

Exploration of Cross-Cultural Communication Skills in the Context of Theme-Based Online Discussion

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Abstract

This study aims to explore the concept of cross-cultural communication skills in the context of theme-based online discussion. The purposes are (1) to delineate a fundamental framework of skill techniques necessary for facilitating one's intercultural communication with others, whereby we can define the concept of cross-cultural communication skills, and (2) to develop a psychological scale to assess the students' skill attainments in the context of cross-cultural online discussion. The participants were 309 Japanese university students enrolled in a series of English classes relevant to a distance learning program called Cross-Cultural Distance Learning (CCDL) program. The instrument used in this study included 30 skill items based on Student Skillstreaming Checklist (Goldstein & McGinnis, 1997), and 6 items on Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT: Shepard, Giles, & Le Poire, 2001). To examine the fundamental framework of the skill techniques, we analyzed the data in terms of exploratory factor analysis, and discussed the resulting factor structures as compared with those obtained in our previous surveys (e.g., Yoshida & Nakano, 2010). The results represented the replicability of the factor structures, suggesting the internal consistency with respect to our research findings as well as reliability with respect to our research paradigm.

Keywords

Cross-Cultural Communication Skills, Social Skills, Accommodation Skills, Online Discussion, Distance Learning

Introduction

This paper shows a part of our longitudinal study that has attempted to explore the concept of cross-cultural communication skills required in the context of theme-based online discussion among Asian learners of English. Since the inception of our continuous survey (Yoshida & Nakano, 2008), we have sought to conceptualize the essential skill

techniques that can be utilized for facilitating one's cross-cultural interactions with others, which we regarded as cross-cultural communication skills, with the aid of relevant theories and the concepts. In this process, we decided to adopt the concepts of social skills (Goldstein & McGinnis, 1997; Kikuchi, 1988), a series of socially desirable skills originally developed in the field of psychology, and accommodation skills (Shephard et al., 2001), a set of conversation management skills developed on the basis of socio-linguistic perspectives on human communication.

1 Our Previous Surveys

Using a 50-item questionnaire called Student Skillstreaming Checklist (Goldstein & McGinnis, 1997), Yoshida (2009; see also, Yoshida & Nakano, 2008, 2009) conducted empirical surveys among Asian learners of English in the context of cross-cultural online discussion. As a result, 34 out of the 50 skill items were found to be essential in the cross-cultural interactions. In order to further investigate the essential skill techniques, Yoshida and Nakano (2010) adopted the concept of accommodation skills elaborated in Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT: Shephard et al., 2001) and added newly constructed 6 CAT items to the questionnaire. The questionnaire items were subject to exploratory factor analysis to examine the conceptual structure of the cross-cultural communication skills. The results indicated that two opposing types of communicative tendencies, convergence and divergence, can be extracted from the 6 CAT items as congruent with the original notions of CAT, and that these socio-linguistic concepts can live in harmony with those of psychological concepts, that is, those associated with social skills. These findings suggested a piece of evidence for applying the concepts of social skills as well as of accommodation skills to exploring the concept of cross-cultural communication skills. On the basis of these considerations, the current study aims to further describe the conceptual structures of the

cross-cultural communication skills through the modification of our questionnaire items.

2 Method

2.1 Participants

The participants were 309 Japanese university students enrolled in a series of English classes relevant to Cross-Cultural Distance Learning (CCDL) program, a distance learning program which has been run by Waseda University and the partner universities around Asia since 1999 (Nakano, Yoshida & Owada, 2008). We collected the data from 21 different English classes.

2.2 Instrument

The instrument used in this study included 30 skill items based on Student Skillstreaming Checklist (Goldstein & McGinnis, 1997), and 6 items on Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT: Shepard, Giles, & Le Poire, 2001). The former 30 items were developed through the modification of the 34 items found to be essential in the context of cross-cultural online discussion (Yoshida, 2009; Yoshida & Nakano, 2008, 2009).

3 Results and Discussion

We analyzed the data in terms of exploratory factor analysis (Principal Factor Analysis followed by Promax rotation). As a result, we extracted 6 factors, each of which can be regarded as “Basic Skills for L2 Communication” ($\alpha=.868$), “Advanced Planning Skills” ($\alpha=.814$), “Skills for Dealing with Affective Issues” ($\alpha=.818$), “Communicative Tendencies toward Divergence” ($\alpha=.845$), “Skills for Clarification” ($\alpha=.687$) and “Communicative Tendencies toward Divergence” ($\alpha=.652$), respectively. Although some of the reliability indices are relatively small (i.e., Factors 5 & 6), these 6 factors are found to show almost similar factor structures with those obtained in our previous surveys (e.g., Yoshida & Nakano, 2010). This result represented the replicability of the factor structures, suggesting the internal consistency with respect to our research findings as well as reliability with respect to our research paradigm. Thus, the resulting structure in Table 1 could be one of the frameworks to define the concept of cross-cultural communication skills in the context of theme-based online discussion.

4 Future Study

On the basis of the 6 factors extracted as well as each of factor scores, we will discuss the students’ perceived skill use in the cross-cultural online discussion and then compare them among the 21

different English classes.

Table1: The Pattern Matrix

Item	Factors					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
[item2 BasicR2]	.865	-.131	-.096	-.027	.022	.085
[item5 BasicR6]	.757	.027	.022	.076	-.077	-.060
[item3 Basic 4] [item6 BasicR7]	.699	.014	-.174	-.015	.190	-.013
[item7 BasicR8]	.628	.103	.171	.115	-.096	-.051
[item8 AdvancedR10]	.595	-.136	.080	-.160	.147	.071
[item9 AdvancedR11]	.562	.096	-.048	.024	.063	.018
[item1 BasicR1]	.457	.117	-.027	-.251	-.116	.261
[item13 FeelingR17]	.407	.107	.129	-.044	-.044	.062
[item28 Planning48]	-.015	.770	-.117	-.089	-.047	.073
[item29 PlanningR49]	.017	.689	.004	.057	-.106	.085
[item17 Aggression24]	.137	.630	.084	.056	-.051	-.142
[item16 AggressionR2]	.020	.606	.094	-.057	-.012	-.177
[item26 Stress41]	-.102	.504	-.088	.004	.417	.136
[item27 PlanningR47]	.008	.495	.034	-.037	.199	.099
[item20 Stress32]	-.024	-.067	.898	-.068	.031	.106
[item19 AggressionR2]	-.082	-.018	.839	.005	.078	.028
[item21 Stress34]	.146	.174	.493	.025	-.030	-.056
[item34 Divergence]	.046	-.108	.009	.803	.008	.138
[item35 Divergence]	-.087	.048	-.070	.792	.021	.117
[item24 StressR39]	.149	-.150	.005	.080	.807	-.112
[item23 StressR38]	.013	.040	.174	-.069	.555	.002
[item32 Convergence]	.158	-.025	.049	.161	-.118	.611
[item31 Convergence]	-.075	.063	.094	.217	.060	.496
eigenvalue	7.697	2.459	1.554	1.268	1.192	1.024
Correlation	1.00	.646	.567	.000	.434	.059
		1.00	.637	.080	.475	.152
			1.00	.101	.379	.066
				1.00	.218	.311
					1.00	.224
						1.00

Note: The labels in “Items” represent the item numbers in the present questionnaire and those in Student Skillstreaming Checklist, respectively. The items named with “R” are those modified or revised by the authors.

References Selected

Yoshida, S and Nakano, M. (2010). Social Skills in English Communication: An Empirical Survey among Cross-Cultural Distance Learning (CCDL) Participants. *Proceeding of the 15th international conference of Pan-Pacific Association of Applied Linguistics*, 462-469.