There were however answers that implied that students did not understand the need to focus on singular encounter and wrote down typical culture shock situations (them vs. another culture), for example: "I saw many homeless persons", "I had culture bump with American food (large size)". Yet, other encounters showed the gullibility of young Japanese abroad: "Clerk cheated on change", "I was scammed on the street". Interestingly, these situations also show a different cultural mindset, where in Japan there is trust that no one will short-change or ask you to give money for handouts on the street.

The second step asks to define the situation. This helps to frame the event in a universally understood way, void of cultural nuance. In this step students specify, who was the person they had the encounter with (to the best of their knowledge), identify location and define the universal situation, e.g.: "Graduate students were talking about research in their lab", "Male store clerk at a university store was selling us something".

In the third step students list other person's behavior: "The other person talked about their research in detail, with a smile and making a joke", "(Clerk) thanked us for buying something. He had energy and didn't seem to hate his job". The purpose of this step is to focus on what exactly took place versus the preexisting stereotypes, either heard from others from the same culture or known from media, e.g. TV and movies. Unfortunately, the mostly skimpy answers given by students did not permit them to later on analyze the reasons for such behavior. It is obvious that students were not used to: 1.) writing in English, 2.) expressing their observations of others (in any language).

The fourth step makes student focus on their own behavior. Here, students appear overwhelmingly passive: "I listened with others", "I was buying something", and they often mistook this step for listing their feelings: "I was impressed while buying something", "I didn't understand the situation". They had trouble focusing analytically on what

actually took place and added their emotions to what was supposed to be physical description.

Their own feelings were listed in step 5, and included: "shocked", "surprised", "surprised and happy", "impressed". Step 6 asked: "What do people in your culture do in this situation?", to which students answered: "In my culture (students) talk seriously and use notes (when talking about their research)", "People in my culture that work in convenience stores are typically unpleasant or sad or insincere". Here, students had an opportunity to reflect on their experience with their own culture, further analyzing the underlying values under such behaviors in point 7: "When students in my (Japanese) culture talk about their research seriously, I say they are polite" - I think the student meant "considerate" in this case. Another example: "When people in my culture that work at convenience stores are unpleasant, I say they are inconsiderate but normal". Predominate value was politeness and consideration.

The 8th and 9th steps asked students to reflect on how the values they listed in step 7, such as politeness and/or consideration, are shown in other cultures. In the case of American graduate students explaining their research to visiting Japanese students, the answer was: "American students (to show consideration to others) talked with smile and making a joke". Unfortunately, most Japanese students could not provide an answer. Perhaps the tools of critical thinking that allow a deeper empathy and understanding were missing or the step analysis became too complicated to understand at this point.

The last step asks to look into the reasons "why do people in one's own culture (Japanese) do things that way?" (why do they do it differently?). Again students were lost while searching for answers: "Because there is no value to respect customers, as much as it is in Japan" - obviously this student meant the other culture (the US), thus misunderstood the directions. "I think Japanese people are polite but too formal" - another student did a better job at trying to look at the hidden cultural values - "so their presentations are formal. I think they need flexibility".

7. Discussion

According to Bennett's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity, the goal of intercultural training is to "transcend traditional ethnocentrism" (believing that one's way of doing things is the only right way to do them) and explore the new cultures. He offers six stages through which that goal can be accomplished: from initial stages of denial, defense and minimization to acceptance, adaptation and integration. Educational activities, such as the 10-step analysis of culture bumps, help students to move through the stages as greater recognition and acceptance of differences takes shape.

Students who completed the 10-step analysis had little problem finding the differences, however they had difficulty pinpointing one particular event with the other culture. Their encounters were mostly observations implying that they did not actively engaged or interacted with anyone; they either "listened with others" (American students explaining their

research) or saw things (German students in hoods). Apparently their level of English and the character of the short study visit in which they moved in groups, not individually, contributed to this.

In 2000 study, which I also conducted with Japanese students, the results showed that anything different was perceived as “shocking”. At that time, students completed the 10-step analysis without ever having been abroad. The culture bump, in contrast to culture shock, can take place in one’s own country. Students in 2000 study relied on their encounters with people from different cultures living in or visiting Japan.

In 2012 and 2013 study, students were asked to analyze their experiences abroad soon after returning from the short study visit in the U.S. and Germany, respectively. In case of the visit to Germany, they stayed at a Freiburg University dormitory, listened to lectures, met with students, and toured the surrounding attractions and major cities (Dresden, Berlin). They ate at campus cafeteria, took local trains, shopped and interacted with Freiberg University students on daily basis in English. Overall, they had ample opportunities to observe and experience a wide range of situations, in which their cultural expectations were put to test. Therefore, the results of their 10-step analysis show a variety of encounters and enable deeper insights. Some observations of cultural differences were eye-opening. In a “hood vs umbrella”-culture bump, a student wrote: “(In Japan) person wearing a hood looks suspicious”, explaining why hoods, although popular in Japan, are not worn as protection against rain. While in Europe an umbrella is not what a student would normally carry around, because it’s considered cumbersome.

Students who completed the 10-step procedure after their short study visit, could put their experiences in context, give them meaning and draw conclusions that would hopefully help them next time when they come across something culturally different. Still, some students had a difficulty separating cultural difference from something universally inappropriate (money scams, short-changing) or from physical differences (“Everybody was so tall!”). It is obvious that these results confirm the need for further instruction in intercultural training to further equip students with a skill of “shifting perspectives as necessary ... and engaging in the ongoing creation of a world which is not dependent upon a single cultural point of view” (Bennett, 1993).

8. Conclusion

Believing that one’s way of doing things is the only right way to do them is what solidifies nations and cultures all over the world. However, to explore other cultures, to gain greater recognition of the world and the mechanisms that make it work, one should strive to, as Bennet points out, “shift perspectives”.

The 10-step analysis of cultural encounters was used in this study as an educational activity: 1.) to help students discover and examine their attitudes about other cultures, 2.) to awaken self-awareness of their culture, 3.) to learn how to look at a problem from a different perspective, analytically

and without hasty judgment, and finally 4.) to reflect on their recent experience abroad.

Japanese students of English, whose incentive to learn the language motivates them to also learn about other cultures, need to understand that for successful communication to take place two things have to happen. First, there must be a common ground for understanding other cultures, namely acknowledging the differences and similarities, and second, there must be respect for difference; a sense of wonder and appreciation of how we all, besides being from various parts of the world, are different.

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Appendix 1

1. Pinpoint the culture bump:

I had a culture bump with a/an _____ (culture)

They (what did they do? Describe their action) _____

I thought that was _____ (rude, polite, etc.)

In step 1, it is important to be specific. Choose an incident that happened and try to remember it as specifically as possible. Even if the same thing has happened repeatedly, isolate one time event.

2. Define the situation:

The other person(s) was/were _____

_____ (male/female)

We were at _____ (location)

3. List the other person's behavior:

The other person _____ (e.g. asked to seat down next to another person on the train)

4. List your own behavior:

I (was/stood/sat/watched/said) _____

5. List your own feelings:

At this time I felt (surprised/shocked/scared/etc.):

6. What do people in your culture do in this situation?

People in my culture _____

7. What is the underlying value under this behavior?

When people in my culture (do behavior from point 6)

_____, I say they are _____
(polite, considerate, etc.)

8. How do other cultures show that value (from point 7)?

How do (German, American, etc.) show _____
(consideration/politeness)?

9. How do other cultures behave in the situation defined in step 2?

(German/American, etc.) _____ (e.g. expect other people to remove the bag and let them sit next to them)

10. Why do people in my culture do those things that way? (Why do German/American people do the same action differently?)
