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The Language Educator and Globalization: How Do We Best Prepare Our Learners?

Richmond Stroupe
Soka University, Tokyo, Japan

Abstract

The process of globalization and increasing interconnectedness through technology, business, and institutional exchange is leading to greater opportunities and mobility for students. In response, in an effort to adequately prepare learners, the nature of the language classroom is changing. While still based on fundamentals of improving linguistic understanding and proficiency, emphasis is increasing on the broader role of the language class and language educator in preparing graduates to enter a global workforce. As a result, the increasing number of expectations placed on our profession lead to new challenges and opportunities. How can language educators prepare students for regional and international opportunities in a time of fast-paced change, increased expectations, and global competition? This paper presents some current and innovative approaches which address the need for skills beyond general fluency in English, including emphasis on English for professional purposes, development of critical thinking skills, and increasing cultural understanding.

The effects of globalization have been well-documented and are far-reaching (Institute for the Study of Labor, 2008; Milken Institute, 2003; Mrak, 2000; Sapkota, 2011). Multinational companies, supply chains that span multiple countries and regions, regional and international trade agreements and an ever increasingly mobile workforce are commonplace. Politically and economically, international agreements bringing governments closer together are increasing in number and breadth (Burall & Neligan, 2001; Phillipson, 2001). Most recently, a number of countries around the Pacific are considering ratifying the Trans-Pacific Partnership free trade agreement, which would have significant consequences for some of the largest global economies (Congressional Research Service, 2013). Within two years' time, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) member states are planning further economic integration, which will also have economic, social, and political ramifications even beyond the nations in Southeast Asia (ASEAN Secretariat, 2008; Chia, 2013; Hansakul, 2013).

Contributions for this increased level of internationalization will be necessary from those in both the public and private sectors. Government officials will need to work more closely with their counterparts in other countries (Anderson, 2012; Council on Foreign Relations, 2012; U.S.

State Department, 2012), and executives and managers in different business sectors will face increased and diversified competition (Dexter, 2004; Forbes, 2011; Institute for the Study of Labor, 2008; Kliesen, 2006; Lerche, 1998). Quite importantly, educators will be called upon to prepare each national workforce to rise to these challenges (Sahlberg, 2006; World Economic Forum, 2013). In particular, educators dealing with English language instruction will contribute by developing the proficiency of their learners to aid them in competing in a global environment which is increasingly relying on English as the international lingua franca (Dewy & Jenkins, 2010; House, 2012; Kirkpatrick, 2010; Ku & Zussman, 2010). Yet a focus solely on English language proficiency will leave learners lacking in the skills necessary to succeed in this competitive global employment marketplace. In this paper, other areas where English language educators should diversify their efforts are highlighted, along with programs successful in addressing each area.

In the business sector, proficiency in English as a second or foreign language matters greatly in the global economy, both to employers and to individuals (Forbes, 2011; Nickerson, 2005; Otilia, 2013; Phillipson, 2001). While standardized test scores remain important (Educational Testing Service, 2011), practical English language proficiency is becoming a more marketable skill for job-seekers (Otilia, 2013). Multinational corporations require employees with effective communication across their global operations; this points to the need for skills in multiple languages. Likewise, corporations are realizing significant economic benefits related to individual performance and institutions as a whole as the English and plurilingual skills of their employees improve (International Research Foundation for English Language Education, 2009). In a survey conducted by Forbes (2011), 106 senior executives of American companies with yearly revenues of \$500 million or more indicated that issues related to language had become central to their effective functioning as global corporations. When asked, 65% admitted that language barriers existed, and that such barriers led to miscommunications (67%) and made collaboration more difficult (40%). At the same time, 71% suggested that executives in leadership positions increasingly required non-English skills, and many (66%) expected U.S. managers to gain minimal proficiency in the local languages where they were posted. A majority (68%) noted that cultural awareness / competence is also increasingly important (Forbes, 2011).

A clear need exists for increased English language proficiency in a number of sectors. Yet the question this paper poses is "Is English proficiency enough?" While a focus solely driven by increased hours of English language instruction at younger ages may result in a more proficient national population, other skills that are in as much demand (or more so) in a globally competitive employment market may be overlooked. A broader question for educators, learners and policymakers is what qualities are necessary for competitive workers to have over the next decade. How can language educators empower learners in this global context, and how can these skills be integrated into the language learning classroom? This paper will focus on skills that can add to the competitive advantage of language learners as they enter the global marketplace, namely the development of academic and workplace skills, including specific linguistic skills, critical thinking skills, and intercultural communicative competence.

Specific Linguistic Skills for Specific Purposes

English language instruction encompasses the teaching of English for a multitude of purposes. Jordan (1997) considered these differences, first beginning with describing English teaching for general or social purposes, which would include a four-skills approach. From this point, Jordan (1997) began to draw a distinction between English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and English for Specific Purposes (ESP). EAP stresses the development of language required in specific fields

of study, including professional discourse based on specialized lexical items and common forms of communication, and more generally, enhanced skills related to working with academic texts, engaging in research and taking part in class through activities such as posing questions and contributing to class discussions. In comparison, in ESP, the focus on specific skills necessary in specific workplace environments is the hallmark of this approach to language teaching (Orr, 2002).

This attention to specific skills necessary for workers in their professional environments is what formed the basis of the curriculum in the Lower Mekong Initiative Education Pillar English Project. The project focus is the development of professional communication skills for government officials in anticipation of the necessary requirements leading up to and after ASEAN integration in 2015 (Anderson, 2012; ASEAN Secretariat, 2009). A number of identified skills were highlighted as mid- to upper-level professionals and officials from one country begin working more closely and often with their counterparts in other ASEAN countries in the areas of health, the environment and infrastructure, most often making use of English as the language of administration. In order to meet their responsibilities both regionally and internationally, the capacity of these officials in actively engaging in meetings, presenting ideas and plans in meetings, seminars, and conferences, being able to read and draft documents, and contributing to research initiatives need to be developed (Anderson, 2012). Focusing on English language proficiency for general or social purposes would have been insufficient; what was warranted was a more targeted approach. The program, completed in 2012, was evaluated positively, and therefore led to a second phase, expanded in number of countries involved and variety of sectors served. This second phase of the Lower Mekong Initiative is to be completed in 2014 (Lower Mekong Initiative, 2013).

Critical Thinking Skill Development

Specific linguistic skills for specific purposes are one component for success in the global community, yet there are other skills which are equally important. At Soka University in Tokyo, Japan, the Economics Department initiated a project to determine what these attributes and skills are, and how their curriculum could better prepare the students they graduated (Honma, 2008). Faculty members from this department surveyed top Tokyo Stock Exchange (TSE) companies in order to develop a graduate profile which would be attractive to these companies when searching for new employees. The qualities indicated included content knowledge and, more importantly, the ability to apply that knowledge in practice. English language proficiency, study skills (including research skills and time management) and international experience and cross-cultural understanding were also important. In addition, emphasis was placed on the development of critical thinking skills. It was not enough that graduating students had strong backgrounds in their content areas and could express themselves in English. Being able to analyze, apply concepts, synthesize information, and offer and support ideas and opinions was also valued.

The research on the importance and development of critical thinking skills is extensive (Bloom, 1956; Ennis, 1996; Facione, 1998; Willingham, 2007). While there has been much debate on the definition of critical thinking (American Philosophical Association, 1990; Bloom, 1956; Ennis, 1987; Facione, 1998), Ennis (1987) summarized the skill succinctly: Critical thinking is the process of incorporating the skills necessary to rationally decide what to do and believe.

Students accomplish this process informally on a daily basis. The challenge for educators is to develop these skills further over time in an academic context. This has been accomplished in the Economics Department at Soka University through the department's International Program,

which includes a strong EAP component focusing on the development of critical thinking skills (Honma, 2008). Critical thinking skills have often been developed at only advanced levels of instruction or applied through ad hoc activities. In the International Program and other programs at the university, critical thinking skills are dealt with in the same way as other skills, i.e., developed over time, from a basic to higher level, with level-appropriate language support and content (Stroupe, 2006).

A practical approach to the development of critical thinking skills can benefit from an illustration of Bloom's Taxonomy (Figure 1). Bloom (1956) initially presented his hierarchy of critical thinking skills beginning with knowledge (understanding content). With this knowledge, learners can then progress to the next stage, by expressing their comprehension of the knowledge (by summarizing, paraphrasing, or comparing and contrasting in one area to another) or applying what the learners have understood to a new context (Forehand, 2005). The three higher order thinking skills would require learners to analyze the knowledge more deeply, synthesize that knowledge with information from external resources by integrating it into a new form, and then finally, make judgments or evaluations with supporting evidence and documentation of their positions and ideas. A newer version of Bloom's Taxonomy renames the synthesis level of the original version and elevates that creative component in the critical thinking process (Anderson et al., 2001, as cited in Krathwohl, 2002). In the current paper, the focus is on the original version which was adopted in the current context due to its relevance to academic skills.

Figure 1. Comparison of Bloom's Taxonomy: Original and revised versions. From Forehand, M. (2005). Bloom's taxonomy: Original and revised. In M. Orey (Ed.), *Emerging perspectives on learning, teaching, and technology*. Retrieved from <http://projects.coe.uga.edu/epltt/>

Oftentimes, teachers can become disillusioned with focusing on the development of critical thinking skills in language instruction (or other) courses, lamenting their students' seeming inability to be able or to learn how to critically analyze. In many cases, this may be due to insufficient scaffolding or introducing linguistic skills or content knowledge beyond what the students are prepared to utilize. To overcome these challenges, some brief guidelines may be helpful:

- Critical thinking skill development should not be “saved” or allotted to only learners with advanced second language proficiency or content knowledge (Strauss, 2008; Stroupe, 2006, 2013; Willingham, 2007). All learners engage in critical thinking skills in their daily lives. The challenge for educators is to bring this dimension into the language learning classroom and expand on these skills, at all levels of language study.
- Tasks focusing on critical thinking skill development should be based on level-appropriate linguistic skills. Not all students have the linguistic skills or lexical knowledge to express judgment about, for example, the most effective method to reduce fossil fuel dependency and state their support of that position, regardless of the evidence they may have. Yet most lower-level proficiency students can often quickly gain the linguistic skills necessary to explain who their favorite actor is and why. While the sophistication of the language and content knowledge necessary for these two tasks can be quite different, the critical thinking skill is the same: Making an assertion and supporting that judgment with reasons (Figure 2). The basic linguistic structure (I think X because A, B, and C) is the same, while the content is different, based on the complexity and necessity of previous knowledge.

Lower level: Topic: Favorite movie	Advanced level: Topic: Concept of supply and demand
Knowledge <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is your favorite movie? 	Knowledge <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What does the concept of supply and demand state?
Comprehension <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Summarize the story of your favorite movie. What happens first, second, and so on? 	Comprehension <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explain how the concept of supply and demand operates.
Application <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Think about the ending of your favorite movie. Are there any other possible endings? 	Application <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Considering the recent oil shortage, explain how the price of oil may be affected. Use specific examples to support your answer.
Analysis <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compare and contrast your favorite movie with your partner's. What are the similarities and / or differences? 	Analysis <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compare and contrast the effects of the oil shortages of the 1970s and early in the 21st century.
Synthesis <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use the Internet and investigate the life stories of the director and main actors in your favorite movie and present that information in some form (in a written report, discussion, or presentation, for example). 	Synthesis <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research recent developments in the Middle East, and summarize predictions of the price of oil over the next 24 months.
Evaluation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explain why this is your favorite movie. Use specific examples to support your opinion. 	Evaluation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the most effective mechanism to reduce extreme fluctuations in the global price of oil? Use specific examples to support your answer.

Figure 2. Practical examples of application of Bloom's Taxonomy: Lower and Advanced Language Proficiency Levels.

- Tasks focusing on critical thinking skill development should also be based on level-appropriate content knowledge (Stroupe, 2006, 2013; Willingham, 2007). Also apparent from the actor / fossil fuel example above, the content knowledge necessary (and resulting lexical and linguistic complexity) to offer a judgment and support for the latter topic is far more demanding than the former. It is important that educators recognize this difference and focus critical thinking development tasks on content knowledge or interests readily accessible to learners, either through their previous studies or personal interests and experiences.
- Critical thinking skill development should be explicit in the course curricula. While there is debate as to whether critical thinking skills are most effectively taught inductively or deductively, explicit focus in the curriculum by educators is essential. Explicitly including the development of critical thinking skills as an educational goal “legitimizes” the process and encourages the inclusion of discussions of critical thinking into the professional discourse of those involved (Stroupe, 2006, 2013).

The International Program has realized significant success since its inception: The overall number of graduates from the Economics Department securing positions in Tokyo Stock Exchange (TSE) companies has been increasing, and incoming students began to choose economics as their major because of the reputation of this program. Subsequently, the program was used as a model for a similar content-based program in Japan-Asia Studies, a university-wide academic program, and most recently, a new English-medium department.

Increased Cultural Awareness

In addition to needing task-specific language skills and the ability to critically analyze, our learners, because of increased mobility and international communication, will more often be working with colleagues from different cultural backgrounds from their own. Fantini (2005) points out that in order to interact with others from diverse cultural backgrounds appropriately, a level of intercultural communicative competence is necessary in addition to linguistic proficiency. Many language educators recognize this importance and include discussions of cultural differences in their course curricula. Yet like critical thinking skills, developing the ability to understand and have empathy for others in different cultural contexts should be seen again in the long-term, progressing over time, supported by scaffolding and recycling.

Increased cultural awareness was one of the key components of the Program for Regional and Educational Exchanges for Mutual Understanding (REX Program) which has been implemented by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) and the Ministry of Internal Affairs in Japan, and local governments abroad since 1990. The REX Program was developed to promote Japan’s internationalization and provide unique opportunities for teacher development. Through this program, native Japanese speaking English teachers in junior high and high schools in Japan have been selected to live in a variety of countries to teach Japanese at the secondary level. The REX Pre-Departure Program was designed to introduce departing teachers to Japanese language teaching methodology, cultural expectations of the educational context to which they were traveling, and support with daily life issues which they would face when living abroad.

In addition to teaching Japanese, another major component of the assignment abroad for these teachers was to teach about Japanese culture. This task may seem straightforward, yet the REX participants quickly realized that while they implicitly understood the nuances and practices of their own culture, making this knowledge explicit in a teaching situation was quite challenging.

In addition, while the participants could readily describe cultural activities, because the meanings of these activities were often implicit, oftentimes they found it difficult to explain the reasons behind cultural traditions in which they had engaged for most of their lives. A framework for analysis of the implicit which would lead to explicit instruction was needed.

When discussing culture, the first question which comes to mind is indeed, what is culture? Again, this may seem obvious, but upon closer inspection, the answer seems elusive. How for example, is the exchanging of business cards culturally bound when the “same” item is used both in Japan and in other countries?

What is necessary is a definition of culture. While many are available, the definition that seemed particularly useful to the REX Pre-Departure Program is as follows:

Culture... is the way of life of a society,... consist[ing] of prescribed ways of behaving or norms of conduct, beliefs, values, and skills, along with the behavioral patterns and uniformities based on these categories -all this we call “non-material culture”-plus, in an extension of the term, the artifacts created by these skills and values, which we call “material culture.” (Gordon, 1964, pp. 32-33)

As can be seen with Gordon’s definition, the concept of culture can be all-encompassing. For instructors in the classroom, it is problematic to teach everything about culture, so using a framework based on this definition as a pedagogical tool can help learners gain a deeper understanding of the complexities of culture.

From Gordon’s definition, four key components were identified. The first is beliefs, including individual and social beliefs of members of a particular group, and the societal values on which these beliefs are based. These beliefs and values are central to the framework and inform the behaviors of members of a society, the second component in the framework. Beliefs help define what behaviors are expected, rewarded, or discouraged in a particular society. Yet behaviors are not decontextualized: Behaviors are associated with the third component, cultural artifacts, the “material culture” which Gordon refers to as the objects in a culture which members can see, touch, or feel. Finally, there are social institutions, which support and perpetuate social beliefs and values and cultural practices. Among the most influential social institutions are the family and community, educational systems, religious organizations, government, and business. Media can also play an important role, providing a method through which social institutions can further emphasize cultural practices. While it is at times difficult to identify all four components of the framework in a cultural activity, three of the four are typically readily identifiable, with beliefs always present, and can provide the basis for further analysis.

An illustrative example can be seen in the aforementioned common and quite important practice of exchanging business cards in Japan. Two components of the framework are readily identifiable. The artifact in this example is the business card itself. Additionally, when business cards are exchanged in Japan, there are a multitude of behaviors expected to occur related to the seemingly simple action of presenting the card: using both hands, holding the card in a particular manner, with the name of the presenter facing the recipient, and accompanying the actions with a bow based on the status of those involved. These behaviors are based on the Japanese societal belief of mutual respect and status in a relationship, with the accompanying belief of politeness in business interactions. This is such an important aspect of the business community that companies in Japan have lessons for their new recruits about how to properly

exchange business cards in varying situations, thereby providing the fourth component in the framework, the institution that perpetuates the cultural practice.

Using beliefs as the beginning foundation for analysis, REX participants who will be living in western countries are provided with Kohls's (1984) *The Values Americans Live By* as an introduction and point of comparison between eastern and western cultural values (with the explanation that American values should not be seen as the equivalent to western values, but rather as a point of departure for discussions and further investigation). With this understanding of beliefs, the participants then began to objectively examine another culture, in this case that of the United States, based on events or social characteristics which shape cultures in different ways. Some influencing factors on culture could include history, the educational system, religion, ethnic diversity, and the family. In the same ways that these factors can shape culture, these can also be utilized to perpetuate or actively change culture over time. After completing an examination of one aspect of another culture, participants then had the knowledge and experience necessary to reflect back on their own culture, moving from a subjective understanding to a more objective understanding which could be explicitly shared with others, namely their non-Japanese students in their destination countries.

As shown from the points discussed above, the REX participants moved through a step-by-step process of understanding, reflection, and sharing of cultural values and associated behaviors, artifacts, and institutions. Each step in the process provides a foundation or basis for greater understanding in the next step. First, participants are provided a definition of culture and a framework with which to further analyze cultural beliefs and behaviors, in this case the framework based on Gordon's definition of culture. After providing a general understanding of values / beliefs of the target culture (in this case Kohls's article), additional, more specific cultural information from the target culture (readings, videos, web-based material, etc.) can be provided in a specific area (education, religion, historical events, etc.). After analyzing this cultural information using the framework, participants can then use the same framework and targeted area to reflect back on their own culture. Consolidation of these steps can be accomplished through a final project such as a presentation of a cultural aspect of the learner's own culture or of the target culture. In the case of the REX participants, this consolidation took the form of a demonstration lesson that would be used when explaining Japanese culture with their students in their destination country.

Initially, such analysis of the REX participants' and other cultures was challenging, but through each week of the Pre-Departure Program, the process became more familiar. Eventually, the participants began to discuss, question, and consider cultural influences which they could observe, not as an assigned task of the program, but because they had developed and internalized this approach to understanding the cultures with which they came into contact.

Conclusion

Increasing interconnectivity through globalization, digitization, and international activities is creating a more competitive environment for our learners. The responsibility is placed on educational systems and educators to ensure we prepare our students adequately for the expectations which they will face after leaving our classrooms. While global opportunities are increasing, access to those same opportunities is becoming increasingly competitive. As educators, it is necessary to better prepare graduates for global competition in a fast-changing business environment. A focus on developing critical thinking skills along with relevant linguistic skills is important. Graduating globally competent learners also includes developing their greater understanding of multiple cultures along with intercultural communicative

competence. The global marketplace will only become more integrated and competitive in the future. Therefore it is incumbent upon us as educators to recognize our students' needs and prepare our students to excel and realize success in their future careers.

Author Note

Richmond Stroue, Graduate Program in International Language Education: TESOL, Graduate School of Letters, Soka University, Tokyo, Japan.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Richmond Stroue, Soka University, 1-236 Tangi-machi, Hachioji-shi, Tokyo 192-8577 Japan. E-mail: richmond@soka.ac.jp

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