

# The Use of Video in Teaching Cross—Cultural Comparison to Japanese Learner of English and American Minority Cultures

CARLOS B. TOWNSEL

## ABSTRACT

This paper will focus on the use of authentic video in teaching cross—cultural comparison and diversity to Japanese learners of English and American minority cultures. The primary purpose is to illustrate how social conscience raising can be achieved by the use of video presentations and selected readings on American culture, values and traditions. This paper also intends to assess the various attitudes and beliefs held by Japanese regarding American minority groups and cultures in the United States.

## INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the topic of American minority group people and cultures has become a very controversial subject in Japan. Quite often in the news media, magazine and television commentary, there has been a tremendous amount of attention given to various minority groups, primarily African Americans, (Blacks) Chicanos, Hispanics and Native American Indians in the United States. Until recently, these minorities have been simply ignored, misunderstood or unknown to the vast majority of Japanese people. Whatever knowledge most Japanese people possess about the more than nine minority group Americans in the United States is usually stereotypical and based on misinformation.

The purpose of this paper was to ascertain the effect of video

presentations to Japanese ESL students using the movies **Lean On Me** and **Hollywood Shuffle** in an attempt to enlighten the learner to the similarities between Japanese culture and those of American minority group cultures. As a result of this exposure, it is presumed previously held negative attitudes of American minorities would be changed to more healthy attitudes to some extent.

### Japanese Attitudes

When teaching American minority cultures, it might and should be expected that students will bring to class his/her own preconceived ideas, notions and attitudes about American minority group people; specifically African-Americans, Hispanics, Chicanos, and Native American Indians. Regretfully, we discover the overwhelming majority of these attitudes are negative and based on stereotypes having been derived from the various media, school or upbringing. van Wolferen (1989) suggest that these negative attitudes are constantly reinforced by numerous outspoken and usually uninformed academics and political leaders in Japanese society. Studies by Damen (1987) indicate that many of these attitudes are found in the ethnocentrism of Japanese and not necessarily feeling founded in racism, while Doi (1985) hypothesized the lack of cross-cultural understanding of Japanese would only perpetuate oblivious attitudes to anything new or different. Words, as suggested by Gozzi (1990) are the lifeblood of any culture and as new vocabularies are created, changes in the culture are too. Halliday (1978) indicates the acquisition of any language requires an understanding of the culture, its subcultures, and the meaning found in the words used to express ideas and concepts. Valdes (1986) suggests that the strong attitude toward individualism in American culture crosses the entire spectrum of the society. Wallerstein (1983) suggest that students of ESL often

## The Use of Video in Teaching Cross-Cultural Comparison to Japanese

blame themselves because of their inability to speak English and create negative acculturations toward minorities in American society as an excuse for their linguistic shortcomings. Due to the minimal amount of research and studies in the field of cross-cultural interaction among Japanese and minority cultures done to date, more studies need to be conducted to ascertain to effect of attitude change and conscience raising among Japanese after exposing them to unknown aspects of American society, it's national culture and the lifestyles of the people.

As previously mentioned, very little work has been done to date regarding the impressions and attitudes held by Japanese learners of English, towards American minority group members; Blacks, Hispanics, and American Indians. Japan is considered a homogeneous society. The opportunities for frequent contact with non-Japanese people or the exposure for the average Japanese to people of a different racial, ethnic, or national background is rather limited. This is especially the case when we think of the national population living outside the major urban areas of Tokyo and Osaka. Most Japanese have had little if any, contact with these group members and therefore their knowledge is generally little more than superficial. Many of the contacts and interactions Japanese have or have had with these group members has been either through meeting professional performers (dancers, singers, actors, models, etc.) or athletes (baseball, basketball, soccer, track, etc.). The majority of these contacts, generally consist of Japanese going to an event, paying money and observing these people perform and/or entertain them. Actual face-to-face communication is virtually nil.

### American Minorities

In recent years, a significant number of Japanese ESL students

have been traveling abroad to the United States, England, Australia, Canada and various other English people countries. Many of these students, businessmen and women, tourist, etc., will undoubtedly have some communicative contact with minority group members of those countries. It is exceedingly important that Japanese not only understand the similarities in the thinking process of these people to that of Japanese, but almost have an understanding and sensitivity for what is or could be, considered culturally offensive to members of those groups. Recently a group of Japanese tourist were seen wearing "Little Black Sambo" T-shirts and sweatshirts in Washington D.C.. Most Americans, regardless of race, found this culturally offensive and clearly evidence of a cultural ignorance about American society among Japanese in general.

Most people take pride in their country and their ethnic heritage in the United States. The aim of these video presentations is to acquaint Japanese learners to American minority populations and their cultures. The conclusions the learner draws at the completion of these lessons will surely be his/her own, but it will be presumed that by the information obtained from these presentations will have a positive affect on the attitudes and dispositions of learners who held previously negative opinions.

### Teaching Materials

The primary video used in these lesson is Lean On Me. The theme of the film deals with the education of inner city high school students and how their performance on State administered achievement tests were significantly improved within a period of one year. The film depicts how through positive self images and the reinforcement of the concept of *high self esteem*, students evaluated as low/underachievers, eventually succeeded academically

The Use of Video in Teaching Cross—Cultural Comparison to Japanese in school. In addition to the movie **Lean On Me**, students are later introduced to a movie where the major theme deals with racial issues and stereotypes, titled: **Hollywood Shuffle**.

### Text

The video presentations are supplemented by readings from the textbook, **Contact USA 2nd. ed.**, and are selected according to the nature of the sequenced presented in the lesson plan of the teacher. It is strongly suggested that prior to all video presentations, the appropriate readings are read and thoroughly discussed. This will assure that the student has enough back ground information at hand to reasonably interpret what he/her is viewing and therefore get the most out of each lesson.

Additional reading materials include the monthly, **EBONY** magazine. **EBONY** magazine, is highly regarded as the most informative source of information concerning the social, economic and political conditions effecting the contemporary Black and other minority American communities. The feature articles, commentary and news items are easy to read and comprehend for most high beginner to intermediate level ESL students. While most material written about minority group members in the United States is historical and primarily focus on the civil rights movement, **EBONY**, contains information relevant to modern day international, domestic and local issues concerning the United States.

### The Materials

I have been extremely successful in generating lively discussions among my students, after they viewed the movie **Lean On Me**. I think this is one of the best authentic videos available. The

success of this video is found the enlightening and educational theme of the story. I refer to the movie, **The Blackboard Jungle** under sources and materials as a primer to contemporary authentic videos. These two videos portray American minorities and their cultures in a positive light. Both videos have high school educational setting, although access to the video Lean On Me is more easily obtainable throughout Japan. Japanese people have traditionally placed a tremendous importance on academic study and the education they receive in high school. Many of the lifelong relationships Japanese people maintain, found their beginnings during their high school careers. Consequently, these materials prove to be of great interest to these learners and therefore the motivation for learning English both spoken and written is greatly increased.

#### Other Sources

American television programs, newscast, documentaries and feature dramas also provide for acceptable materials in this approach. Tape recorded U.S. television (sitcoms) programs are probably the best video materials the teacher could provide their students. As these programs generally mirror contemporary American society and social issues, they would also be most appropriate in their educational value. Additionally, many of these programs are available in *closed-caption*, therefore providing the learner an additional aid in his/her learning process. Furthermore, television programs e.g., **The Bill Cosby Show** or **L.A. Law** provide the learner with a realistic look at the social status of American minority groups and portrays these group members in positive lights rather than the traditional images found in blaxploitation films. I would speculate that if more Japanese ESL learners knew that **The Bill Cosby Show** is the number one rated television

The Use of Video in Teaching Cross-Cultural Comparison to Japanese (sitcom) program in the United States, and television program sponsors in Japan have intentionally neglected to air TV programs of it's nature to the viewing public, they would be outraged. Parenthetically, I must suggest that any TV program or movie that presents a "*step 'n' fetchit*" character will be aired on prime time television, where one that would present any American minority in a positive image, will undoubtedly not be shown on Japanese television or seen in local movie theatre, therefore I suggest that videos of this nature be recorded by the teacher when he/she is in the United States and shown here to their students.

### **Compositions**

As previously mentioned, these video presentations provide for excellent thought provoking topics which could be used in the writing process. Many of the students would be first and second year university students learning academic writing and research skills for the first time. I often require the students to submit an essay paper based on the themes from the videos and comment in reference to what they viewed, their personal opinions about what they perceived and explain their analysis from the stand point of their backgrounds. In addition to the traditional compare and contrast analysis found in the American educational methodology, I ask the students to extend themselves by taking a critical look at their culture. Issues covered in the essay are as follows:

#### **ISSUES TO BE COVERED IN YOUR PAPER**

- \* Compare the type of high school Mr. Clark was teaching in to Japanese public high schools.
- \* Compare the type of elementary schools Mr. Clark was teaching

in to Japanese public high schools.

\* Compare on Japanese private elementary junior high & senior high schools.

\* Compare on issues concerning student discipline, motivation home life, teacher/student relationships, class size, social issues e.g.drugs, smoking, student dating, gang violence, outsiders etc..

### SPECIAL POINT

Mr.Clark was teaching at high school in 1967 which was predominately composed of non-White students, then he was transferred to an elementary school of a mostly Black, Hispanic and poor White student population. Please comment on the number of Korean-Japanese Chinese-Japanese and other non-Japanese teachers teaching in public/private schools in Japan.

### PERSONAL COMMENT

Imagine you could go back into time and relive your high school experience. Would you have liked to have gone to Eastside High in (1967) or (1987)? Why?

Which system is better? The American or Japanese educational system? Think about the beginning scene in the movie when Mr.Clark's class was playing a game about American history.

### VIDEO ACTIVITY TECHNIQUE

Presenting authentic videos should be done in small doses whenever possible. Initially I like to show my features at full length first. This technique will usually give the learner the overall picture of the language being taught and a sense that

## The Use of Video in Teaching Cross-Cultural Comparison to Japanese

he/she has completed a major part of the activity in general. Second, I would present short four to five minute segments, therefore allowing comprehension to take place at a slower, more relaxed pace. Using previously prepared questions, the student is asked to look for various items of information; e.g.,

- What is the present situation a character is facing?
- What did you see?
- What is the scene about or who is it about?
- What has happened, what is happening now?
- How does this affect the character? His actions, present and future.

Students are asked to view the videos without sound, listen to the audio without viewing the video and view the video with the sound and picture.

### Video Tasks

In the video **Lean On Me**, the main character is the high school principal. Throughout the movie, the principal is constantly lecturing to the student body either in the cafeteria, assembly hall, or to the school teachers. The principal uses a significant number of gestures and other para-linguistic language. Gestures and facial expressions are common to many languages backgrounds, while others are not. This aim of Task 1, is to focus on the use of gestures as a reinforcement of what is being said. First, the task sheet shown below should be distributed.

After looking at a video where someone is giving a speech or talk.

Are there any points where the speaker does the following?

- |                                    |            |           |
|------------------------------------|------------|-----------|
| 1) Raises or lowers his eyebrows.  | Yes [    ] | No [    ] |
| 2) Nods or shakes his head.        | Yes [    ] | No [    ] |
| 3) Uses his hands.                 | Yes [    ] | No [    ] |
| 4) Raises or lowers his shoulders. | Yes [    ] | No [    ] |
| 5) Stands up straighter.           | Yes [    ] | No [    ] |
| 6) Visibly takes a deep breath.    | Yes [    ] | No [    ] |

When he did the things you have noted, do you think he was:

- about to say something important;
- trying to emphasize what he was saying;
- trying to attract attention;
- trying to involve people in what he was saying;
- trying to do something else (specify).

### Procedure

Play the tape sequence through once or twice (5 to 10 minutes) and see if the students can spot the gestures. Check the answers and have a discussion to highlight key points e.g., the way in which the speakers mark important stress patterns with a hand or body movement. Stress to the students that with good speakers, movements will be finely co-ordinated with what they are saying at any point. Also, these movements won't distract from the message.

This exercise will help the students overall sensitivity in how they should behave in public speaking and assist them in restricting their hand movements in conversation where necessary.

The aim of Task 2, is to get the students to imitate the production of certain words and phrases, and the body language

The Use of Video in Teaching Cross-Cultural Comparison to Japanese that accompanies them.

### Procedure

- Present a sequence of not more than two minutes. Be certain that the speakers are particularly expressive.
- Play the tape through without stopping. Then play it again, this time stopping after each utterance was said, as well as the accompanying body language.
- Get the students to reproduce a short sequence/section of the film and act it out for the class or in small groups.
- Have the observing students evaluate each performance against what was shown in the film. Then ask the better students lead a discussion.

The aim of Task 3, is to help the students use extra-linguistic clues to assist them in understanding and interpreting what is being said.

### Procedure

- Select a sequence not more than two minutes in duration and play the tape through once with the sound off.
- Have the students predict what is being said from the visual images alone. This could involve guessing who the characters are, what they are talking about, what their attitudes are, etc..
- Have the student give reason for their answers on the basis of scene setting, facial expressions, the use of gestures, style of clothing, etc..

This aim of Task 4, is to help the students develop a feel for

voice quality and vexation.

### Procedure

- Play the video with the monitor turned out or turn the monitor around so the students can not see it.
- Have the student make a mental picture of who is talking. Give them the following prompts if necessary: young/old, male/female, fat/thin, well educated/poorly educated, strong/weak, confident/nervous? Etc..
- Have the student practice in pairs for 5 to 10 minutes and then ask them to report back to the class, before playing the film again with the picture. Have the student check their hypotheses.
- Conduct further discussion on the reasons for right and wrong choices.

Predictive listening is an important part of being able to take part in a conversation. Many Japanese ESL student tend to turn off quite early on in conversations, especially when there are a number of speakers in a discussion. Usually, these learners are not able to take their turn even when one is offered or respond to a provocative comment. The aim of Task 5, is to give the students practice in following extended conversation and identifying cues which will help them to participate. This activity can also help students sustain interest in a conversation for a longer time and take an active part in them.

### Procedure

- Use an authentic video in which there or more people are holding a conversation.

## The Use of Video in Teaching Cross—Cultural Comparison to Japanese

- Designate a role to each student of one of the speakers in the video.
- Start the tape and at various points in the interaction stop the film and ask questions such as:
  - Do you think he has finished what he has to say, or will he continue?
  - How do you know?
  - Who do you think will speak next? Why?
- When the next speaker has been established a student taking that role should try to predict what will be said.
- The tape can be played to check the students' predictions. Discussion of right and wrong responses can now occur.

### Video Tasks for "Lean On Me"

#### [A]

- Start the video from the beginning of the film. (Opening scene)
- Ask the student what they predict will happen. Have them write their predictions and exchange their information with a partner.
- Show the video through the opening scene only and have the students discuss in pairs, the cultural differences between the classroom atmosphere in the scene and that they experienced during their high school career.

#### [B]

- Start the video at the scene where a female student has discovered her pregnancy and seeks the advice of the school principal.
- Have the students predict what the principal will say and ask them how the student would handle it in Japan.

—Play the tape and discover if there were any differences in cultural attitudes in this situation.

Having reviewed video Tasks 1 through 5, you can easily see how those activities can be applied to the movie *Lean On Me*, as shown in examples A and B above. Using these techniques, the student will unconsciously raise his/her awareness to the cultural similarities and difference between minority group Americans and Japanese. At the same time, the students will begin thinking about the validity of what they have been told about American minorities and what they have seen in the videos and read from the readings.

### Discussion

Although this paper does not contain any statistical information or surveyed analysis of shifts in attitude changes, the feedback received from more than 100 student essays and individual responses held to my hypothesis, that given an opportunity to objectively learn about another culture and its people, the overwhelming majority of the students opinions would change to more positive perceptions. It will be acknowledged that this research is exploratory, having previously established the small amount of previous research done in this area. The author is aware of some sociological studies done a decade ago by British researchers, yet that research goes beyond the topic and scope of this paper.

These videos showed Blacks, Hispanics, Chicanos and American Indians in roles as doctors, lawyers, dentist, school administrators, teachers, businessmen and women, etc.. No overt attempt was made to single-out or categorize any character in the videos by sex or race. What proved most interesting to me were the responses given by the students. The majority of their concerns

The Use of Video in Teaching Cross—Cultural Comparison to Japanese seem to be what images they portrayed to the international community as a people and why they hadn't studied about various minority group people in this manner before now.

Perhaps, enlightened school administrators, study and culture group directors, or travel agencies in Japan could encourage ESL learners to participate in homestay and study abroad programs, where the participants could live with an American minority group member family or attend an ESL/EFL language program on an U.S. college or university campus with a high population of minority group students.

The primary concern here was that Japanese ESL learners could increase their knowledge and awareness of other cultures, by giving them the means to harness that knowledge. Clearly, the technique used here has promise as a tool in the evaluation and assessment of negative attitudes of Japanese toward non—Japanese people.

### SOURCES & MATERIALS

Text: Contact USA (2nd ed., 1989 — Prentice Hall Regents)

Films: Lean On Me (Warner Bros., 1989)

The Blackboard Jungle (M.G.M., 1955)

Hollywood Shuffle (Samuel Goldwyn, 1987)

Periodical: EBONY Magazine (Johnson Publishing Company.  
Yohan Distributors, Tokyo)

REFERENCES

- Damen, L. (1987) Culture Learning: The Fifth Dimension in the Language Classroom Addison-Wesley Publishing Company
- Doi, T. (1985) The Anatomy of Dependence Kodansha International Ltd., Tokyo
- Gozzi, R. (1990) New Words and a Changing American Culture University of South Carolina Press
- Halliday, M.A.K. (1978) Language as Social Semiotic Baltimore: University Park Press
- Lebra, T. S. (1985) Japanese Women (Constraint & Fulfillment) University of Hawaii Press
- Nolasco, R. and (1989) Conversation Arthur, L. Oxford University Press
- Valdes, J. M. (1986) Culture Bound Cambridge University Press
- van Wolferen, K. (1989) The Enigma of Japanese Power Macmillan London Ltd..
- Wallerstein, N. (1983) Language and Culture in Conflict Addison-Wesley Publishing Company

要 約

この論文は日本英語学者に対するアメリカの小数グループ文化、及至は日米比較文化の領域におけるビデオ教材利用の問題研究を行うものである。

ビデオの使用、及び米国人の文化、価値観、慣習に関する領域の読書指導によって学習者の社会意識が向上されることを示すことが本論文の第一義である。さらに米国のマイノリティ集団の文化に関する日本人の態度、諸概念等を査定評価しようとするものである。