



Youth Roles and Linguistic Functions in Cross-Cultural Practice: Implications for Japanese Language Education

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Abstract: While the multipolar world drives rapid and high-quality global development, it also gives rise to new issues of the times. Taking Chinese and international students at Inner Mongolia Honder College of Arts and Sciences as its subjects, this study adopts a case study approach to examine two types of cross-cultural practice: first, Chinese students' capacity for cultural symbol transmission in English public speaking; and second, Mongolian international students' language adaptation and their cognition of Sino-Mongolian cultural contrasts during their studies in China. On this basis, the paper foregrounds youth roles and language use, exploring the functions and influence of young people in multipolar cultural dialogues. Drawing on the above case analyses, the paper further discusses the implications of cross-cultural practice for Japanese language education and puts forward preliminary approaches to integrating language and cultural content in Japanese language teaching. The findings tentatively indicate a mutually reinforcing relationship between youth participation in cross-cultural practice and the enhancement of their linguistic competence and cultural awareness. Accordingly, the study advocates creating contextualized opportunities for language use for young people in educational practice and introducing a cross-cultural comparative perspective into university-level Japanese language teaching, so as to promote the dual acquisition of linguistic forms and cultural understanding.

Keywords: language application, intercultural communication, the role of youth, Japanese language education

INTRODUCTION

Research Background

Under the current multipolar context where digitalization transforms the globe and cultural misunderstandings affect international relations, it is particularly valuable for young people to courageously take on the mission of being "cultural dialogue diplomats". As the fundamental bridge for young people's cross-cultural communication, changes in the proportion of speakers of different languages worldwide should also be taken into account. Based on the above understanding, Inner Mongolia Honder College of Arts and Sciences has actively established friendly cooperation with universities in different countries, carried out international exchange and study programs, and provided precious cultural dialogue opportunities and innovative approaches to Japanese language teaching for Chinese and foreign youth. However, existing research has rarely examined how youth naturally act as cultural bridges in everyday cross-cultural encounters, nor has it systematically explored the pedagogical implications of such practices for Japanese language education. This study aims to fill this gap.

Research Questions

1. What specific roles do Chinese and foreign youth play in the dialogue practice within a multipolar culture?
2. How does language function in cross-cultural practice?
3. How can cross-cultural dialogue be transformed into innovative pedagogical approaches for application in Japanese language education?

Research Methodology

1. Research Design

This study adopts an exploratory qualitative case study design, which is suitable for exploring how young people use language in intercultural practice and what roles they play.

2. Case Selection

Three cases were selected using purposive sampling, each representing a different type of intercultural contact: cultural symbol output (a Chinese student introducing Chinese culture in English), short-term immersion (a Chinese student on a study tour in South Korea), and long-term adaptation (a Mongolian student studying in China).

3. Participants

The study analyzes materials from three undergraduate students. Student Ma (Chinese, English major, first year) provided her speech script for an English contest. Student Zhao (Chinese, English Education major) participated in an interview after a study tour in South Korea. Student Yumei (Mongolian) participated in an interview after one year of study at Honder College. All names have been anonymized.

4. Data Collection

Data sources include: a speech script (Appendix A), interview records from a study tour student (Appendix B), and interview records from an international student (Appendix C). The interviews were semi-structured, each lasting



approximately 30 minutes, focusing on intercultural experiences and language use.

5. Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was applied. First, initial coding was conducted based on the three research questions, generating codes such as “cultural symbols”, “language barriers”, “perceived similarities”, and “cultural adaptation”. These codes were then grouped into broader themes: “the multiple roles of youth”, “the extended functions of language”, and “implications for language education”.

6. Ethics

All participants gave informed consent. Their names have been anonymized, and the data are used solely for academic purposes.

Literature Review

Wang Xiaohui (2017) points out that Inner Mongolia Honder College of Arts and Sciences has innovatively launched characteristic cross-cultural courses leveraging its geographical advantages and the expansion of international student programs, emphasizing that teachers should conduct cultural and language teaching for students under the concept of general education.

Furthermore, the research in this paper is grounded upon two core theoretical pillars: Bennett’s Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS)—which posits that an individual’s adaptation to cultural differences is primarily reflected in the cognitive transition from ethnocentrism to ethnorelativism—and Krashen’s Input Hypothesis—which emphasizes the significance of comprehensible input for language acquisition.

CASE ANALYSIS

Cross- Cultural Practices of Chinese Students

1. Dissemination of Cross-Cultural Concepts in English Speeches(see Appendix A)

Example A: The dragon’s body is as long as the Great Wall of China, its claws are as sharp as a knife, and its eyes are as big as two bright lanterns, shining in the dark. Far from the negative connotations often associated with dragons in Western folklore, the Chinese Dragon is a symbol of power, luck, and prosperity.

Analysis A: To enable the audience to quickly grasp the respective cultural characteristics of Chinese and Western dragons, Student Ma chose to start with the Chinese dragon she was familiar with. She broke down and symbolized the Chinese dragon’s physical features—specifically, describing its appearance using well-known Chinese cultural symbols (such as the Great Wall and lanterns). This approach not only achieved the speech objective of “painting an imaginative picture with language”, but also delivered effective cultural communication. However, a limitation lies in the fact that the student did not focus on the commonalities between Chinese and Western cultures, nor did she conduct in-depth reflection or provide supplementary details regarding the origins and differences of Western dragon culture.

According to the DMIS, individuals in the defense stage tend to “denigrate cultural differences” or view their own culture as superior. Student Ma’s speech, while effectively communicating the image of the Chinese dragon, adopts a strategy of contrast—highlighting the “positive” Chinese dragon against the implied “negative” Western dragon. This reflects the typical defense-stage pattern of “we are good, they are not.” This observation is not a criticism of the student. Rather, it reveals a key pedagogical point: awareness of cultural output alone is insufficient. Students must be guided from “comparing strengths and weaknesses” toward “understanding the origins of differences”. This directly informs Japanese language education: when teaching students to introduce Japanese culture, educators should avoid simple dichotomies and instead analyze the historical and social contexts behind cultural symbols. To avoid inadvertently oversimplifying or neglecting other cultures when presenting one’s own, both educators and learners should increase the emphasis on learning cultural backgrounds and make the process of cultural input more flexible and integrated into daily life.

Example B: Internally, it has promoted unity and harmony among diverse ethnic groups, strengthening national identity. This mythical creature has also become a bridge for cultural exchange, showcasing the richness of Chinese heritage to the global community.

Analysis B: The quoted content in this paragraph also aligns with the defense stage mentioned earlier. Student Ma provided a straightforward introduction to the spiritual symbolism of the Chinese dragon and its significance in Chinese culture, yet she overlooked reflections on questions such as “why Western societies have persisted in cultural misunderstandings about the Chinese dragon” and “whether such domesticating expressions can evoke cultural resonance”.

2. Language Application and Cultural Acquisition in Study Tours (see Appendix B)

To broaden students’ international horizons and advance the cultivation of international talents, Inner Mongolia Honder College of Arts and Sciences organized a summer study tour to Chungwoon University in South Korea for teachers and students from July 13 to 21. During the tour, Student Zhao, majoring in English Language Education, summarized the crucial role of language application in cross-cultural processes through her practical use and immersive acquisition of English and Chinese in unique contexts in South Korea. This demonstrates that the young people’s growth was facilitated by an environment that fulfilled the effective input conditions of Krashen’s Input Hypothesis—namely, comprehensibility, interest and relevance, and the absence of a rigid grammatical sequence.

Chinese Cultural Input for International Students(see Appendix C)

As a Mongolian international student at Honder College, Student Yumei carefully observed the commonalities and unique traits between Chinese and Mongolian cultures. The commonality lies in the shared noble value of emphasizing family and respecting elders in the traditional cultures of both countries, while the unique trait manifests in their distinct food cultures. Her ability to integrate the commonalities and traits of the two cultures into her own identity within a short

period is also rooted in the “Affective Filter Hypothesis” under Krashen’s Input Hypothesis: the low anxiety environment provided by Honder College and the high motivation sparked by Chinese culture have made it easier for her to resonate with the emotional commonalities in the cultures, thereby promoting her personal growth and cross-cultural understanding.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Case Comparison: Divergent Youth Responses Across Intercultural Contexts

A comparison between Student Ma (cultural symbol output) and Student Yumei (long-term adaptation) reveals an interesting difference. Student Ma remained in the defense stage of the DMIS, while Student Yumei quickly identified cultural commonalities between China and Mongolia. Why did this difference occur?

One plausible explanation lies in Krashen’s Affective Filter Hypothesis. Student Yumei’s low-anxiety environment at Honder College—combined with her high motivation triggered by genuine interest in Chinese culture—lowered her affective filter, making it easier for her to resonate with emotional commonalities across cultures. In contrast, Student Ma operated in a high-stakes public speaking context, which may have raised her affective filter and led her to adopt a more defensive, contrastive strategy.

This comparison does not suggest that one response is superior to the other. Rather, it highlights the diversity of youth roles in intercultural dialogue—some act as cultural disseminators, others as cultural integrators. More importantly, it suggests that pedagogical interventions should attend to learners’ emotional and motivational states. For Japanese language education, this means creating low-anxiety, high-motivation learning environments where students feel safe to explore cultural differences without resorting to simplistic us-versus-them comparisons.

A concrete classroom application of this insight would be a “cultural comparison without judgment” activity: students first watch a video of a Chinese and a Japanese student discussing their respective dragon legends, then work in pairs to identify similarities and differences, and finally reflect on why each culture developed its own image. The goal is not to decide which dragon is “better,” but to understand the historical and social contexts behind each.

The Roles of Youth in the Dialogue Practice

The “multipolar cultures” studied in this paper are primarily characterized by different cultural images under the same symbol, with discussions centered on cultural misunderstandings and information translation in cultural dialogues. In a multipolar world with multipolar cultures, the roles of youth in cultural dialogues are equally multipolar.

First, young people are interpreters of local culture. Endowed with the advantage of the local language, they serve as a pillar force in understanding local culture and disseminating it to the outside world.

Second, young people are recipients of multipolar cultures. Like standing on the shoulders of giants, young people, building on the knowledge accumulation and pathbreaking efforts of predecessors, acquire a broad global perspective. By leveraging digital tools such as short videos, they extensively learn foreign languages and cultures.

Third, young people are bridge-builders of multipolar cultures. Specifically, through the output of local culture and the input of foreign cultures, they establish friendly relations with young people from other countries. Together, they conduct in-depth research on the unique and shared characteristics of each other’s cultures, and jointly explore strategies of alienation or domestication in the process of cultural input and output. In this way, they aim to reduce cultural misunderstandings, achieve the goal of seeking common ground while respecting differences in cultures, and contribute to the global efforts of building a community with a shared future for mankind in the pursuit of world peace.

The Function of Language in Multipolar Culture

In a multipolar world, cultural dialogue cannot exist without language as a tool for conveying information. Cultural misunderstandings are inevitable; therefore, questions such as when to use which language, how to use language in different contexts, and how to express one’s views clearly through language are not only directions that language researchers and learners should jointly explore in the future, but also core considerations for young people in cultural dialogue.

Due to the unique characteristics and shared commonalities of different languages—whether in terms of vocabulary, grammar, syntax, or the processes of teaching and learning—languages are enabling cultural communicators from diverse cultural backgrounds to acquire knowledge of multipolar cultures, and to participate in the development and refinement of such cultures. Meanwhile, owing to the distinct features and shared traits of different cultures, including their origins and development, emotional connotations, and philosophical tendencies, speakers of different mother tongues are able to develop multidimensional thinking patterns. This allows them to acquire language skills within a cultural context that is professional and instinctive, and to gain deeper cultural empathy or cultural experiences—rather than being limited to one-sided cultural misunderstandings or cultural hatred.

Innovative Teaching Methods in Japanese Language Education

In the process of Japanese language education and learning, the culture-language integration approach should be appropriately adopted. Specifically, a multicultural and multilingual learning environment should be proactively created for students, within which they are guided to deeply appreciate the charm of cultural conflicts and commonalities. Beyond creating such an environment, the following concrete teaching strategies can be directly implemented in university-level Japanese language classrooms:

1. Comparative cultural analysis tasks. Students compare a cultural symbol from Japan (e.g., the Japanese dragon ryū, gift-giving customs, or honorific expressions) with its Chinese equivalent. Using Japanese as the medium of communication, they analyze the origins, connotations, and social functions of each symbol. For example, after reading the speech in Appendix A, students could create a bilingual comparison table of Chinese and Japanese dragon imagery and present their findings in small groups.

2. Low-anxiety output activities. Drawing on Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis, instructors can design ungraded, low-stakes speaking tasks that encourage students to express their cultural observations without fear of error correction. Role-plays in which a Japanese international student explains a cultural practice to a Chinese peer, or vice versa, are particularly effective. Pair discussions and small-group sharing sessions also help lower the affective filter.

3. Contextualized input using authentic materials. The interview excerpts in Appendices B and C, or similar authentic materials (e.g., recordings of cross-cultural dialogues, short video clips of international students sharing experiences), can serve as listening or reading comprehension texts. After processing the input, students identify instances of cultural misunderstanding or successful cultural bridging and discuss, in Japanese, how the participants could have communicated more effectively.

4. Reflective writing on intercultural encounters. Students are asked to write short reflective diaries (e.g., 150 words per week) in Japanese about their own cross-cultural experiences, either real or imagined. The instructor responds to content and reflection rather than correcting every grammatical error, thereby maintaining a low-anxiety, high-motivation learning environment. Over time, this practice helps students internalize both linguistic forms and cultural perspectives.

By combining these four strategies with a multicultural learning environment, Japanese language educators can move beyond isolated cultural fact lessons and foster genuine intercultural competence alongside language proficiency.

CONCLUSION

Cross-cultural practice enables Chinese and international youth to acquire language skills, refine their cultural awareness, and grow into diplomatic talents needed in the contemporary international community. In the future, more contextualized language application opportunities and research and experimentation platforms for teaching methods should be provided to young people. Influenced by culture—as an abstract symbol—young people actively conduct research on the integration of language and culture in teaching, participate in the task of promoting multipolar cultures to achieve multipolar balance and multipolar innovation, accelerating the development of global science and technology, economy, and humanities, which is conducive to the progress of human civilization as a whole.

This paper primarily adopts a qualitative case study approach. For future research, methods such as questionnaires and journalistic interviews can be employed, and the scope of the survey population should be expanded to strengthen data support. Additionally, future studies should deepen case analysis, quantify the actual impacts and effects of the culture-language integration approach in Japanese language teaching, elaborate on Chinese and international youth's understanding of and practice in multipolar cultures, and focus on the collective cultural development and exchange outcomes derived from cultural dialogues between Chinese and international youth.

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APPENDIX A: Speech Transcript by Student Jiadi Ma

This speech is written by a first-year undergraduate student, prepared for competing in the speech contest of the 2024 "FLTRP·ETIC Cup" "Understanding Contemporary China" National Foreign Language Contest for College Students.

The Chinese Dragon Is Good

Good afternoon! Today, I am honored to share with you a captivating tale that has been woven over thousands of years — the story of the Chinese Dragon.

Before we start, I have some simple questions for you. Do you know what the zodiac year 2024 is? Yes, this is the Year of the Dragon.

So, what does the Chinese Dragon look like in your impression? I have prepared some pictures of the Chinese Dragon that might show it vividly. In my opinion, the dragon's body is as long as the Great Wall of China, its claws are as sharp as a knife, and its eyes are as big as two bright lanterns, shining in the dark. Far from the negative connotations often associated with dragons in Western folklore, the Chinese Dragon is a symbol of power, luck, and prosperity.

The spirit of the Chinese Dragon has had a profound impact on both China and the world. Internally, it has promoted unity and harmony among diverse ethnic groups, strengthening national identity. This mythical creature has also become a bridge for cultural exchange, showcasing the richness of Chinese heritage to the global community. It's not just a symbol;

it's a living, breathing embodiment of the Chinese people's aspirations and values.

In conclusion, the Chinese Dragon is far more than a symbol; it represents the aspirational values of the Chinese people. Let us embrace this legacy and continue to tell the story of the Chinese Dragon, spreading its message of hope and unity. Thank you.

APPENDIX B: Comments from the Interview by a Study Tour Student Xin Zhao

As an English major, my study tour experience at Chungwoon University in South Korea has given me a brand-new understanding of the collision and integration of the Chinese, English, and Korean languages. This is perhaps the most beautiful form of linguistic integration, and also the most precious gift from this study tour.

APPENDIX C: Comments from the Interview by International Student Yumei

Sometimes I encounter small challenges, especially in my studies and adapting to life here, but overall I'm managing and staying positive. Over the past year I feel I've improved a lot. My vocabulary has grown, and I can now communicate in daily life more smoothly. Studying at Honder Campus has really helped me practice in a real environment. I think both Chinese and Mongolian people care a lot about family and show great respect to elders. The difference I notice is in food culture. Mongolian food has more meat and dairy, while Chinese food has more vegetables and many different flavors. I find these differences very interesting and meaningful.