

Using literary works to develop learners' abilities necessary to undertake intercultural communication

IGARASHI, Yuko

1. Introduction

Japan's Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) has been implementing English language education with a goal of cultivating learners to become those who successfully communicate with English speakers from diverse linguistic/cultural backgrounds in international environments. In this education, the learners are expected to develop their abilities and knowledge essential for establishing a successful intercultural communication (IC) undertaken in English by multicultural interlocutors.

To nurture learners' necessary abilities and knowledge for IC, the exposure of IC in classrooms becomes of great importance as Japanese learners of English have few opportunities to experience IC in their daily life. In this environment, EFL textbooks play a crucial role of providing appropriate readings which enable learners to examine IC and to help them acquire intercultural communicative competence. This competence, essential to establish an IC, is constructed by the following four competences, according to Byram (2021): (1) linguistic competence (the ability to produce and understand the utterances by applying linguistic rules), (2) sociolinguistic competence (the ability to negotiate meaning of the utterances with interlocutors in sociocultural contexts), (3) discourse competence (the ability to adopt suitable strategies to establish a communication by applying the communicative norms in a given situation), and (4) intercultural competence (knowledge of various cultures, appropriate attitude, essential skills, and critical cultural awareness).

This paper proposes the enthusiastic use of a literary work as an appropriate reading in an EFL textbook to develop learners' intercultural communicative competence; literary works include "novels, short stories, plays and poems which are functional and convey their message by paying considerable attention to language which is rich and multi-layered" (Lazar, 1993: 5). To show appropriateness of using literary works in EFL education, firstly this paper will present how the work has been seen in language education, and explain what elements are necessary for a reading to be appropriate. After that, this paper will demonstrate what can be learned from a literary work by using an actual short story, in addition

to my study results about the use of literature in Japan. Lastly, challenges that current EFL textbooks face will be discussed.

2. Literary works as learners' models in EFL education

For a long time, literature has been used in language learning classrooms. Carter and Long (1991) demonstrate the appropriateness of its use in EFL education by providing the following three models.

2.1. The language model

A literary work becomes learners' language model as it shows how the target language is formed from the linguistic perspectives (i.e., lexical, semantic, and syntactic perspectives); the work often includes subtle and varied creative use of the language through linguistic forms, and is frequently seen as "the highest form of expression of the target language" (Gilroy & Parkinson, 1997: 213). Traditionally, language education has taken advantage of this characteristic to develop learners' linguistic competence.

Since the 1980s when the communicative language teaching has become a popular method, literature is used to exemplify not only linguistic but sociolinguistic information of the language such as genre, register, sociolect, and dialect (Gilroy & Parkinson, 1997). A literary work generally includes discourse undertaken by interlocutors, so that it enables learners to see that the interlocutors adopt suitable forms depending on to whom, when, and where to use; they are led to recognize that the language has variations. Further, the work enables them to examine what conversational rules and strategies are used to converse (Pulverness & Tomlinson, 2013). By analyzing discourse conventions and situational constraints on conversational behavior in the work, learners can nurture sociolinguistic and discourse competence in addition to linguistic competence. Therefore, a literary work in communicative language classrooms is treated as a teaching material that develops learners' reading skills as well as oral and writing skills by encouraging them to appreciate various language use in the work (Gilroy & Parkinson, 1997).

2.2. The cultural model

A literary work functions as learners' cultural model; it depicts people's lifestyle, beliefs, values, acceptable behaviors as well as social norms in a given country, and enables the learners to "engage in a conversation among cultures, explore unfamiliar traditions, and evaluate human relationships" (Sam, Lien, & Dan, 2016: 116). The literary work makes it possible for the learners to study the culture without being in the country.

There are various cultures presented in literary works. Some works describe the culture of learners' own country, and others depict cultures of other countries. In EFL classrooms, learners need to expand knowledge of their own culture as well as other cultures (McKay, 2002); it is important for the learners to study their own culture as it makes them reinforce their knowledge of the culture. Learning cultures of other countries is also essential to advance the learners' cultural knowledge and enables them to recognize similarities and differences by comparing the cultures to their own. This learning process helps them nurture

Using literary works to develop learners' abilities necessary to undertake intercultural communication (IGARASHI) their cultural awareness as they can develop a sense of appreciation and respect toward each culture and cultural diversity.

2.3. The personal growth model

In addition to acquiring knowledge of various cultures, literature invites learners to "grow as individuals as well as in their relationships with the people and institutions around them" (Carter & Long, 1991: 3). This is achieved by examining interactions depicted in a literary work which makes learners understand suitable attitudes for a successful communication; the learners analyze what attitudes enhance or hinder relationships with others. Moreover, the learners can see people's life in the work, reflect on their own life, and be inspired to think about what kind of life they want to lead and what might be necessary to have a successful life.

In summary, a literary work provides learners with opportunities to examine appropriate attitudes for communication and think about their life. In other words, they can acquire knowledge of the necessary attitudes for a successful IC and knowledge to be mature individuals through a literary work.

2.4. The use of multicultural literary work

The three models above illustrate that a literary work becomes a valuable resource to nurture learners' essential abilities and knowledge for successful communications. In particular, a multicultural literary work is of great importance as it includes the following three essential elements.

First, a multicultural literary work illustrates the interlocutors' various cultures. By examining lifestyle, social norms, and beliefs in a given setting of the work, learners can expand their cultural knowledge and nurture their intercultural competence such as appropriate attitude and skills for IC and critical cultural awareness.

Second, a multicultural literary work can provide learners with examples of interlocutors' interactions, so that they can analyze what discourse conventions and situational constraints are used; thus, their sociolinguistic and discourse competence are nurtured. Further, misunderstanding and/or miscommunication between interlocutors caused by cultural differences will be depicted in their interaction; this enables learners to examine what obstacles are involved in an IC. As a result, the learners recognize that establishing an IC is not always successful for interlocutors and that some situations require them to problem solve. This recognition is essential for the learners to prepare for IC.

Third, the literary work is most likely to include multicultural interlocutors' conversation; this includes linguistic as well as sociolinguistic information (genre, register, sociolect, dialect, forms of address, and the expression of politeness, etc.). While reading about the various conversations, learners can analyze what expressions are used in what situation to whom in the IC.

When a multicultural literary work possesses the above elements, it would function as an appropriate reading to develop learners' intercultural communicative competence.

3. The use of literature in Japan's EFL textbooks

In Japan, many literary works were used in EFL textbooks until the promotion of communicative language teaching by MEXT. Since the 1980s, the use of this type of works has steadily declined because the works are perceived to be unsuitable for developing communication skills; today, there are not many literary works presented in EFL textbooks (Erikawa, 2008).

3.1. My study results on literary works in EFL textbooks

To provide evidence of the rare use of literary works in Japan, I examined 12 senior high school EFL textbooks in 2023. The examined textbooks were *English Communication I* published by four textbook companies (*Keirinkan*, *Sanseido*, *Suiken Shuppan*, and *Tokyo Shoseki*); these textbooks were chosen as the data from *Kyokasho Repooto Henshuu Iinkai* (2021) demonstrated that 70% of senior high schools in Japan adopted either of these textbooks in 2021. An *English Communication I* class, aiming to develop learners' four basic English skills, is a required class for first-year students. Every examined textbook has either eight or ten units, each of which basically includes a reading text; some units have additional reading texts.

There are 174 readings in total in the examined textbooks. Many of the readings are essays/nonfiction stories (116 readings); some interviews/conversations (21 readings) and presentations/speeches (26 readings) are also included. Most of the readings depict international events or people's experience in international settings; these readings often describe people who enthusiastically work in an international environment and who successfully live in a country different from their origin. The textbooks also include some readings that depict misunderstanding or miscommunication between interlocutors, and the number of this type of readings is eight out of the 174 readings; many of them describe a life story about people who face difficulties in IC.

Of the 174 readings, only 11 readings are literary works, all of which are short stories except one excerpt from a novel. Literary works in the textbooks occupy only 6.3% of the entire readings; however, they are not used in any of the units, but in an additional reading section outside of the units, and some textbooks do not include any literary works at all.

Among the 11 literary works, only one reading, "One Autumn Date" written by the Japanese author, *Daisuke Ikenoue*, in the textbook, *Landmark Fit* by *Keirinkan*, includes multicultural interlocutors. This provides evidence that multicultural literary works are not perceived as important for preparing learners for IC by textbook producers.

3.2. An example of multicultural literary work

In EFL textbooks, a multicultural literary work contributes to developing learners' necessary abilities and knowledge for successful ICs. As an example, "One Autumn Date" in *Landmark Fit* is examined here. This work presents interaction undertaken by multicultural interlocutors; it describes the life of a Japanese female student, Ayuko, and the interaction with her Malaysian boyfriend, Tony, at an American university. The following is an excerpt from this short story depicting their date arranged by him for the first time; they previously

Using literary works to develop learners' abilities necessary to undertake intercultural communication (IGARASHI)

had a date many times, all of which were arranged by Ayuko. Therefore, Ayuko was very excited about this particular date.

They were talking happily for the first thirty minutes. Then they became silent for a while. Ayuko expected something romantic would happen.

Tony was the one who broke the silence. He said, "A-yu-ko?"

Ayuko thought that Tony would kiss her. She was both excited and nervous as she answered, "Yes, Tony?" To her surprise, he took off his duffle coat and put it on her. Ayuko had no choice but to say, "Thank you, Tony." Then silence came again.

Another few minutes passed. Ayuko thought about saying something, but she didn't. She didn't want to break the romantic mood between them.

Then another ten minutes passed, Tony said again, "A-yu-ko?"

"Here he comes! Finally he has decided to kiss me!" she thought. She looked Tony in the eyes and said, "Yes, Tony?"

"All right." Then he took off his sweater and put it on her, saying, "Maybe you've got a cold."

Again, Ayuko had no choice but to say to him, "Thank you Tony, but aren't you cold?"

"Well, yeah. What do you think? But if you are cold, it's my job to warm you up." said Tony, shivering.

"That's very kind of you, but you don't have to do that. I'm not as cold as you are."

Tony said, "Why? I asked you twice and you said 'Yes!'"

She suddenly understood all the strange behavior of her boyfriend. He wasn't calling her name; he was asking her if she was cold!

Ayuko started laughing. Tony also laughed, knowing what happened. Ayuko grabbed him, hugged him tightly, and said, "I love you, Tony."

Tony, with a face red like a tomato, said, "I love you too, Ayuko."

Ayuko answered with a smile, "No, I'm not cold now." (p.177-8)

This excerpt illustrates Ayuko's misperception toward Tony's behavior. She expected to be kissed as it is not unusual while dating in Japanese culture, but it did not happen in this instance most likely because of cultural differences. Tony is from a Muslim country where kissing is not allowed while dating. Initially, Ayuko thought maybe he did not like her because he was not trying to kiss her, and she also did not think when he simply said her name he was asking if she was okay, or cold, as both of these things did not follow Japanese cultural norms; his behavior confused her. However, she finally realized that the reason he offered her his coat and sweater was because he cared very much about her.

Looking at this excerpt from Tony's perspective, we can see the difference; he was very concerned about whether she felt cold, as he, who was from a tropical country, felt the day was very cold. He, therefore, called just her name out of concern, and offered her his coat and sweater. He tried to show his affection to her through this; his cultural norms were such that he did not anticipate her expectation of being kissed.

This excerpt shows that both Ayuko and Tony experienced an unsmooth IC given that her cultural norms are different from his. It is a valuable reading for learners, as this enables

them to understand that people behave differently following their own cultural norms, to recognize that cultural differences may cause some challenges in communication, and to think about the way to handle them; in addition, it gives the learners' opportunities to explore interlocutors' cultures.

The conversation between Ayuko and Tony contains another important feature which is the sociolinguistic use of English. The conversation is made between international students at an American university, so that it depicts the language of international students; learners can see the actual English use of these students. Their English is standard as they have learned it in formal education in their countries; moreover, their English is casual as the conversation was undertaken between a romantic couple. Generally speaking, a language has both casual and formal forms, either of which must be chosen by the speaker according to the place, time, and situation by following their social norms. This is one of the sociolinguistic uses of the language, and students need to know it for their potential IC. Conversation in a literary text is very important as it is likely to show the sociolinguistic use of the language, which contributes to fostering learners' sociolinguistic and discourse competencies.

The examination of "One Autumn Date" provides evidence that a multicultural literary work is likely to include ICs which makes it possible for learners to examine interactions between multicultural interlocutors as well as their language use in a given context. This type of literary work also enables learners to expand cultural knowledge, understand appropriate attitudes to enhance communication, and think about solutions to solve misunderstanding and/or miscommunication problems in IC. Therefore, a multicultural literary work functions effectively to develop learners' intercultural communicative competence.

3.3. Exercises for a literary work

One of the goals of English language education in Japan is to prepare learners for establishing a successful IC, and multicultural literary works contribute to achieving this goal. However, simply reading these does not prepare them for IC; they should engage in critical thinking, as recommended by Nault (2011) who had his students analyze people's interaction in the multicultural literary work and figure out what could have been done to avoid the conflict between interlocutors.

Critical thinking belongs to a high-order thinking process (analyzing and evaluating), and is "a mindset that involves thinking reflectively, rationally and reasonably": Critical thinking exercises include contrastive analysis, evaluating the writer's or speaker's intentions, finding the underlying message of the text, and examining the strength of its arguments and its effectiveness (Dummett & Hughes, 2019: 4). In contrast, basic comprehension (remembering, applying, and understanding) is placed in a low-order thinking process which involves "understanding the essential meaning of a word, sentence, text, or idea": Exercises categorized into basic comprehension include fill in the blank, matching items, and yes/no questions (Dummett & Hughes, 2019: 10). In EFL classrooms, the use of both critical thinking and basic comprehension exercises works effectively for nurturing learners' intercultural communicative competence.

Importantly, critical thinking brings some benefits to learners for the development of intercultural communicative competence. First, it invites the learners to question and analyze/

Using literary works to develop learners' abilities necessary to undertake intercultural communication (IGARASHI)

reflect the given information and come to reasonable conclusions through deeper level learning (Dummett & Hughes, 2019). Second, critical thinking helps learners expand self-knowledge which enables them to “look at the self in connection to other selves and to both the physical and social environments” (Noddings, 2006: 289). Therefore, this thinking leads the learners to understand the shared meanings, beliefs, values, and behaviors in other cultures in relation to their own. Due to these benefits, each reading of an EFL textbook should accompany critical thinking.

In the interest of checking the use of exercise types (critical thinking or basic comprehension) in literary works, I examined each of the works in the 12 *English Communication I* textbooks and found that most of the works simply assigned reading comprehension questions which are in the basic comprehension type, and some included no exercises whatsoever. However, one exception was found; the multicultural literary work, “One Autumn Date”, also assigns a critical thinking exercise; in this exercise, learners make an inference from the girl's last words and discuss it in class.

4. Challenges that EFL textbooks in Japan face

In EFL classrooms, multicultural literary works play a significant role of offering learners to examine IC undertaken by multicultural interlocutors. In Japan, however, as evidenced by my study, these works rarely appear in the examined textbooks; this is one of the challenges that the textbooks face today. There is another challenge of the textbooks; many do not have multicultural literary works in them and those that do do not have enough variety of exercises, particularly critical thinking exercises. These indicate that learners are not provided sufficient opportunities to examine IC in classrooms, and suggest that many textbook producers overlook the fact that a multicultural literary work is a valuable resource for learners to develop their intercultural communicative competence; the work is valuable as it provides the three models of learners described by Carter and Long (1991), the language model, the cultural model, and the personal growth model.

Why are multicultural literary works overlooked in EFL education in Japan? This is attributed to the perception possessed by many textbook producers that a literary work is not suitable for developing learners' communication skills. Until the 1980s MEXT promoted the grammar-translation method in English language teaching (ELT). During this period, readings in the textbooks were chosen to best satisfy the goal of developing learners' vocabulary and grammar knowledge and understanding of the readings; a literary work was frequently used since it was seen as the learners' language model illustrating sophisticated expressions of the target language. The focus of ELT was to develop learners' linguistic competence, and literary works were used for the purpose. Possibly, this use might have hindered textbook producers to recognize that it is additionally a valuable resource to develop learners' sociolinguistic, discourse, and intercultural competence.

Another explanation of why multicultural literary works are overlooked in EFL education comes from the general tendency taken by textbook producers of avoiding using controversial topics in EFL textbooks. Traditionally, issues of PARSNIP (politics, alcohol, religion, narcotics, isms, and pork) and about disability, racism, and conspiracy theories have been

avoided as these are seen as controversial (Ludwig & Summer, 2023). A multicultural literary work depicts interaction between interlocutors from different cultural/linguistic backgrounds which might include misunderstanding and/or miscommunication caused by their cultural differences. Possibly, the involvement of misunderstanding/miscommunication in the work is perceived as controversial and therefore undesirable to be a reading topic. Instead, the textbook producers seem to prefer to adopt a reading illustrating IC as the interaction always conducted by interlocutors in a harmonious and cooperative way. This is supported by my textbook study demonstrating that many readings often describe people's success stories or international cooperative events.

This paper provides evidence that current textbooks barely use multicultural literary works, failing to recognize that these works are valuable resources for nurturing learners' intercultural communicative competence. Although there are various types of literary works at present such as novels, short stories, plays, and poems, only a certain type of literary work contributes to developing intercultural communicative competence; a multicultural literary work depicting discourse between interlocutors is best suited for this purpose. Learners need to be given enough opportunities to examine multicultural interlocutors' discourse in classrooms for their potential IC.

5. Conclusion

Multicultural literary works become precious resources to assist learners' acquisition of intercultural communicative competence. However, the use of this type of work is overlooked in Japan's current ELT by EFL textbook producers; this situation yields an unsuccessful achievement of MEXT's educational goal of nurturing learners to be those who can successfully communicate with English speakers from various backgrounds in international environments. This paper attempts to demonstrate how important multicultural literary works are to cultivate learners' intercultural communicative competence for the preparation for IC. The use of multicultural literary works needs to be encouraged to achieve MEXT's educational goal.

References

- Byram, M. (2021). *Teaching and assessing intercultural communicative competence: Revisited* (2nd ed.). Bristol, Blue Ridge Summit: Multilingual Matters.
- Carter, R., & Long, M.N. (1991). *Teaching literature*. Longman.
- Dummett, P., & Hughes, J. (2019). *Critical thinking in ELT: A working model for the classroom*. Boston, MA: National Geographic Learning.
- Erikawa, H. (2008). *Nihonjin wa eigo wo doumanandekitaka: Eigokyouiku no shakaibunkashi* [A socio-cultural history of English language education in Japan]. Tokyo: Kenkyusha.
- Kyokasho Repooto Henshuu Iinkai [Editing Committee for Textbook Report]. (2021, November). 2021nendoyou chugakkou/koutougakkou kyokasho no saitaku de-ta [the adoption data for 2021 junior and senior high school textbooks]. *Kyokasho Repooto*, 64, 67-73.
- Gilroy, M., & Parkinson, B. (1997). Teaching literature in a foreign language. *Language Teaching*, 29, 213-225.
- Lazar, G. (1993). *Literature and language teaching: A guide for teachers and trainers*. Cambridge

Using literary works to develop learners' abilities necessary to undertake intercultural communication (IGARASHI)

University Press.

Ludwig, C., & Summer, T. (Eds). (2023). *Taboos and controversial issues in foreign language education: Critical language pedagogy in theory, research and practice*. London and New York: Routledge.

McKay, S.L. (2002). *Teaching English as an international language: Rethinking goals and approaches*. Oxford University Press.

Nault, D. (2011). Using world literatures to promote intercultural competence in Asian EFL learners. *Journal of English as an International Language*, 21, 118-131.

Noddings, N. (2006). *Critical Lesson: What our schools should teach*. Cambridge University Press.

Pulverness, A., & Tomlinson, B. (2013). Materials for cultural awareness. In B. Tomlinson (Ed.), *Developing materials for language teaching* (2nd ed.) (pp.443-459). Bloomsbury.

Sam, A.X., Lien, T.T.K., & Dan, T.C. (2016). Cultural approach: A potential pedagogy for promoting learners' insights into cultural aspects in literary works. *Can Tho University Journal of Science*, 4, 114-127.

(IGARASHI, Yuko, Professor, College of International Relations, Ritsumeikan University)

異文化間コミュニケーション力育成用教材としての 文学作品使用

文部科学省は、国際社会で活躍できる人材の育成を英語教育の目標の一つとして設定している。この人材となるためには、日本の高校生は異文化間コミュニケーションを多く体験して必要な知識や能力を育成することが重要となるが、彼らがこれを日常生活で体験することはあまり期待できない。そのため異文化間コミュニケーションの体験を教科書で補う必要があり、よって教科書は Byram (2021) が示している *linguistic competence*, *sociolinguistic competence*, *discourse competence*, *intercultural competence* から成る異文化間コミュニケーション力を養えるような構成になっている必要がある。

筆者は、異文化間コミュニケーション力育成のために文学作品を教科書で使用することが重要であると考え、1980年代以降、コミュニケーション力育成が英語教育の大きな目標となり、文学作品ではこれを育成できないとされたことから、教科書での文学作品使用が減少している(江利川, 2008)。しかし、文学作品には Carter and Long (1991) が示している *language model*, *cultural model*, *personal growth model* という三つのモデルで表される特徴があり、特に異文化間の人物の交流を取り扱った文学作品では、登場人物の文化背景や会話分析が可能となるため、Byram の示している四つの *competence* を育成する有効な教材となり得る。そこで筆者は文学作品の現在の使用状況とその有効性を示すため、高校英語検定教科書にあるリーディング教材の調査を行った。

まず文学作品の使用状況であるが、これはやはり非常に少なく、その中でも特に異文化間の人物の交流を取り扱った文学作品は一点のみであった。文学作品の有効性を示すために、この異文化交流の作品を分析し、学習者は他文化知識の習得と、誤解の対処法の考察、そして登場人物の会話を通しての社会言語学的分析ができることを示した。

また異文化間コミュニケーション力を育成するためには、本文をより深く理解するための練習問題が必要で、特に *critical thinking* の使用が有効となる。それは、*critical thinking* では学習者は本文内容を深く分析し、人物の交流から生じる問題点を抽出し、その解決策を考える練習ができるため、異文化間コミュニケーション力の育成につながるからである。筆者は調査対象教科書の文学作品に付帯する練習問題に *critical thinking* が含まれているのかを調べたが、一問だけ使用されていることが確認できた。しかしこれでは学生の異文化間コミュニケーション力を育成することはできない。

この教科書の調査結果から、異文化間コミュニケーション力を育成するために必要となるリーディングと練習問題が現教科書にはほとんど含まれていないことが示された。よって教科書の改善が早急に必要で、そのためには教科書作成者は異文化間コミュニケーション力を育成するために文学作品が有効であることを認識する必要があると考える。

(五十嵐 優子, 立命館大学国際関係学部教授)