

Speaking of Intercultural Communication



異文化理解の英語コミュニケーション

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NAN'UN-DO

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Preface

Welcome to **Speaking of Intercultural Communication**. I wrote this book for students who are interested in intercultural communication. There are many other interesting books about intercultural communication, most of them with long reading passages. This textbook also has reading passages, but the main focus is on student communication and class activities. My belief in education is that students can use their own ideas and experiences to learn new information. One “Ah hah!” experience is worth more than two “Uh-huh.” moments. This text is designed for active communication, especially for sharing your thoughts and experiences, so please try your best.

In order to make the most of this book, please remember: Don't be afraid of making mistakes. Making mistakes and learning from them is how you can improve your intercultural communication skills (and your English).

I enjoyed writing this books and I hope that you will have an enjoyable time learning and speaking about intercultural communication.

Peter Vincent

Unit 5

Culture and Values



Pre-reading Activity

1. In some cultures, people are comfortable with formality. It is important to understand the many rules of formality to make relationships go smoothly. In other cultures people prefer informality. People are more relaxed, open, and spontaneous.

Where is Japan on the scale below? Are things changing? In which direction?

Formal culture 5 4 3 2 1 0 1 2 3 4 5 Informal culture

2. Some cultures are hierarchical, with large differences in power and communication styles according to social status, age, wealth, etc. In other cultures, people consider themselves more equal, with smaller differences in power and communication styles according to hierarchy.

Where is Japan on the scale below? Are things changing? In which direction?

Hierarchical culture 5 4 3 2 1 0 1 2 3 4 5 More equal culture

Reading Values

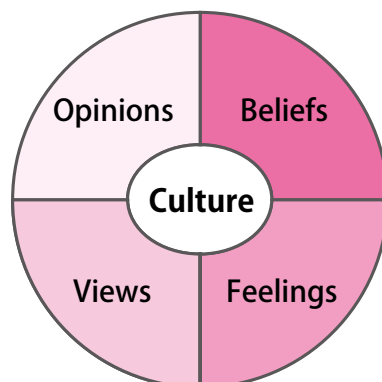


Values are the way that we feel about things, including what is right or wrong, good or bad, fair or unfair. Many of the values we have are personal. Many others are social values that we have learned from our parents, from teachers, from the media and from many other sources. Values are different from rules, though rules are often based on values. Many of our values are not written down anywhere and are unconscious, so they are sometimes difficult to describe.



Some people think that humans are basically the same and share the same values, but this is not really true. Our social values are shaped by our cultures. Most values are not universal, so this can be a major problem when communicating with people from different cultures. A foreigner living in Japan may not understand the values of respect, loyalty, patience, and endurance in the same way Japanese do.

Our communication styles reflect our cultural values, including the words that we use. Some words have special meaning in our culture and are not easy to explain or translate. For example, it is difficult to translate such Japanese expressions as “*mottainai*,” “*gaman*,” “*ganbare*,” or “*senpai*” in a simple way without losing their deeper meaning in Japanese culture. Japanese often use the expression “*shoganai*,” an expression that reflects traditional fatalism in Japan, a country that has experienced centuries of unavoidable loss from war, earthquakes, and fires. Americans, on the other hand, do not often use such fatalistic expressions. The American culture is largely a “can do” culture, where people believe they make their own future and their own “good luck.” Japanese *keigo* shows the Japanese value of respect and formality. English has no equivalent to *keigo*. In fact, an English speaker is likely to use much the same language in speaking to an “inferior” or a “superior” (interestingly, many English speakers do not even like the words “inferior” and “superior” when talking about people). This shows that Japan is a more hierarchical country than most English-speaking countries, especially the United States. Again, it is important to point out that culture is constantly changing, so even in Japan, a word like “*gaman*” may have different importance to a Japanese who is 70 years old compared to one who is 18 years old.



The value differences we experience when living in or visiting a foreign country may surprise us, and at times may even deeply trouble us, because values are closely tied to our identities and sense of well-being. Our beliefs, opinions, views, and feelings are all shaped by our cultures and are part of our identity. Visitors can get negative feelings about people in a host country, thinking they are rude, unfriendly, irresponsible, or otherwise lacking in values. However, we have to realize that these different values are usually neither “right” nor “wrong,” though we may feel differently. This does not mean that we always have to change our own values, but it does mean that we have to be flexible and accept the differences. There are some cultural differences that you might strongly disagree with, but even in those cases, you have to think about how to deal with these differences.

To gain “cultural competence,” you have to first understand your own values and way of thinking. Then you have to work to gain the knowledge and understanding of different values so you can live or work well in a foreign culture. In some cases, you may want to adjust your own values and attitude, though when you live in a foreign country, this often happens without our consciously thinking about it. The important thing, though, is to understand differences and appreciate diversity.

Activity 1 True or False

After each of the following sentences, write T if the sentence is true and F if the sentence is false.

1. We learn some of our values from the media. _____
2. Almost all values are shared by everyone around the world. _____
3. Foreigners usually do not have loyalty. _____
4. The words we use to communicate sometimes show our values. _____
5. The expression “*shogunai*” reflects the history of the Japanese people. _____
6. *Keigo* is used equally by both young and older Japanese because the value of hierarchy is not changing much in Japan. _____
7. It is important that we change our basic values when we live overseas. _____

Activity 2**Matching Proverbs with Meanings**

Look at the expressions below and match them with the related value. Put the letters in the correct spaces.

**Proverbs**

1. A man's home is his castle. (American) _____
2. A penny saved is a penny earned. (American) _____
3. All work and no play make Jack a dull boy. _____
4. A single arrow is easily broken; three are much stronger. (Japanese) _____
5. Better safe than sorry. _____
6. Every dark cloud has a silver lining. _____
7. If life gives you lemons, make lemonade. _____
8. Time is money. _____
9. When in Rome, do as the Romans do. _____
10. Knowledge is power. _____
11. Might makes right. (American) _____
12. Money grows on the tree of persistence. (Japanese) _____
13. Silence is better than speech. (Japanese) _____
14. The nail that sticks out gets hammered down. (Japanese) _____
15. The best things in life are free. _____
16. Don't cry over spilled milk. _____

Values

- | | |
|---|---|
| A. Not overvaluing wealth | J. Not standing out too much |
| B. The strength of groups | K. The value of play |
| C. Being flexible in different cultures | L. Valuing love, family and other things over wealth. |
| D. Not taking unnecessary risks | M. The importance of being quiet |
| E. The importance of education and learning | N. Creativity, effort, optimism |
| F. Thrift | O. Looking for the positive, even in negative experiences |
| G. Not wasting time | P. Accept loss and "move on" with your life |
| H. Property, privacy | Q. Power often wins over fairness |
| I. Effort and perseverance | |

Activity 3 True Stories

1 The Ski Trip



An American joined a group of Japanese workers from his company for a two-day ski trip. In the morning, the American and other experienced skiers taught and helped the beginner skiers. After lunch, the group decided to go back to the hotel to play some games and do other activities together.

The American told everyone that he would ski by himself, since (like everyone) he had bought a day pass. He felt he had already done his group activity in the morning and wanted some free time to do some more challenging skiing. When he returned to the hotel late in the afternoon, his other colleagues were cool to him.

Question: Why do you think the Japanese colleagues were cool to the American?

Activity 4 Foreigners in Japan

What do you think the following pictures show in terms of value differences?

1 Slurp!
Slurp!



Foreigners are surprised by Japanese noodle-eating manners.

2



Foreign men are shocked to see cleaning ladies in the restroom.

3



Foreigners are surprised that students clean their classrooms and toilets.

4



5



Foreigners are sometimes surprised by what Japanese children get away with.

6



7



Foreigners are sometimes surprised by what Japanese eat.

8



Many Foreigners can't understand why Japanese don't protest against the "noise invasion."

Activity 5 Find Someone Who...

Use the survey chart below to find someone who answers "yes" to your questions (#1, #4, and #7 are different! You want to find someone who answers "no"). When you find someone who answers "yes," ask an additional question of your own that is related to the first question. Write notes in the "Extra information" column.

Example:

A: Are you shy?

B: No, I'm not.

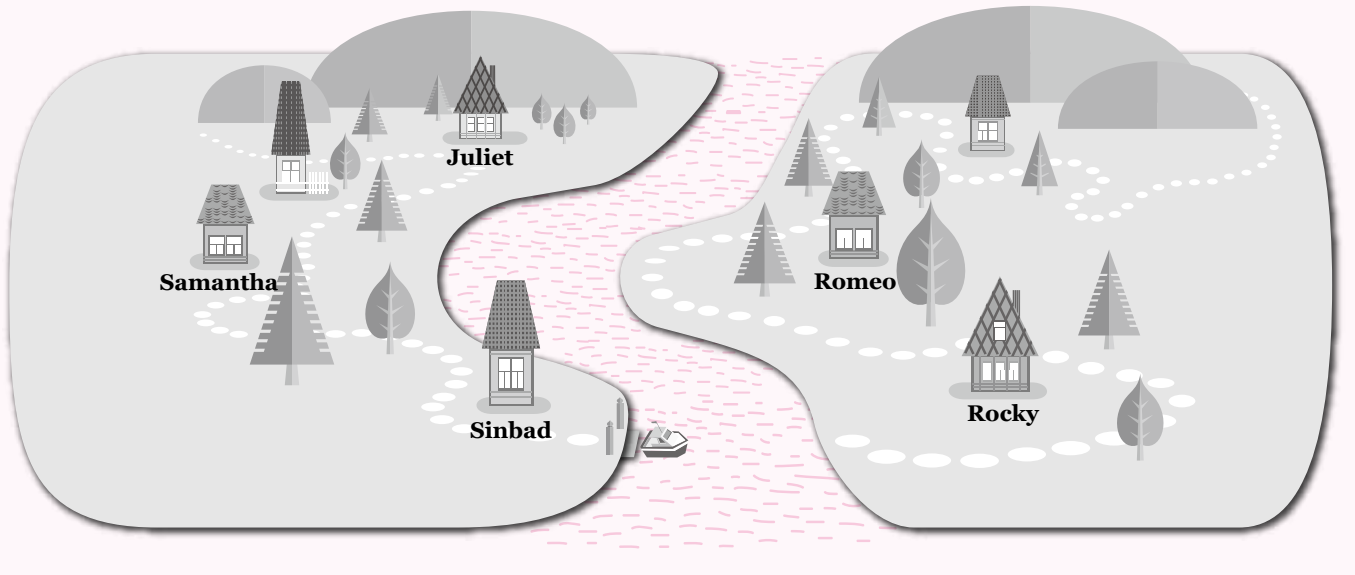
A: So what kind of person are you?

B: I say what I want to say.

	Find someone who...	Name	Extra information
1	...is not shy.		
2	...likes Western food more than Japanese food.		
3	...likes to dress formally more than informally.		
4	...doesn't like to use <i>keigo</i> .		
5	...thinks being a good person is more important than being successful.		
6	...needs to have time alone.		
7	...doesn't like to be alone.		
8	...believes it's important to endure (<i>gaman</i>).		

Activity 6 The Story of Juliet

Read the following story. After you have finished, discuss the five people in the story. In a group, give each person a number, from #1 (the best person) to #5 (the worst person). Be prepared to tell the class why you have made the choices you have made.



Once upon a time, there was a woman named Juliet who lived in a village near a river. She was very much in love with Romeo, who lived in the village across the river. It was difficult to get across the river, especially in the winter when there was a lot of water.

Juliet wanted to be with Romeo so much. One winter, she went to a man named Sinbad, who had a boat. She asked him to take her across the river. Sinbad said, "Yes, but only if you spend the night at my house first." Juliet was shocked and left.

She then went to her best friend's house, Samantha, and told her what happened. Samantha said, "I don't want to hear about this. Solve your problems by yourself." Juliet was sad and left.



After crying for several hours, Juliet finally agreed to Sinbad's offer and stayed at his house. The next morning, Sinbad took her across the river. Juliet arrived at Romeo's house and they hugged. "By the way," Romeo asked, "how did you get across the river?" Juliet explained honestly, and Romeo became angry. "Go away! I never want to see you again!" he shouted. Juliet left in tears.

She went to another friend's house, a man named Rocky, and told him the whole story.

"I'm going to go to Romeo's house and beat him up," said Rocky. When he came back to his house, he told Juliet that Romeo was now in the hospital. He also said, "I don't really love you, Juliet, but I will marry you if you want."

~ The End ~

Character	Positive value(s)	Negative value(s)
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		

Activity 7 Culture Values

Look at the list of statements below and circle your score from 5 (strongly agree) to 0 (strongly disagree).

1. Japan is the best country in the world. 5 4 3 2 1 0
2. Family is more important than work. 5 4 3 2 1 0
3. Money is the best measure of success. 5 4 3 2 1 0
4. God plays an important role in my life. 5 4 3 2 1 0
5. Progress is a positive thing. 5 4 3 2 1 0
6. We should remember and respect our traditions. 5 4 3 2 1 0
7. People are basically good. 5 4 3 2 1 0
8. Our life's destiny is already decided. 5 4 3 2 1 0
9. We should never forget our ancestors. 5 4 3 2 1 0
10. Women are equal to men. 5 4 3 2 1 0

Questions: Share your answers with your group. How many of your answers show your own personal differences? How many do you think were effected somehow by your culture? Which are traditional Japanese values and which are more modern values?

Activity 8 Presentation

Prepare a presentation about one of the values in Japan concerning such topics as the use of language (formal, informal), marriage, dating, work, family relationships, table manners, gift giving, *omiyage*, visiting a person's home, wedding ceremonies, funerals, etc.

Unit 6

Culture and Perception



Pre-reading Activity

What do you see in the picture above? Is there another way to look at this picture so that the image changes? What does the fact that people see different images from this picture have to do with intercultural communication?

Reading Culture and Perception



We have already learned that people from different cultures have a different way of thinking and doing things. But cultural differences go even deeper than that. Many people think that people all over the world see things the same way. After all, we all have human eyes, right?

But we actually see things differently. Thanks to cultural differences, people have a different way of looking at things (perception) and then understanding what they are looking at (interpretation). Of course, people do not need to be from other cultures to perceive and interpret things differently. Think, for a moment, about the fans of Noh, Kabuki, baseball, Takarazuka, or the most popular Japanese pop group. When they watch a performance or game, they will see things that a non-fan will not, they will interpret what they see differently, and their feelings about what they see may be very, very different. One movement in Noh or Kabuki could have deep meaning to someone, while it would have no special meaning for others. Think about a resident of Tokyo who is hurrying down an escalator to catch a train and he stops because someone is standing on the right side of the escalator. He might feel frustrated by that person. In Kansai, people would be frustrated by someone standing on the left. While the image of the non-moving person is the same, the side they are standing on has different meanings and causes different feelings.



Look at the image of the glass above. Some people say “the glass is half full.” Others, maybe even in the same culture, say that “the glass is half empty.” In the U.S., the people who see the glass half full are called “optimists,” while those who see it half empty are called “pessimists,” two different personality characteristics.

What do you see? What do your classmates see?

It is important to remember our perceptions rely on five senses, our sense of sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch. These are the senses we use to experience the world. We constantly get information from our senses, so much that we ignore much of it. We usually perceive those things that are important to us, and ignore the rest. These choices of awareness are often unconscious, so we are not consciously aware of them. And this is where we can get into trouble in a foreign culture. We may ignore information that is important in that particular culture. Because of this, we may make mistakes and feel foolish. For example, a foreigner in Japan might easily misunderstand the meaning of a Japanese smile. A Japanese person in the U.S. may easily misunderstand silence, which could mean that someone is unhappy or uncomfortable with you. During communication, there are so many small cues that have important meaning, from body language to changes in voice tone, from shouts to silence. Communication is much more than words. And, as we saw in the last unit, even simple words can be perceived differently.

When you experience a foreign culture, you have to expect you will perceive things differently from people in the host culture. You may not appreciate the taste or smell of certain foods. You may misunderstand the meaning of communication cues that people are using. Becoming skillful at intercultural communication (having something we call “intercultural competence”) usually requires a lot of intercultural experience, including experiences of misperception and communication failure. You must expect to learn how to perceive correctly within the new culture step by step and, all too often, mistake by mistake.

Activity 1 True or False

After each of the following sentences, write T if the sentence is true and F if the sentence is false.

1. Differences in perception and interpretation are all due to cultural differences. _____
2. People in different regions of a country may perceive and interpret things differently. _____
3. In the U.S., a person seeing a glass half-full is considered a pessimist. _____
4. We usually perceive things that are not really important to us. _____
5. Facial expressions, such as a smile, have the same meanings in almost all cultures. _____
6. You can usually avoid making mistakes in perception and interpretation when visiting a foreign culture. _____

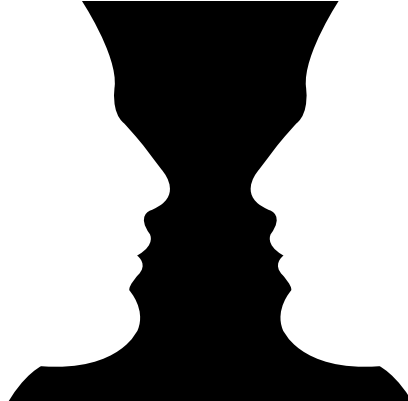
Activity 2 A Different Way of Seeing Things

Work in groups. What do you see in the two images below? Can you see that there is another way to view the images? How do you think the pictures relate to culture and perception?

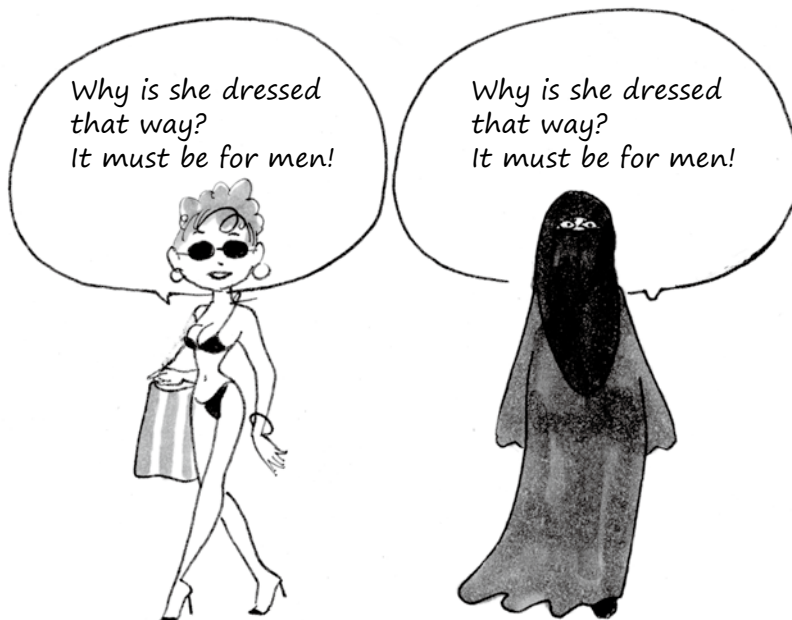
A



B

**Activity 3** Different Interpretations

Look at the picture below. Very often, people from different cultures interpret what they see differently. Here, what the two women in the picture see is very different, but their interpretation about "male dominated culture" is the same. Why is that? What does it say about their cultures?



Activity 4 True Stories

The Subway Ride

A Japanese visitor riding a subway in New York wanted to get off at a stop, but there was a woman standing in front of the door. He said, "Excuse me" several times, but she did not move. He finally gave her a gentle push, but she turned around and shouted, "Don't touch me!" He left the train feeling embarrassed, while she continued to shout.

Question: Why do you think this happened?

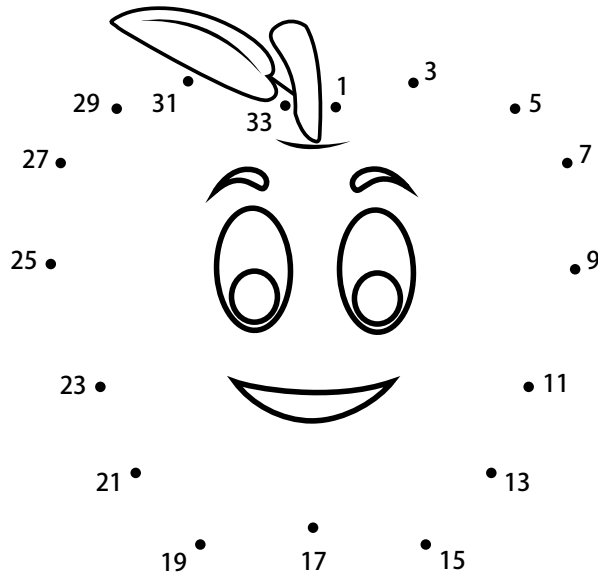
Activity 5 Foreigners in Japan

What do you think the following pictures show in terms of culture and perception?

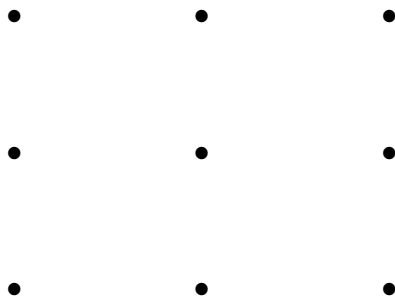


Activity 6 Connecting the Dots

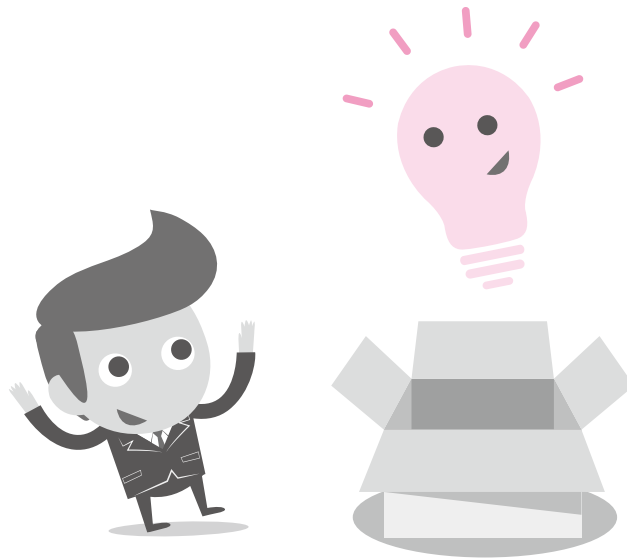
“Connecting the dots” is an English expression that means to try to make sense of (to interpret) information that is incomplete. We often do this in our daily lives, but this becomes more difficult in a foreign culture. Can you tell what the picture below is before you “connect the dots”?



Below is a famous puzzle that requires you to connect the dots. There are nine dots. Connect them with four straight lines. However, you cannot lift your pen or pencil when drawing the four lines.



The term “thinking outside the box” means to think in a new, fresh way, which is very useful when you want to be creative or come up with new ideas. When we visit a different culture, however, we often have to “think outside the box,” which is to perceive things differently from the way we normally perceive them, as well as make fresh interpretations. We simply cannot always perceive things “correctly” within a new culture without help from a host-culture advisor, but we can learn to be flexible and open to new ways of perception and interpretation. Then we can gain “intercultural competence” more quickly.



Think outside the box