

Enhancing Transcultural Interaction between Japanese and Non-Japanese Students through an Interview Project in English

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1. Introduction

Human beings draw close to one another by their common nature, but habits and customs keep them apart. Confucius (Samovar & Porter, 2000)

From my experience studying in the United States, I know the importance of communicating with students of the majority group in order to be successful in a new environment. As a foreign student in an American university, I was lucky to have American friends who helped me. I realized later that my learning style was to ask people for information when I did not understand, and to keep on asking. This strategy seemed to work well for me, because teachers and classmates passed on useful information. I experienced miscommunication every once in a while; however my friends and I totally enjoyed it. They told me how they studied, which brand of soap to buy, and how to eat bagels.

In general, I think it was difficult for international students to make American friends although the foreign student advisors organized parties for international students. Some students from Japan failed to acquire communication skills in English and left the university with feelings of dismay and resentment toward Americans. While I was in the United States, a counselor from a high school contacted me and said that she needed help for a Japanese student. The girl was fifteen years old, and was studying in the United States on her own. When I met her, she explained in Japanese that her roommate had demonstrated how to use toilet, and she felt humiliated. Her English was not fluent: even her counselor could not understand her troubles and needs. Yet she was not retarded or abnormal, so her roommate's kindness hurt her feelings deeply. I saw her several times afterwards. The Japanese student started to open her heart with the help of the counselor, and made many American friends in the end. International students experience culture

shocks to a certain degree depending on each individual.

My experience made me think more about transculturation. Transculturation can be defined as interaction with other cultures while reflecting on one's own cultural identity. "Almost everyone needs social contact with other people, and this need is met through the exchange of messages that serve as bridges to unite otherwise isolated individuals" (Samovar, Porter & Jain, 1981, p.11).

Thus I became interested and concerned about the relationships between Japanese and non-Japanese students in the college where I teach. This study aimed to find out how interviewing non-Japanese students on campus would affect Japanese, Chinese, and South Korean students' intercultural sensitivity levels. It was conducted in three freshmen-level English classes at the women's college in the fall semester 2001. All of the participants surveyed belonged to the Department of Intercultural Communication.

There were no foreign students at my college in 1997. In April 2001, there were seventy non-Japanese students from twelve countries. Since the junior college that I work for was transformed into a four-year college in 1998, I have taught eight foreign students from Asian countries in my English class. Despite the students' major in Intercultural Communication, I observed the lack of communication between non-Japanese students and Japanese students in and outside the classroom.

Before undertaking this study I asked the Japanese and non-Japanese students to write in English about the situation of non-Japanese students on campus in July 2001. Many students in my class expressed their eagerness to communicate with non-Japanese students in this preliminary survey. One student wrote:

I think the foreign students want to make Japanese friends more, study Japanese and Japanese culture. So the Japanese students should talk to them more actively and friendly, and tell about their native language and culture each other. It would be to the foreign students and Japanese students' benefit to do so.

Others expressed similar sentiment in regard to presence of non-Japanese students on campus as opportunities to use English. Yet it seemed difficult for some shy students to speak up:

Most Japanese students are shy. Of course, I'm very shy, too. So, we Japanese students are tend to avoid the foreign students. Before I talk to the foreign student, I worry if I can't communicate with them.

If the foreign students ask me something, I am glad to answer her. It is not easy for me that I talk her first.

If only the students were willing to participate, there were some events to meet foreign students – parties, watching kabuki, short trips around the country, volunteer Japanese teaching assistants and so on. But most of the students did not make use of the opportunities. Some students did not even know that these opportunities existed. The majority of the students waited for non-Japanese students to speak to them first.

I came up with the interview project for the fall semester based on the students' needs expressed in the journals. The course offered opportunities for both Japanese and non-Japanese students to conduct research and interview non-Japanese students on campus, record it, transcribe the interview and examine the difficulties they were having at the college. Non-Japanese students in class interviewed other non-Japanese students as well. Students were encouraged to adopt a critical but positive attitude toward transcultural communication. This project is similar to the study conducted by Murray and Bollinger (2001) on how to raise cultural awareness of Japanese university students in Japan: however in my study the interviewees were the non-Japanese students on campus instead of any native or non-native English speakers. In my class, students were asked to set their own goals, cultivate their critical thinking and learn English in relation to cultural, social and economic context surrounding them. The final goal of the course was for both Japanese and non-Japanese students to integrate into the university community.

2. Review of Studies

2.1 Intercultural Communication

Hall (1959) defined culture in terms of communication and language. According to him, it is difficult to notice one's own culture; however awareness of our own culture is more important than understanding a foreign culture. One's culture can only be defined in its relation to other cultures (Hall, 1959; Tomalin & Stempleski, 1993). Each culture has developed its own unique talents and insights over the years and we have to learn to be humane to each other and to make use of the diverse talents (Hall, 1976). In a diverse modern society, it is hard to define what culture is. In the broadest sense, every human relation in society is intercultural. Hall (1976) defines it as:

Culture is, of course, man's primary mode of coding information in a way that enables him to cope with an increasingly complex life. One might also say that, in

addition to everything else, culture is a series of solutions to past problems and challenges and is therefore past oriented and as a consequence short in its inventory of solutions to future problems.... (p. 89)

According to Ilieva (2001):

I find Geertz' (1973) definition of culture as "the fabric of meaning in people's life" useful to work with. It seems to offer a compromise that could relieve teachers of the burden of presenting a bulk of cultural information to familiarize students with dubious generalized cultural patterns, while allowing them to be rigorous in searching for and negotiating the cultural meaning of any utterance or activity addressed in the classroom. Thus a fruitful approach to culture in the language classroom would be to view it as the meaning assigned to objects, events, and relationships in a particular context or situation by participants in or observers of the situation. (p. 2)

In a school setting, intercultural communication also concerns communication among administrators, teachers, Japanese and non-Japanese students. Communication is interactive and interdependent. If miscommunication occurs, it is not only the fault of foreign students. The Japanese administrators, teachers and students are responsible for developing an open-minded attitude and creating an accepting environment (Kurachi, 1998).

There is a question concerning whether culture can be taught or should be taught. Some researchers consider that culture is teachable, and offered diverse training programs (Brislin & Yoshida, 1994; Fowler & Mumford, 1995; 1999; Seelye, 1992). Others say that teachers should not force cultural training and teachers can attempt to raise students' cultural awareness if they are willing to learn. Culture's constantly changing nature makes it hard to teach as facts. A study by Wright (2000) shows that process-oriented exercises are more effective in raising cultural awareness than knowledge-based approach. Crawford-Lange & Lange quoted in Ilieva (2001) say:

An information-centered, culture-teaching strategy implies that the culture under study is closed, final, complete... [It also] eliminates consideration of culture at the personal level, where the individual interacts with and acts upon the culture... Although culture contains knowable facts, these facts are in constant flux. More important to an understanding of culture than the collection of facts is an appreciation of culture as a constellation of phenomena in a continual process of

change, brought about by the participants in the culture as they live and work. (p.7)

In sociolinguistics, intercultural communication is an important concept for language learners as well as teachers, because mastering only the linguistic features of a L2 is not enough for language learners to be accepted in different societies:

Sociolinguists have traced the sources of intercultural miscommunication to the distinctive nature of the value systems, pervasive configurations of social relations, and dominant ideologies of cultural groups. (Chick, 1996, p. 329)

Samovar (1981) and Samovar & Porter (2000) list important elements that determine cultural values: social organizations, verbal and nonverbal language, religion, perception of time, patterns of thought, concept of time, and use of space. Intercultural communication skills are necessary in order for language learners to be successful.

2.2 Transculturation

Zamel (1997) has expressed concerns over some researchers' tendency to characterize students by their linguistic and cultural backgrounds. She proposed using the construct transculturation so that students can think critically and to use their L1 knowledge to their benefit.

Transculture is an important concept in understanding how people from different cultures communicate. Transculturation is transcendence of cultural differences through experiencing other cultures while reflecting on one's own culture. Transculturation cannot be taught as a skill. It requires individuation of the learning process and cultural encounters:

Transculturation is a bridging process that involves negotiation of learning outcomes and adaptation and integration of socio-cultural identity. The goal of transculturation is individuation, or the re-connecting of a dependent and independent orientation to learning, which results in interdependency. The higher education mission, and in particular, the mission of additional language study, is to effect a route from dependence and familiarity toward independence and risk. Along the way attitudes shift involving the valuing of diversity, the acceptance of the unpredictable, and the emergence of new behaviors and thinking which do not detract from a healthy socio-cultural identity in tune with local socio-cultural and socio-educational needs. (Brady & Shinohara, 2000, p. 306)

According to the acculturation model of language learning, "various social and psychological factors govern the extent to which learners are able to adapt to the target

language culture and, thereby, acquire the L2" (Ellis, 1997, p.137). Forcing the learners to acculturate to the target-language group tends to promote an ethnocentric view toward the world (Kurachi, 1995). Often students perceive the aim of learning to communicate with only native speakers although English is a useful communication tool among non-native speakers (Brady & Shinohara, 2000). Teachers sometimes regarded the students' cultural background as negative and limiting (Zamel, 1997).

Brady and Shinohara (2000) used a group video presentation project, e-mail and fact-finding tasks using the Internet to promote transculturation in a language classroom. The purpose of the study was for their students to engage in self-directed learning, critical thinking and extended out-of-class activities.

Murray & Bollinger (2001) aimed to develop cross-cultural awareness of Japanese university students, and proposed three process-oriented tasks: communication via e-mail with penpals overseas, interview "returnee" students as guest speakers in class, and interview a native or a non-native English speaker, videotape it, and present it to class. They reported overall positive response from the participants.

2.3 Intercultural Sensitivity Scales

Assessing students' intercultural awareness is a daunting task. Hammer (1999) introduced the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI). Despite the reliability of the inventory, it requires a two-day training session to gain permission to conduct the survey and is commercially scored. Chen and Starosta (2000a) developed Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (ISS). The inventory aims to assess intercultural sensitivity or the affective dimension of intercultural communication competence. They defined intercultural sensitivity as "an individual's ability to develop a positive emotion towards understanding and appreciating cultural differences in order to promote appropriate and effective behavior in intercultural communication" (Chen & Starosta, 2000b, p. 408). They also stressed the dynamic nature of intercultural sensitivity and the important role of motivation and willingness of person to accept cultural difference. The instrument contains 24 items that can be self-scored by the students.

We have seen that cultural awareness is a vital part of language teaching. Also, considering the dynamic nature of culture, it is more effective to use process-oriented activities. Intercultural Sensitivity Scales questionnaire is a useful tool to measure students' level of transcultural understanding.

This study sought to investigate how Japanese learners' intercultural sensitivity changed

through interviewing exercises. During the fall semester the students were asked to form into groups of four to five, develop interview questions, and interview a non-Japanese student for ten minutes in English, which was then tape-recorded. Then the students were required to transcribe the interview, analyze it, write a reflective report and present on the interview, non-Japanese students' culture and what they learned from the experience for thirty minutes. This paper combined both qualitative and quantitative data to measure the students' perception of culture. It addresses the following research questions:

1. What is the level of intercultural communication sensitivity the participants are at?
2. What discoveries do the participants make through the intercultural communication activity to interview non-Japanese students on campus?
3. What reactions and changes do they experience as a result of their cross-cultural encounters on campus?

3. Method

3.1 Setting and Participants

The setting of the study was a private Japanese women's college in central Tokyo. The participants were 62 freshman students in 3 classes from age 19 to 40, a majority of whom were 19 years old, including three Chinese and one Korean student, majoring in Intercultural Communication. There were some students majoring in Japanese Studies as well as people returning to university after working for several years or raising children. The teacher and the students met twice a week from October 2001 to January 2002 in English listening comprehension classes.

3.2 Procedures

The first objective of the course was for students to be able to appreciate the value of transculturation and to use the knowledge appropriately and sensitively in communication. In class, students were given magazine articles on Japanese food, and they read and discussed them in English. Then students introduced one Japanese thing of their choice in English to create their own guidebook on Japanese culture. In another activity students identified instances and causes of miscommunication among different cultures in movies, although movies tend to be exaggerated and are not necessarily be accurate depictions of reality. Use of movies *Mr. Baseball*, *Pocahontas*, and *the Snowman* provided incentives for the students to think more about intercultural communication. Students kept Listening-Viewing journals on the movies and culture every other week. The format was developed

based on Fujishima (1995), and was adopted for transculturation purposes. In class, the students filled in the upper part of the sheet, i.e., notes on body language, cultural differences and interesting translation. For the translation, participants were asked to find the discrepancy between spoken English and Japanese subtitles. At other times, I showed the same segment of a film in both English and Japanese to contrast the differences. Twice a month, a 100-word journal in English on the content of the movie was assigned as homework.

The interview project encouraged students to communicate in English within an environment that consisted of Japanese and non-Japanese students. The final purpose of my class was to raise the participants' awareness that English could be used as a common language among non-native speakers for transcultural communication and mutual understanding.

3.3 Data Collection

Three kinds of data were collected for this study: (1) Intercultural Sensitivity Scale questionnaire results, (2) L-V journals, and (3) final reflective reports.

The participants answered Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (ISS) at the beginning and the end of the semester to both raise and measure their awareness of cultural diversity. The students answered the questionnaires and self-scored them in class at the beginning of the fall semester and at the end of the course. The instrument was also used to classify student journals.

Students wrote a reflective report in Japanese at the end of the course. They were asked to comment freely on what they learned and thought about as a result of the course and made suggestions for improvement. The reflective essays were not included in the final grade. L-V journals and reflective essays were classified according to the ISS scores and scanned for comments that relate to transcultural communication. The participants originally wrote L-V journals in English. Since reflective essays were written in Japanese, I translated them from Japanese into English. Some participants chose to write their reflections anonymously. I asked the students to sign the research permission form if they were willing to be included in this research. Most of the students agreed to participate.

In the following section, I will introduce the ISS scores first. They provide guidance in selecting and categorizing the qualitative data. They also showed the change in students' attitudes toward people from other countries in the course of three months.

4. Results

The overall results of ISS, journals, and reflective essays showed the positive effects of the interview activity on the participants' intercultural sensitivity. The average intercultural sensitivity scores of the Japanese and non-Japanese participants increased significantly from 80.42 to 88.43.

4.1 Intercultural Sensitivity Scale

The ISS results from 62 participants ranged from 60 to 104 while the possible scores were from 24 to 120. The average scores for all the participants were 80.42 on October 29, 2001, and 88.43 on January 18, 2002. The increase of the ISS scores indicates that the students' intercultural awareness was raised on the course of three months. The figures demonstrate the effectiveness of the interview activity to increase intercultural sensitivity. The average score for non-Japanese students were 90.5 in October and 90 in January, higher than the Japanese students. The scores seemed to match the actual student behavior in and out of class observed from their journal entries and their final reflections on the course.

Table 1

Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (ISS) Questionnaire Results

ISS Scores	<u>October 29, 2001</u>	<u>January 28, 2002</u>
	Number of Students	Number of Students
60-69	5	0
70-79	20	12
80-89	26	31
90-99	9	16
100-109	2	3

4.2 Journal Entries and Reflective Essays

The participants' L-V journals and reflective essays were first classified according to the ISS scores and then scanned for comments that relate to intercultural communication. Bennett (1993) defines six levels of intercultural sensitivity: (1) Denial, (2) Defense, (3) Minimization, (4) Acceptance, (5) Adaptation and (6) Integration. In the parenthesis after quotations, I indicated October and January ISS scores, followed by journal or essay, Japanese or non-Japanese writer, and the date it was written (month/day/year).

(1) In the stage of denial, a person does not believe that the cultural differences exist.

Intentional or unintentional, a person creates social barriers to abstain from cultural encounters. Seemingly harmless, ignorance in the denial stage creates the worldview that puts people from other cultures to subhuman status, and regards them as objects to control.

A student mentioned in her reflective essay that she almost had no contact with non-Japanese people before this class started. I assume that it was the case for some other students in my study before the interview:

For a person like me who has almost no chance to speak to non-Japanese people, interview was a precious time. I began to wish more than before that I want to be able to speak English. Thank you so much for giving me the opportunity (79/78, essay, Japanese, 1/21/02).

In the following quote, a student described the current situation of Japanese and non-Japanese students' complete separation on campus. According to her, there had been almost no intercultural communication taking place:

It seemed that non-Japanese students never had a chance to talk to Japanese students, but Japanese students also didn't have much contact with non-Japanese students. At least, my friends and I were like that. In the first place, non-Japanese students flock together, and it is very difficult for us Japanese to enter the group. Probably the same goes for the group of Japanese students. So I am very thankful that I was given the opportunity to speak to a non-Japanese student (83/102, essay, Japanese, 1/21/02).

(2) Defense is the second stage of intercultural sensitivity. People recognize cultural differences in a negative way, and create defense against them, so as to preserve their ethnocentric worldview. Some students showed symptoms of defense against different cultural threats:

It is clear that there are some differences between Japan and U.S. I felt Japanese is looked down on by American (72/81, journal, Japanese, 10/5/01).

Last summer, when I visited England, I found clearly that British people tend to look down on other countries people. I was very surprised. Because they really hate American pronunciation. I want to know relationship better between American and England (79/78, journal, Japanese, 11/30/01).

Rather than looking at cultural differences objectively, these students turned negative

and perceived their cultures inferior to the others.

Another example from the defense stage is denigration or stereotyping. Some students wrote in their reflective essays that their worldview was limited before the interview, but they started to have more interest in different cultures:

My group studied about Romania. I only had the knowledge about the famous Romanian gymnast, Comaneci before, but I learned a lot more about the country, so it was fun (essay, Japanese, 1/21/02).

Speaking of China, a lot of people think that: it has a large population, delicious foods... and so on. Although there is some truth that, too, the best thing what I was taken an interest was "tea" (essay, Japanese, 1/21/02).

Stereotyping is typical for people unfamiliar with a certain culture. Participants made new discoveries about culture on their own.

(3) At the minimization level, people use their own cultural values to interpret others' behavior. They believe in their worldview whether political, religious, or economic, and attempt to convert the people around them. There was no statement by students that Japanese culture should be universal. One reason may be that Japanese people traditionally consider themselves unique and different from other cultures.

(4) The next stage is acceptance. At this level, cultural difference is acknowledged and respected as it is. In the first example, a student explained how she felt after watching the movie, *Pocahontas*:

I was moved by this movie. Pocahontas and John was grown in different country, different environment. Their love is beyond the words and also their skin colors. I think Pocahontas and John have a large heart which can accept anything. They respect each other and each culture (93/83, journal, Japanese, 12/7/01).

Another student wrote about a scene from *Mr. Baseball* and how American and Japanese cultures have different values, namely, individualism and collectivism:

Like that Japanese woman said to him "American only feel 'me', 'me', 'me'". From the words, we can see that Japanese have a group spirit. Everyone tries one's best for their team, not self. Of course, the countries which have difference backgrounds become difference thinkings (90/95, journal, non-Japanese, 12/7/01).

In this journal by a Korean student, she contrasted Australian and Asian food culture.

She concluded that Korean and Japanese were actually quite similar:

As we know see between Japan and America, there are many different cultures and living styles. In my case, when I went to Australia, about 6 years ago. I was also very confused. For example, my home stay family was liked to eat puddings mixed with rice. One of Japanese student and I, we couldn't eat that. We couldn't imagine. In Korea, we think that respecting for senior. So when we drink aohole, we have to drink turning head, not faced for senior. And, we have to wait until senior finish eating meal. Although there are different things between Japan and Korea almost things are same (95/87, journal, non-Japanese, 10/26/01).

We should accept different customs each other. The Japanese players often say 'Gaijin'. They separate Gaijin from Japanese clearly. So, we can't understand each other forever (91/90, journal, Japanese).

Gaijin or outsider is considered a problematic term to be used in regards to foreigners in Japan. Usually the term, *gaijin*, is used by Japanese to refer to a Westerner, not an Asian. This student noticed the language that separates and discriminates against foreigners. She saw the underlining prejudice against Westerners and tried to promote respect toward physical, linguistic and cultural differences.

(5) At the adaptation stage, people make efforts to communicate with people from different cultures while preserving the identities. For example, the student set her purpose of studying English to adapt to different cultures. Her willingness to learn English as a tool of intercultural communication overlaps with my purpose of conducting this research project. The student reflected on her culture and American one in comparison to each other. Then she determined how she would live by keeping certain Japanese culture and leaning to express herself more in an American way:

It's true that Japanese try to restrain the direct expression of emotion. On the other hand, American express their feelings openly. In Japan, there are some cases that what you say in your official stand; your real intention is different. I think it is not good. But I think that Japanese can't imitate American's expression of emotion. Because Japanese automatically by living in Japanese society. It seems to be characteristic of Japanese society. But I think I should make a greater effort to speak our minds freely (84/85, journal, Japanese, 10/15/01).

The other student realized that leaning English is also useful to communicate with non-

native speakers in Asia:

Today English is called international language and I could understand it fully by communicating in English while interviewing non-native speakers. I used to consider "English" as the subject to learn how to talk to Americans and British people. But I realized that I could have conversations with Chinese, Koreans, Indians and people from many countries in English. I want to be able to speak English better (60/87, essay, Japanese, 1/21/02).

A Chinese student commented on how her life in Japan made her reconsider about her own culture, and how little she knew about it:

I was told to write a composition of the traditional culture of my country today. I held a pencil and thought about it over and over. I almost searched everywhere in my brain. Finally, I found my knowledge about my country's culture was so poor that I know not enough to write down anything. I have no choice except to search something on the Internet, it took me five hours to do that, but I learned a lot about my country's culture. It is ironic that I realize the value of my country's culture when I am in a foreign country (95/95, journal, non-Japanese, no date).

(6) Integration is the final and highest stage of intercultural sensitivity according to Bennett (1993). At this level, a person becomes multicultural, belonging to different and various cultures and able to make relevant and rational decisions according to the surrounding cultural norms. I did not find an instance of integration among my students.

In addition to the increase in the ISS scores, students expressed different benefits and advantages they received as the result of the interviewing exercise.

Friendship among the students in my class was one of the most important by-products of the interview exercise. Since the interview, dictation and presentation were all done in groups, the students said that they made friends easily:

What I learned from listening comprehension class was that English is not a subject to learn on my own, but to learn with others while having fun (essay, Japanese, 1/21/02).

Feelings of fear and anxiety that the participants felt at the beginning of the course changed gradually into confidence:

Interviewing a non-Japanese student was the most memorable activity. I was very nervous when I asked the questions in English. But I learned to enjoy speaking and listening in English (76/85, essay, Japanese, 1/21/02).

I am not scared of non-Japanese students and non-Japanese teachers as much as before thanks to the listening comprehension class (86/85, essay, Japanese, 1/21/02).

I went to homestay in Australia before. Since the family couldn't understand me and I couldn't understand their English, I detested talking to foreigners. I was worried what would happen if I spoke to a foreign student in Japanese and he or she couldn't understand me. I was so worried when I heard that we would interview foreign students. But it was actually really fun when I met a foreign student because I could pick up more English than I expected. I think I gained the skill in this listening comprehension class. At the same time I learned that talking directly to foreign students was the best way to learn about different cultures. After I made the discovery, I could speak up to foreign students in my seminar class on my own and I really felt happy about it (87/80, essay, Japanese, 1/21/02).

I am able to talk to non-Japanese students now (essay, Japanese, 1/21/02).

The students gradually overcame their reluctance to speak up to the non-Japanese students on campus and took initiatives in intercultural communication. The students' change in attitude toward the non-Japanese students was the initial aim of the course.

The Japanese and non-Japanese participants expressed that they have more motivation to use English to accomplish other tasks. These students made an important discovery that English is not just an end in itself, but can be a useful tool to accomplish other goals:

The best activity of this semester, of course, was making the interview tape of a non-Japanese student. We did everything from making appointment to presentation, and discovered so much. I found new friends, and felt the necessity to learn English (essay, Japanese, 1/21/02).

I have been in this class for almost a year now. I feel more and more eager to use English to do many things (90/95, essay, non-Japanese, 1/21/02).

Another reaction was more interest in intercultural communication. Some students expressed a desire to know more about other cultures:

For me Indonesia was a mystery. So I was more and more fascinated by it. For preparation, I made so many new discoveries about Indonesia's geography, culture, language, food, etc. through books and the Internet... I want to know more about other cultures (72/81, essay, Japanese, 1/21/02).

It was important and interesting to learn about different cultures (84/83, essay, Japanese, 1/21/02).

Thanks to the listening comprehension class in the fall semester, I have more interest in foreign countries (essay, Japanese, 1/21/02).

Interviewing non-Japanese students was a good opportunity for me to learn different cultures. I studied about Romania, and since I didn't know anything about the country, I made many new discoveries (essay, Japanese, 1/21/02).

Finally, here is a comment by a non-Japanese student who participated in the interview project. She made a positive remark on how she had benefited from the exercise and how it eased her stress of living overseas. I think that non-Japanese students interviewing other non-Japanese students is also a good learning experience:

Unlike the Japanese language school, my life surrounded by the Japanese students was always stressful and a little frightening. I could relax a little in this class. I thought interview with non-Japanese students was an excellent idea. Since the teacher studied abroad in America, she understood the feelings of the foreign student like me (95/87, essay, non-Japanese, 1/21/02).

In the next section, I will summarize these results, and analyze them.

5. Discussion

The first research question was about the level of intercultural communication sensitivity the participants were at. Following Bennett's categories of intercultural sensitivity, my students showed instances of denial, acceptance, and adaptation in their writing. The level of intercultural sensitivity differed; however, and the participants reported the positive influence of the interview exercise on their intercultural communication skills.

The second research question was the discoveries and reactions the participants experienced through the intercultural communication activity to interview non-Japanese students. Some students regard English as a communication tool with native speakers that they may not use often. They became aware of that English is useful in communicating among non-native speakers as well and that the language can be utilized to establish communication in real life.

My last research question was about the reactions and changes the participants experienced as a result of their cross-cultural encounters on campus. The increase in the ISS was significant. They experienced other benefits as the result of the interview as well. They established stronger sense of mutual friendship within the class by making appointments, preparing the questions, and working together to present. They also reported more confidence in communicating in English. Before the interview, the participants had little or no contact with non-Japanese students, in large part because of their fear of and anxiety about communication failure. Interviewing gave a positive experience that their English was good enough to communicate. Some students continued talking to non-Japanese students on campus after this interview exercise and I hope this project created more accepting environment for non-Japanese students.

6. Conclusion

This study aimed to increase the transculturation skills of the Japanese and non-Japanese participants in my listening class by assigning students to interview non-Japanese students on campus. The results showed an overall positive effect of the interview on the participants' intercultural sensitivity. In addition, they expressed the changes in their attitude toward non-Japanese students and English learning. This activity was effective to prepare the participants for intercultural encounters. I hope my students in the Department of Intercultural Communication will make use of the learning experience to create a transcultural college community.

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