

# Implementing verbal and non-verbal activities in an intercultural collaboration project for English education

Kiyomi Fujii<sup>1</sup> and Maki Hirotani<sup>2</sup>

**Abstract.** Technological development offers language teachers a myriad of options for collaborative activities. Learners, in turn, benefit from increased opportunities to interact with people who can speak their target language. Research has previously highlighted the importance of developing learners' intercultural competence through such activities. The researchers implemented verbal and non-verbal activities in an intercultural collaboration project for learners of English in Japan and learners of Japanese in the U.S. This paper will detail the project activities and provide a comprehensive summary of the results, especially as they pertain to interaction with native speakers of the target language to develop verbal and non-verbal communication skills.

**Keywords:** EFL, intercultural competence, verbal and non-verbal.

## 1. Introduction

With recent developments in Internet technology, many collaborative activities between native and non-native speakers have been conducted in foreign language classrooms (Belz, 2007; Jauregi & Canto, 2012; Jin, 2013; Kitade, 2008; O'Dowd, 2005). Previous studies have examined the effects of such collaborative activities and reported positive effects on the development of language skills (Belz, 2007; Jauregi & Canto, 2012; Jin, 2013; Kitade, 2008; Tudini, 2007). Researchers have also identified the importance of developing learners' intercultural competence

---

1. Kanazawa Institute of Technology, Nonouchi, Japan; kfujii@neptune.kanazawa-it.ac.jp

2. Rose-Hulman Institute of Technology, Terre Haute, Indiana, United States; hirotani@rose-hulman.edu

**How to cite this article:** Fujii, K., & Hirotani, M. (2015). Implementing verbal and non-verbal activities in an intercultural collaboration project for English education. In F. Helm, L. Bradley, M. Guarda, & S. Thoušný (Eds), *Critical CALL – Proceedings of the 2015 EUROCALL Conference, Padova, Italy* (pp. 198-203). Dublin: Research-publishing.net. <http://dx.doi.org/10.14705/rpnet.2015.000333>

through such activities. According to the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AACU), intercultural knowledge and competence is “a set of cognitive, affective, and behavioral skills and characteristics that support effective and appropriate interaction in a variety of cultural contexts” (n. p.), which can be classified into two types of cultural knowledge (self-awareness and worldview frameworks), two types of skills (empathy and verbal/non-verbal communication), and two types of attitudes (curiosity and openness). Within the above classification, the skills of verbal and non-verbal communication are what we commonly think pertains to the study of language. It follows, then, that both verbal and non-verbal communication skills be assessed in detail, yet no study to date has investigated the development of both of these skills through collaborative activities.

In an effort to bolster this area of inquiry, the researchers brought together English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners from a university in Japan, and Japanese as a Foreign Language (JFL) learners from a U.S. university in a collaborative online environment. Rather than a proprietary, locked system, we opted for Facebook as our platform of choice to engage both groups of students in verbal and non-verbal activities. In this paper, we will detail the aforementioned activities using the student-created video skit data from Facebook.

## **2. Method**

### **2.1. Overview of the project**

Twenty students enrolled in an English course at a private college in Japan (KIT) and ten students enrolled in second-year Japanese courses at a private college in the U.S. (RH) were involved in this project. The project was conducted from September, 2014 to February, 2015, lasting over four months during KIT fall semester and RH fall and winter semesters. We created two types of private Facebook pages for the project, where students communicated exclusively in English or Japanese. The students at each institution were divided into four groups (A, B, C, and D) and worked within their group to complete the assignments. The verbal and non-verbal activity was implemented in this Facebook project in two phases: (1) introduction of verbal and non-verbal expressions to students’ overseas counterparts in their native language and (2) creation of skits that incorporate the learned expressions.

### **2.2. Materials**

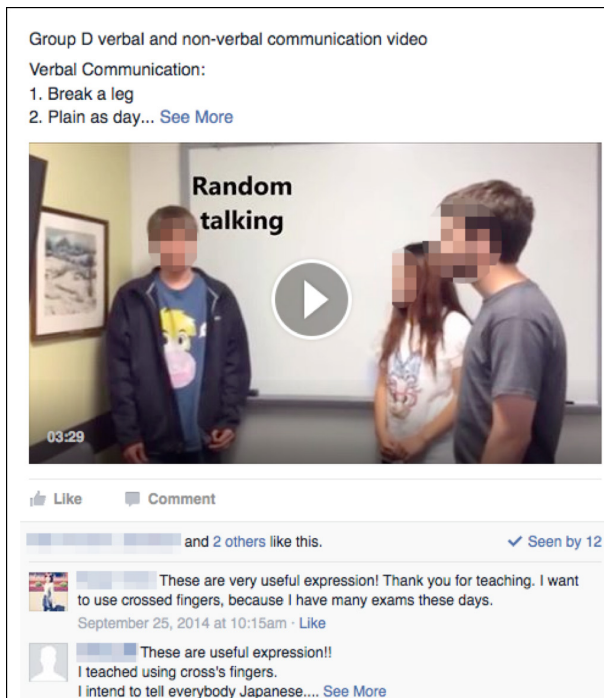
Students were surveyed before and after the project with a set of questionnaires to self-evaluate the development of their verbal and non-verbal communication

knowledge and skills, as well as attitudes toward other cultures with reference to the AACU rubric for knowledge and skills (Elola & Oskoz, 2008). A reflection log of students' views of the activities and a vocabulary quiz were compiled to assess their comprehension of the verbal and non-verbal expressions. At the end of the semester, KIT students took the quiz, which consisted of ten verbal expressions (“break a leg”, “awesome”, etc.), and five non-verbal expressions (e.g. “crossed fingers”) that the RH students introduced. In the vocabulary quiz, students were also asked to indicate whether they knew the expressions before their participation in the project. Facebook videos and posted comments were also analyzed to gauge students' verbal and non-verbal communication.

### 2.3. Verbal and non-verbal activities

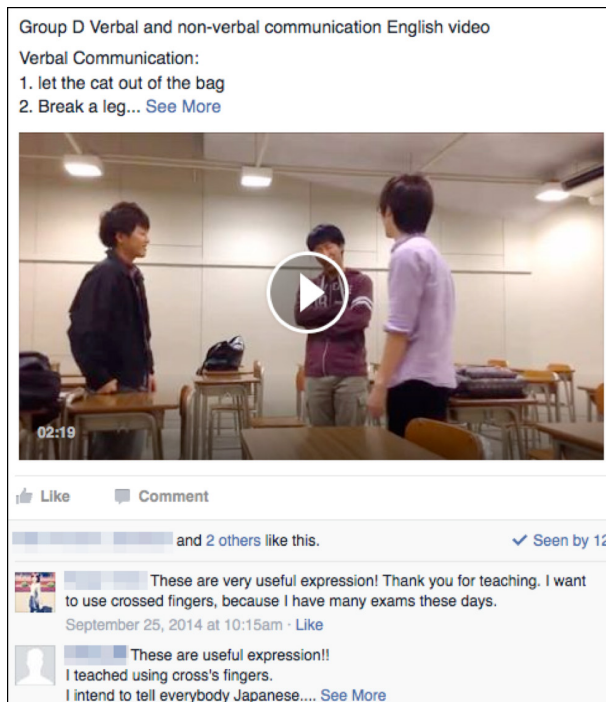
A number of video assignments were given on specific topics: (1) self-introduction, (2) school life, (3) introducing verbal and non-verbal communication, (4) skit, and (5) culture survey.

Figure 1. RH student video introducing verbal and non-verbal expressions on Facebook



Students then posted the videos created in their groups on Facebook. For verbal and non-verbal activities, RH students in the U.S. introduced verbal expressions to KIT students, commonly used by American college students but not easily found in EFL textbooks, as well as non-verbal expressions, including body language and gestures (Figure 1). Each group member was charged with introducing one expression and one gesture. The general procedure was as follows: one student introduces a verbal communication expression while showing a flashcard of the expression in their first language. After repeating the expression a few times, the student explains the meaning of the expression and how it can be used, the student and his/her group members provide a short skit to demonstrate the use of the verbal expression in natural conversation, the student shows one gesture without speaking. After showing the same gesture a couple of times, the student explains the meaning of the gesture and its use, and the student and his/her group members provide a short skit illustrating the use of the non-verbal expression in natural conversation.

Figure 2. KIT students video skit on Facebook



After KIT students watched the videos uploaded by their RH counterparts, we conducted vocabulary activities to reinforce the learners' vocabulary building in

class. Handouts of all verbal and non-verbal expressions that were introduced by RH students were provided for the in-class activity, along with slide presentations to practice expressions. Then, students created skits in English using the newly learned verbal and non-verbal expressions. Students were required to incorporate at least five verbal expressions and five non-verbal expressions into their video skits, and post the videos to the English page on Facebook. The students were given the freedom to choose any topic for their skits, but were prohibited from simply reading off a prepared script during the recording. Conversely, the verbal and non-verbal expressions introduced by the KIT students to their U.S. peers were also used in RH students' skits in Japanese for reinforcement (Figure 2).

### **3. Results and discussion**

The questionnaire results indicate that KIT students felt that they gained knowledge and skills for both verbal and non-verbal communication (Hirotnani & Fujii, 2015, this volume). The students' comments from the reflection log support this result. It is evident through their self-evaluations that through this project, students grew aware of the differences and similarities between Japanese and American verbal and non-verbal expressions. In the results from the vocabulary quiz, approximately 88% of the items were new words for the students and 61.7% of the non-verbal expressions were previously unknown. Students stated that in English classes or textbooks they learn formal expressions, but this activity allowed them to learn casual expressions that American college students normally use. A few students also commented that after having learned useful everyday expressions, they now want to use them personally and teach them to other Japanese students. Finally, the reflection log reveals that the follow-up vocabulary activity helped students to understand not just the words themselves, but also the context in which they can be used in daily situations. Overall, the response was highly positive.

### **4. Conclusion**

We speculated that a collaborative project that took advantage of a platform familiar to most students, and that focused on verbal and non-verbal activities to improve intercultural competence would pay dividends precisely by putting groups of students from the respective target countries together virtually. To test this supposition, we conducted a project between EFL and JFL learners at colleges in Japan and the U.S., using Facebook. Although it is still early, the results described in the present paper indicate that those who participated in this collaborative project felt that they gained knowledge and skills in verbal and non-verbal communication.

These are partial results and call for more research, but the preliminary findings are encouraging.

## References

- AACU. *Intercultural knowledge and competence*. Retrieved from <https://www.aacu.org/sites/default/files/files/VALUE/InterculturalKnowledge.pdf>
- Belz, J. A. (2007). The role of computer mediation in the instruction and development of L2 pragmatic competence. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 27, 45-75. doi:10.1017/s0267190508070037
- Elola, I., & Oskoz, A. (2008). Blogging: fostering intercultural competence development in foreign language and study abroad context. *Foreign Language Annals*, 41(3), 454-477.
- Hirotsani, M., & Fujii, K. (2015). The integration of a three-year-long intercultural collaborative project into a foreign language classroom for the development of intercultural competence. In F. Helm, L. Bradley, M. Guarda, & S. Thouësny (Eds.), *Critical CALL - Proceedings of the 2015 EUROCALL Conference, Padova, Italy* (pp. 235-242). Dublin Ireland: Research-publishing.net. doi:10.14705/rpnet.2015.000339
- Jauregi, K., & Canto, S. (2012). Impact of native-nonnative speaker interaction through video-web communication and Second Life on students' intercultural communicative competence. In L. Bradley & S. Thouësny (Eds.), *CALL: Using, Learning, Knowing, EUROCALL Conference, Gothenburg, Sweden, 22-25 August 2012, Proceedings* (pp. 151-155). Dublin Ireland: Research-publishing.net. doi:10.14705/rpnet.2012.000043
- Jin, L. (2013). Language development and scaffolding in a Sino-American telecollaborative project. *Language learning & Technology*, 17(2), 193-219.
- Kitade, K. (2008). The role of offline metalanguage talk in asynchronous computer-mediated communication. *Language learning & Technology*, 12(1), 64-84.
- O'Dowd, R. (2005). Negotiating sociocultural and institutional contexts: the case of Spanish-American telecollaboration. *Language and Intercultural Communication*, 5(1), 40-56. doi:10.1080/14708470508668882
- Tudini, V. (2007). Negotiation and intercultural learning in Italian native speaker chat rooms. *The Modern Language Journal*, 91(4), 577-601. doi:10.1111/j.1540-4781.2007.00624.x

Published by Research-publishing.net, not-for-profit association  
Dublin, Ireland; info@research-publishing.net

© 2015 by Research-publishing.net (collective work)  
© 2015 by Author (individual work)

Critical CALL – Proceedings of the 2015 EUROCALL Conference, Padova, Italy  
Edited by Francesca Helm, Linda Bradley, Marta Guarda, and Sylvie Thouéšny

**Rights:** All articles in this collection are published under the Attribution-NonCommercial -NoDerivatives 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0) licence. Under this licence, the contents are freely available online (as PDF files) for anybody to read, download, copy, and redistribute provided that the author(s), editorial team, and publisher are properly cited. Commercial use and derivative works are, however, not permitted.



**Disclaimer:** Research-publishing.net does not take any responsibility for the content of the pages written by the authors of this book. The authors have recognised that the work described was not published before, or that it is not under consideration for publication elsewhere. While the information in this book are believed to be true and accurate on the date of its going to press, neither the editorial team, nor the publisher can accept any legal responsibility for any errors or omissions that may be made. The publisher makes no warranty, expressed or implied, with respect to the material contained herein. While Research-publishing.net is committed to publishing works of integrity, the words are the authors' alone.

**Trademark notice:** product or corporate names may be trademarks or registered trademarks, and are used only for identification and explanation without intent to infringe.

**Copyrighted material:** every effort has been made by the editorial team to trace copyright holders and to obtain their permission for the use of copyrighted material in this book. In the event of errors or omissions, please notify the publisher of any corrections that will need to be incorporated in future editions of this book.

Typeset by Research-publishing.net  
Fonts used are licensed under a SIL Open Font License

ISBN13: 978-1-908416-28-5 (Paperback - Print on demand, black and white)  
Print on demand technology is a high-quality, innovative and ecological printing method; with which the book is never 'out of stock' or 'out of print'.

ISBN13: 978-1-908416-29-2 (Ebook, PDF, colour)  
ISBN13: 978-1-908416-30-8 (Ebook, EPUB, colour)

Legal deposit, Ireland: The National Library of Ireland, The Library of Trinity College, The Library of the University of Limerick, The Library of Dublin City University, The Library of NUI Cork, The Library of NUI Maynooth, The Library of University College Dublin, The Library of NUI Galway.

Legal deposit, United Kingdom: The British Library.  
British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data.  
A cataloguing record for this book is available from the British Library.

Legal deposit, France: Bibliothèque Nationale de France - Dépôt légal: décembre 2015.