

## Techniques and Strategies for Teaching Culture in Japanese Classrooms

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The history of teaching Japanese language in a school curriculum in the United States is relatively short, and while teachers presently employ a number of good culture teaching methods, a greater variety of techniques and strategies have been developed and used by European language teachers.

Adapting some of these strategies, this study gives examples of how Japanese language teachers can help students internalize the process of language learning by way of cultural interaction. In this paper twenty-two strategies and techniques for teaching Japanese culture, with explanations of usage, and some applications are given.

Teachers can make a world of difference in helping students increase empathy for greater cultural understanding. Equipped with a rich collection of culture teaching strategies and techniques to employ in their classroom, they help to raise the students' level of consciousness and proficiency as well as internalize Japanese language learning through culture.

### INTRODUCTION

In a world of turmoil with problems in the Middle East, one cannot help wondering that if we understood the cultures of other people, we would try to accept and better understand their way of thinking: it may lead to an eventual world peace.

One way to penetrate another culture is through the study of foreign languages, for the basic aim of foreign language teaching is to increase empathy for greater cultural understanding. Not every foreign language teacher, however, for a variety of reasons, necessarily incorporates culture study among the goals of reading, writing, listening, and speaking in a curriculum. This may be because of a shortage of class time, the teacher's insecurity in teaching culture, or an oversight on the lesson, or other reasons. There is no question that the successful integration of culture and language teaching can contribute significantly to general humanistic knowledge, and that language ability

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and cultural sensitivity can play a vital role in human development.

The history of Japanese-language instruction throughout the United States is relatively shorter as compared with the longer tradition of European-language instruction. While the common trend to date has been for teachers to present Japanese culture in a lecture format, show and tell, talking of festivals or the teacher's personal experiences, field trips, learning songs, seeing bulletin board displays, or showing slides and videos, a greater variety of techniques and strategies have been developed and used mainly for European languages (Seelye, 1988; Omaggio, 1986; Rivers, 1981; Nostrand, 1974). It is our joy to see recent developments by Japanese professionals incorporating cultural understanding into language studies (Mizutani and Mizutani, 1989) and pioneering the application of these European techniques toward methodology in teaching Japanese culture (Kataoka with Kusumoto, 1991; Noguchi and Van Damme, 1985).

This paper is an explanation of various culture-teaching strategies and techniques that are available for teachers of Japanese language to employ. It is then followed with an application of a few of the strategies and techniques in Japanese.

These strategies include the following: (1) a lecture, (2) show and tell, (3) demonstration/actual participation, (4) field trips, (5) bulletin board/displays, (6) songs and dance, (7) role-playing/simulation games, (8) native informants, (9) cultural assimilators, (10) cultural minidramas, (11) culture capsules, (12) culture clusters, (13) audiotaped interviews, (14) videotapes, (15) audiomotor units, (16) identifying culturally conditioned behavior, (17) deriving cultural connotations, (18) decreasing stereotypic perceptions, (19) hypothesis refinement, (20) artifact study, (21) building empathy for a culture, and (22) use of authentic reading materials.

This list includes a few of the teaching techniques presently being used by Japanese-language teachers in their classrooms as well as other strategies. In the following section the strategies and techniques listed above will be briefly explained.

### **Explanation of Strategies**

#### Strategy 1: The lecture

Perhaps the most common technique is the teacher giving a presentation of the material. It can be effective when (1) kept brief; (2) enlivened with visuals, realia, and personal experiences; (3) focused on a specific aspect of cultural experience; (4) students take notes and; (5) follow-up techniques are used in which Japanese is spoken actively.

#### Strategy 2: Show and tell

Students or teachers bring Japanese items to share with and explain to the class. Discussion ensues. If historical origins of a product is known, its uses or superstition can be added, providing more value and interest for the student.

#### Strategy 3: Demonstration/actual participation

Students learn by doing and go through the actual process with feelings and emotions that accompany the activity. Making sushi, folding origami, calligraphy or brush painting are just a few examples.

#### Strategy 4: Field trips/excursion

Firsthand enrichment experience, such as visiting a Japanese restaurant or tea ceremony, gives direct exposure through seeing realia. Excursions are often time consuming and difficult to schedule during a class period. Recommended as a club activity or for after school hours.

**Strategy 5: Bulletin board/displays**

The opportunity to tie in news of current events, announcements, special occasions (Girl's Day and New Year's, for example) and interact with the environment through a well-kept board provides for much incidental learning.

**Strategy 6: Songs and dance**

Songs should be taught as they are sung in Japan and have a context of explanation, illustration, and discussion which breathes cultural life into them. Songs and dances should appeal to the young people of today. Lyrics should not be too difficult. If the teacher cannot lead the singing, records or cassettes would be helpful.

**Strategy 7: Role-playing/simulation games**

Students use intonation, gesture, reaction, props, and so forth to act out dialogues or dramatize a situation in Japanese culture. A presentation should authentically represent cultural viewpoints, relationships, and general behavior.

**Strategy 8: Native informants**

Invite to class appropriate, available Japanese to interact with students. These people are valuable resources who can supply current information about Japanese culture and be linguistic models for students. Students should be encouraged to prepare questions in advance for their visitor, i.e., what he or she does or things that have puzzled them.

**Strategy 9: Cultural assimilators**

In using this assimilation strategy, the teacher prepares a narrative with three basic components: (1) a critical incident illustrating a point of miscommunication between an American and a Japanese, presented in narrative or dramatic form; (2) one or more multiple-choice questions dealing with the identification, analysis, and explanation of the point of conflict; and (3) feedback paragraphs in response to each of the multiple-choice alternatives, explaining whether or not the choice is likely and giving additional cultural information when necessary. Distractors (incorrect choices) should be attractive to students who are operating under false stereotypic perceptions or ethnocentric interpretations of the situation.

**Strategy 10: Cultural minidramas**

Three to five brief episodes, each with one or more examples of miscommunication, create the culture assimilator. Additional information is given between each episode, but not enough to identify the precise cause of the misunderstanding, which becomes apparent only in the last scene. Each episode is to be followed by a class discussion. The difference between cultural assimilators and cultural minidramas is that cultural assimilators are written material.

**Strategy 11: Culture capsules**

A capsule is a short description of one minimal difference between an American and Japanese culture custom, accompanied by a photo, slide, or realia. It can be re-

corded on tape or read silently or aloud by the teacher or students. A culture capsule, like a medicine capsule, is a “pill” that students take to get better.

**Strategy 12: Culture clusters**

This technique involves about three culture capsules of related topics with simulation that integrates the information into a skit or a role-play by dramatization. Distinctive behavior of the Japanese in a specific situation is analyzed through this classroom demonstration. Culture clusters are a larger dosage of culture capsules.

**Strategy 13: Audiotaped interviews**

When a native speaker is not available to be brought into class, or when a person is so famous that it is not possible to bring him or her to class, speeches can be taped. A variety of cultural goals can be achieved with prelistening and postlistening activities on an informal interview with a native speaker about the foreign culture.

**Strategy 14: Videotapes**

The most popular and convenient culture teaching strategy is using video. Videotapes are excellent for providing natural, authentic linguistic exchanges, as well as nonverbal cues such as gestures, social distance, and eye contact. Preview and follow-up activities should be planned to get the most out of videos.

**Strategy 15: Audio-motor units**

Students watch then follow a series of commands in Japanese language pantomimed by the teacher. Based on a cultural theme or event, such as greetings or counting, the commands elicit a physical response from the students. This method is extremely effective for teaching gestures and nonverbal, kinesic body language.

**Strategy 16: Identifying culturally conditioned behavior**

This method illustrates how students might be sensitized to contrasts and commonalities of conventional behavior in American and Japanese cultures. Given a list of statements, the students determine whether those statements are describing American or Japanese culture and support their answers.

**Strategy 17: Deriving cultural connotations**

Through the use of visual support materials and word association activities, students learn to associate culturally representative images of words and phrases they are learning in Japanese. This method helps students to examine the idiosyncracies as well as how language is culture bound.

**Strategy 18: Decreasing stereotypic perceptions**

It is unfair if the behavior of all of the people of a culture is generalized from the behavior of one person. This discussion activity helps students understand the dangers of making unwarranted generalizations about the Japanese and sensitizes them to variability within all cultures.

**Strategy 19: Hypothesis refinement**

This is a seven-step process to help students refine their initial perceptions of an aspect of the Japanese culture through research skills. Step 1: Students perceive an aspect of the culture through learning materials, teacher presentation, or other sources. Step 2: Students make a statement about the culture as a result of this perception. Step 3: Students seek multiple sources of information about the state-

ment, such as newspapers, movies, slides, and books as well as other media, realia, and native speaker informants. Step 4: Students question and compare their sources, examining them for potential limitations such as publication date, intended audience, and purpose. They describe, analyze, and report their findings. Step 5: Students modify the statement in Step 2 and continue to seek additional information that can refine the statement further. Step 6: Students examine a related feature of American culture using the same process. Step 7: Students compare their refined statements about American and Japanese culture, describing similarities and differences they have found.

**Strategy 20: Artifact study**

This strategy is designed to help students discern the cultural significance of certain unfamiliar objects from Japanese culture. The teacher brings in the article in question or obtains pictures of it. Students form hypotheses about the function of the unknown object and engage in small-group discussion. After the teacher explains about the artifact and its use, students examine how their own cultural biases might have played a role in the formation of their hypotheses.

**Strategy 21: Building empathy for a culture**

This strategy helps students learn to explain behavior from the frame of reference of Japanese culture and build empathy through intellectual understanding. The goal of this method is to put oneself in the other person's shoes and show an understanding of customs, ways of thinking, and values of the Japanese.

**Strategy 22: The use of authentic reading materials**

Ads and articles in newspapers and magazines, a rich source in cultural information, may be used in contrasting American and Japanese culture while studying reading. How could certain events occur? Why do people react in a particular way? Through questions and answers between teacher and students, the teacher helps students focus on cultural awareness. Preparation of prelearning and postlearning activities for reading are required by the teacher.

In the ensuing section, application of some of the above strategies will be shown.

### **Application of Strategies**

Application of the following strategies can be done in English or in Japanese, depending on the students' level of competency in the language.

**Sample: Cultural assimilator**

**Directions:** Read the following passage then select your answer from the choices given below.

Tammy was late getting out of Hilldale Nihongo Gakkō. All the other children had rushed out earlier, but where was Tammy? What was taking her so long? The parking lot was empty by now; only a man in uniform raking leaves and her mother remained. Her favorite tennis class would begin in ten minutes, and they would have a five-minute drive to the tennis courts. After pacing the parking lot for a few more

minutes, her mother walked up to the classroom to check what was going on. She found Tammy and a few other students cleaning the room.

Why were the children cleaning the classroom?

- A. The janitor was sick that day so everyone had to help.
- B. Japanese schools use the children to do the cleaning.
- C. The teacher was lazy and didn't want to clean the room.
- D. Tammy didn't want to go to her tennis lesson.

If you selected A, C, or D, your answer is incorrect. Go back and reread the article again.

If your answer is B, your answer is correct. Japanese schools let children do the cleaning to teach them responsibility. Children even mop the floors on their hands and knees and take pride in their work.

Also available for classroom use is the text *Japanese Cultural Encounters and How to Handle Them*, by Hiroko C. Kataoka with Tetsuya Kusumoto. The book contains fifty-six episodes of cultural assimilators under the headings of (1) human relations at work and leisure; (2) etiquette, formalities, and customs; (3) commonly misused or misunderstood Japanese expressions; and (4) handy trivia.

Sample: Culture minidrama

Directions: Have five students volunteer to read the roles of the script.

Narrator: Fifty-eight-year-old Aki Morita came to Hawaii for a vacation but conked his head while on a surfboard and landed in Queen's Hospital. Two colleagues from Aki's branch company in Honolulu decide to visit and wish him a speedy recovery.

George: Let's stop at the florist and bring Aki some flowers. Japanese are always giving each other gifts.

Mike: Yeah, and I'll get some fruits to take over so he can eat them when he's hungry.

Narrator: They get to the hospital with their gifts and go to Aki's room.  
(Teacher leads the class in a discussion.)

Aki: Hi George. Hi Mike. Nice of you to come.

George: Good to see you Aki. I brought you some flowers.

Narrator: George puts the potted plant at Aki's bedside. Aki stares at it.

Mike: And I brought you oranges to eat if you need a snack.

Aki: (After a delay) Thanks fellas.

Narrator: Next day at the office.

Boss: Well boys, how's Aki doing?

George: He'll be okay. We took him a potted plant and four oranges, but he didn't seem too happy.

Boss: A potted plant? Four oranges! Oh no!

In Japan it's okay to take cut flowers to one who is ill, but a potted plant symbolizes the illness will take root and get worse! Japanese don't like the number four because "shi" for four has the same sound as the word for death.

Mike: Oh no! And they put him in room 444!  
(Teacher leads the class in a discussion.)

Sample: Culture capsule.

Directions: The capsule either may be recorded on tape for students to listen to as a group or independently or it may be read aloud or silently by the teacher or students.

In Kyoto, while on a tour of the city, Doris had to visit a restroom. She opened the door, walked in, and found a porcelain hooded hole in the ground. Unfamiliar with its usage, she wondered what to do. After a while she decided to squat and found the toilet paper hard to reach.

Doris had sat the “American way,” squatting in the position one sits on an American toilet seat. If she had reversed herself, she would have found the toilet paper very easy to reach.

After reading the above material, the teacher will show slides or photos of a Japanese toilet. This will stimulate discussion and comments from the class to contrast it with an American powder room. The teacher can introduce various ingenious devices, such as big and small flushes, and tanks with faucets on top, Japanese affix to their traditional squat-type toilets as well as luxurious heated seats on their American-style toilets.

Also available for classroom use is the audiocassette tape *Culture Capsules*, by Kazuyoshi Noguchi and Roger A. Van Damme. This is a sixty-minute tape covering seventeen topics related to greetings and introductions, getting around (transportation and addresses), shopping, eating, conducting business, and gift giving.

Sample: Culture cluster

Directions: Have two students volunteer to act out a narrative that the teacher will read about Americans.

### Narrative 1

It's seven P.M. and the doorbell rings. As Claire opens the door, she greets her dinner guest Gina with a kiss on the cheek and welcomes her into her home. Gina walks into the house with high-heeled shoes as Claire offers to hang up her coat in the hall closet.

“What would you like to drink?” Claire asks. Gina, who has eyed the hors d'oeuvres on the table, plops a delicious crab-stuffed mushroom into her mouth.

“A martini would be fine,” says Gina, licking her finger tips.

They move to the dining room and sit down at the dining table. At each place setting are a salad fork and dinner fork on the left, and a steak knife and soup spoon on the right. Claire says grace. She has made her famous Boston clam chowder. Claire lifts her spoon as a signal for Gina to start the meal. They quietly have their soup, each spoonful drawn from across the soup plate before being sipped. Soup is followed by a fresh salad, after which is the main course of fillet mignon, white rice, and cooked vegetables. The steak is delicious but must be cut with a knife. When not using her knife, Gina's left hand rests on her lap. Dessert is apple pie à la mode, topped off with a cup of piping hot Kona coffee.

Directions: Have two students volunteer to act out a narrative the teacher will read about the Japanese.

### Narrative 2

It's seven P.M. and Yamada-san is greeting her guest Tanaka-sensei with a polite deep bow at the entranceway to her house. They bow politely and smile at each other as Yamada-san invites her guest in. Tanaka-sensei removes her shoes, faces them toward the doorway, and says, "*Ojamashimasu*" [I will bother you] before stepping up into Yamada-san's house.

Yamada-san quickly brings out a cold drink for her guest, and Tanaka-sensei unwraps a gift—a mere token, she says—from her *furoshiki* (wrapping cloth). Yamada-san expresses her appreciation by bowing and saying, "*Arigatō gozaimasu*" [thank you].

At the dining table the dishes are all laid out and food is artistically arranged on each plate. The only eating utensil is chopsticks. Yamada-san verbally and physically motions to her guest to please start eating. Tanaka-sensei says out loud, "*Itadakimasu*" [I humbly accept this (meal)], then picks up the soup bowl with both hands. Holding the bowl in her left hand, she picks up her chopsticks with the right, then using both hands, takes one loud sip of the soup. Next, holding the soup bowl in her left hand, she uses her chopsticks to pick up and eat one piece of seaweed floating in her soup. Putting the soup bowl down, she picks up the rice bowl with both hands. She holds the rice bowl in her left hand and takes a bite of the fish, cutlet, and shrimp before eating some rice and setting the bowl back down. All the food has been cut into bite-size pieces for easy consumption before being carefully arranged on the plates. Desert is sliced honeydew melon and a cup of piping hot green tea.

When dinner is over, Tanaka-sensei says, "*Gochisōsama deshita*" [thank you for the feast].

After the role-playing narrative, the class will discuss and analyze the similarities and differences between the two cultures. Where do Americans entertain and why? The teacher can give additional information about how often and why Japanese entertain at restaurants. Why do Japanese take off their shoes before entering a dwelling? Who starts a meal—in America and Japan?

To make this experience penetrate into the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains, the teacher takes out a place setting used for a typical Japanese meal and teaches students the names for utensils such as a *chawan*, *owan*, and *osara*.

Next, putting some Japanese food on each person's plate, the teacher models behavior and attitude: the students learn to manipulate their chopsticks, picking up and eating food, as well as to practice the appropriate expressions used when eating. The teacher repeats the correct steps of etiquette used in eating a Japanese meal—i.e., sip soup first and take one bite of what is in soup—and has the students follow.

Sample: Decreasing stereotypic perceptions

Directions: Students read the statements below and label each true or false. A discussion in Japanese or English, depending on the students' level of proficiency, will ensue with the teacher.



1. All Japanese are rich.
2. Japanese are generous people.
3. Japanese children study hard.
4. Japanese men work hard.
5. Japanese wives are slaves to their husbands.
6. Americans are rude.
7. American men cater to women.
8. Americans are tall.
9. American children are lazy.
10. American women have no modesty.

### CONCLUSION

Teachers can make a world of difference in helping students increase empathy for greater cultural understanding. Equipped with a rich collection of culture-teaching strategies and techniques to employ in their classrooms, they can increase the teacher-student/student-student interactive process and help students internalize foreign language learning. Internalization of language and culture is the key to further proficiency of which communication is its primary goal. The writers firmly believe incorporating cultural elements will internalize language learning for better retention and increase effective communication.

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