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インターナショナル・コミュニケーション

—英語コミュニケーション活動の促進—

カルロス・ギエルモ・ガルシア II

International Communication

— An in depth look at activities used to facilitate English communication between
 Japanese and foreign university students —

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Abstract

This article will discuss the activities I used to help our Japanese students interact and communicate in English with visiting American and Brazilian students. I talk about the activities we used, as well as dissect the process of creating these ideas to incorporate language and culture. The challenge was to “even the playing field” for our Japanese students since their English level is well below that of the Americans and Brazilians. In the end, the activities worked well to break the ice and help students get to know each other, and allowed our Japanese students plenty of opportunities to communicate in English. Students gained confidence in their abilities and got to see the level of English they will encounter when they study abroad.

Key words : Communication, Teamwork activity, Multilingual

キーワード : コミュニケーション, チームワーク・アクティビティ, マルチリンガル

Introduction

What do you think would happen if you threw university students from three different countries, who speak three different languages, together? How would you get them to interact with each

other and have fun at the same time? This was the situation we encountered when we started working at this university in April 2014. Not knowing anything about the foreign students who were coming, and knowing our Japanese

students needed more practice developing their English communication skills, I tried to design some activities to help all students work together, communicate, and get to know each other. You will read about the activities, how they were created, and the final results of this experience.

The Activities:

I. Things in Common

In the first year (2014), I started the day off with an activity called “Things in Common”. This type of game is what’s called a “mingle” activity. It requires students to have to interact with the majority of the other students, as opposed to the same partner the whole time. Typically, this kind of activity has students practicing some target language like “what is your favorite...” Students would typically have a set of questions to read to a partner, and the partner listens and then tries to answer in a complete sentence. Here is what a sample conversation would look like:

Partner A: What is your favorite color?

Partner B: My favorite color is red. What is your favorite food?

Partner A: My favorite food is pizza. What is your favorite animal?

Partner B: My favorite animal is a dog.

This is the most basic form of this activity, and in most cases that I have seen it used, students have the exact same questions. The problem with this is that students don’t have to listen to the question completely. What I have found is that most students will try to do the minimum amount required to complete the activity. So the problem that occurs is that students know which

question is being asked because they have the same question on their own paper. So instead of listening to their partner, they read the question off their own paper, and then answer it. By having all students have the same questions, it eliminates the need to listen to what your partner is asking. One way to add a level of difficulty would be to have each student write their own question. For example, instead of everyone asking “What is your favorite color?”, you could leave a blank space for students to write their own question; “What is your favorite....?” Then students have to listen to what is being asked because they wouldn’t know what question to expect.

However, for the activity with the Brazilian and American students, I went one step further. Being American myself, I assumed that the American students would take control of the situation if our shy Japanese students were unclear or unwilling to speak. I also made the same assumption of the Brazilian students. I assumed that if all students’ questions were in English, the Americans would just look at their partners’ list of questions and figure out what was being asked, and answer it. I also assumed that our shy, overwhelmed Japanese students would gladly accept the “help” of the American students and let them look at their question list. I don’t think students want to intentionally “cheat” on the activity, but not everyone is patient, and when the questions are so easy to look at and read, I think most people will take a peek to speed things along. So what I did was make different questions for each group of students (American, Japanese, and Brazilian) and I wrote the questions in each groups’ native

language. The Japanese students had questions written in Japanese, the Americans had English, and the Brazilians had Portuguese. I realized that there may be a few students who can read another group’s language, but the majority of students would not be able to. I decided to write different questions for each group because of the situation I mentioned before. I didn’t want our students to ignore their partner, especially when they had a great chance to communicate in English with other speakers of English. I chose to write the questions in each group’s native language because I thought it would stop our students from looking and reading the question from either their own sheet, or their partner’s. I also thought it would cause students to have to actually pay attention and listen to the question being asked. Here is what each question sheet looked like:

In Brazilian:

Things in Common
Find people who have things in common with you.

| | YOUR answers | Partners name |
|---|--------------|---------------|
| 1 Quantas pessoas estão em sua família? | | |
| 2 Qual é seu número favorito? | | |
| 3 Que mês você nasceu? | | |
| 4 Qual é o seu dia favorito da semana? | | |
| 5 Você fuma cigarros? | | |
| 6 Você já quebrou um osso? | | |
| 7 Você se exercita toda semana? | | |
| 8 Você bebe café? | | |

In Japanese:

Things in Common
Find people who have things in common with you.

| | YOUR answers | Partners name |
|-------------------------|--------------|---------------|
| 1 好きな色は何ですか？ | | |
| 2 ペットを飼っていますか？ | | |
| 3 ディズニーランドに行ったことがありますか？ | | |
| 4 あなたの血液型は何？ | | |
| 5 有名人に会ったことはありますか？ | | |
| 6 どの季節が好きですか？ | | |
| 7 毎日、本を読みますか？ | | |
| 8 クレジットカードを持っていますか？ | | |

In English:

Things in Common
Find people who have things in common with you.

| | YOUR answers | Partners name |
|---|--------------|---------------|
| 1 Do you have a part time job? | | |
| 2 Have you ever ridden an animal? | | |
| 3 Can you play a musical instrument? | | |
| 4 Do you have siblings? | | |
| 5 Have you visited 3 or more countries? | | |
| 6 Which hand do you write with? | | |
| 7 Can you whistle? (prove it) | | |
| 8 Do you have a drivers license? | | |

As you can see, there are three columns on this sheet. The first column is the question, the second column called “YOUR answers” is where each student will answer the question themselves before the activity starts, and the third column called “Partners’ name” is where they write the name of the person they spoke to. In this activity, they have to find someone who has something in common with themselves. More specifically, they have to find someone who answered the question the same as they did. If they meet someone and they did not answer the question the same, then

they could ask more questions until they found a question they answered the same. After each student finds one thing in common, they move on to find another partner to ask.

While the main goal of the activity is to communicate, an additional goal of this exercise was to help students get to know each other. Even if students didn't answer the question the same way, they were learning information about their partner. Then, when they finally found a question they answered the same, something in common, they would hopefully form a small bond over it, or at least have something to talk about.

Another thing I tried to incorporate was cultural questions. Not every question, but some questions were chosen because I felt it would give students an idea about the culture. For example, question 8 on the American (English) worksheet asks "Do you have a driver's license?" In the United States, most people get a driver's license at the age of 16. In Japan, people are not allowed to get a car driver's license until they are 18 years old. In the U.S., most cities do not have good public transportation, so we tend to drive everywhere.

However, in Japan, public transportation is much better, the costs of having a car are very high, and there is not as much of a need to have a driver's license or a car. Therefore, when the American students asked the Japanese students "Do you have a driver's license?" they would probably get many "no" answers, whereas most American students would answer "yes" to it. So by doing this, I hoped each group of students would learn a little something about each other that way too.

I feel I should mention that these questions were not very difficult and didn't focus on any particular grammar point. The main purpose of this activity was to meet new people, find things in common, learn a little about each culture, and to have things to talk about later if, or when, they had time to chat.

2. Find Someone Who

In 2015, I decided to change the activity, a little, to one called "Find Someone Who". This is also a mingle activity, and again, the main purpose of this activity is the same as the last one: to meet new people, find things in common, learn a little about each culture, and to have things to talk about later if, or when, they had time to chat.

So again, typically the point of this activity is to ask questions to other students in the class and find someone who gives the answer you need. The main difference between "Things in Common" and "Find Someone Who" is that "Find Someone Who" doesn't require you to find something in common with anyone else. It's simply a question to help you get to know things about other people. So making the same assumptions about foreign students and Japanese students as I did the first time, I again made separate questions for each group of students, and I put them in their respective native languages. Below is what the worksheets looked like:

In English:

Find Someone Who...

| | | |
|--|---|--|
| 1) ...has been to Hawaii. | 2) ...has a twitter account. | 3) ...doesn't have a Facebook account. |
| 4) ...has been to a concert this year. | 5) ...has never eaten a Krispy Kreme donut. | 6) ...can play a musical instrument. |
| 7) ...has a pet other than a dog or cat. | 8) ...does not have a job. | 9) ...is left handed. |

In Portuguese:

Encontre alguém que...

| | | |
|--------------------------------------|---|--|
| 1) ...assistiu ao show de TV 'Glee'. | 2) ...tem mais de 100 amigos no Facebook. | 3) ...não bebe café. |
| 4) ...lê mais de 5 livros por ano. | 5) ...caiu em uma bicicleta. | 6) ...monta uma bicicleta para a escola. |
| 7) ...possa dançar. | 8) ...tomou um banho esta manhã. | 9) ...tem uma carteira de motorista. |
| 10) ...não come carne. | 11) ...não gosta de bananas. | 12) ...é mais de 25 anos de idade. |

In Japanese:

Find Someone Who...

| | | |
|-----------------------|--------------------|-------------------|
| 1) 骨を折ったことがある人 | 2) 有名人に会ったことがある人 | 3) 車の事故にあったことがある人 |
| 4) リムジンに乗ったことがある人 | 5) 刺書をしている人 | 6) 馬に乗ったことがある人 |
| 7) 自転車に乗れない人 | 8) ヨーロッパに行ったことがある人 | 9) あなたと同じ血液型の人 |
| 10) 3か国以上の国に行ったことがある人 | 11) 今月マクドナルドで食べた人 | 12) 兄弟姉妹がいない人 |

The way to do this activity is to search for someone who fits the criteria you are looking for. For example, question 1 on the English worksheet says "...someone who has been to Hawaii". To find someone who has been to Hawaii, students should NOT say "has been to Hawaii". They need to understand what the question is asking, then formulate the question correctly: "Have you (ever) been to Hawaii" ? If a student answers "yes", then

their partner writes their name in the space. Some questions, however, ask a negative question, like question 8 on the English worksheet. It says "does not have a job". Students again need to formulate the correct question, "Do you have a job?", and listen for an answer that fits this criteria. In this case, students are trying to get a "no" answer because the question wants you to find someone who does NOT have a job.

The instructions I gave for both "Things in Common" and "Find Someone Who" were that students could not ask questions to students of their own native language. This meant Japanese students were not allowed to ask other Japanese students, American students were not allowed to ask other American students, and the Brazilian students were given the same instructions. I planned each activity to take about 20 minutes, but while I monitored the time and helped students find partners, I mainly kept an eye on everyone's worksheet and allowed them enough time to finish, or almost finish. Because of language ability and outgoing personalities, the American and Brazilian students tended to ask follow-up questions to the Japanese students.

This put our students in a position to have to speak English without reading or memorizing anything. They were essentially in a controlled "real life" speaking situation. Some students did great on their own, some students asked for help from friends, but all students tried hard and were able to communicate in English. I was very satisfied with this result.

3. Photo Scavenger Hunt

The main activity for both 2014 and 2015 was the same, a photo scavenger hunt. In case you are not familiar with scavenger hunts, I will briefly explain. In a scavenger hunt, your team or group is required to go around the neighborhood and find the things on your list. The items on the list are usually a little odd and not so common or easy to find because it makes it more of a challenge to get the items. For example, your list may have items like; a penny from 1998, a \$0.25 coupon, or a napkin with the name of a restaurant on it. A newer type of scavenger hunt is a photo scavenger hunt, where you don't have to collect items; you just have to take digital pictures of the things on your list. These games are fun and great for utilizing teamwork, but there is no language required to find the items.

Because I feel that scavenger hunts are great teamwork activities, and they are fun, I adapted it and added a language element to it so it fit our needs. I made a list of 40 things for students to find and take pictures of. The items were not just a list of things like a car or a house, but instead a description of something to find or do and take a picture of. Examples of English only clues are “one group member shaking hands with a police officer” or “all group members spelling a word with their bodies”. Other clues had English and Japanese mixed, for example “a sign that has ao iro writing” or “a picture of someone using a koushuu-denwa”. By mixing Japanese and English, I hoped that American and Brazilian students would have to get help from the Japanese students to understand Japanese words like “ao

iro” and “koushuu-denwa”.

About 15 clues were either English only, or written in romaji using both English and Japanese, but the other 25 clues were written in Japanese only. My hope was to put our students in a position to have to figure out a way to communicate the details of the clues to their team members. So if a Japanese student saw the clue “a sign that has ao iro writing”, they might only understand “sign” and “ao iro (blue)”, and think they have to find a blue sign. But if you look closely, they are searching for a sign with blue writing, not a blue sign. So the details of the clues required the groups (one Japanese student, one American student, and one Brazilian student) to work together to clearly understand the clues and take the correct pictures. Again, I tried to include some “cultural questions” so that during the activity the American and Brazilian students could learn a few new Japanese words, and hopefully pick up some of the cultural differences. One example would be the questions about finding a sign with hiragana, a sign in katakana, and another question about finding kanji. My hope was that the foreign students would be made aware of the fact that Japan has three different writing systems. At the same time, I tried to make the questions so that our Japanese students would have to explain a little part of Japanese culture. With the example of finding the different types of writing, I hoped that in their search, the foreign students would ask about the difference between the types of writing, and it would lead to a short conversation about it in English.

Here is an example of what the list looked like:

TAKE A PICTURE OF...

- 1) スーツを着て自転車に乗っている人
- 2) a group member hugging a store employee
in uniform.
- 3) 外国のお金
- 4) a team member sliding down a slide head
first.
- 5) a word on a sign written in katakana.
- 6) two people holding hands.
- 7) a word written in Hiragana on a sign
- 8) someone using an “uchiwa” or “sensu”.

As is typical for a scavenger hunt, groups were given a time limit that they had to finish by, and a set of rules to follow.

The rules were as follows:

Photo Scavenger Hunt Rules:

1. Only use 1 camera per group.
2. No pictures of phones or computer screens.
3. Pictures don't have to be in the same order as the list.
4. Take a photo, **then** its corresponding number.
5. Don't be late!

Results

Upon completion of the activity, we (teachers) checked the photos with the list to make sure students took the correct pictures. We awarded a point for each correct picture, and the top 5 teams won prizes.

At the end of each event, professors from the American Universities complimented me on the

way the activities got students to work together and communicate. They mentioned how the activities were fun and encouraged students to speak, listen to, and understand each other. I also made a survey for students in my classes to evaluate and share their thoughts about the activities. Students said they learned new things about people from the other cultures, and they gained a little confidence in their English abilities because they were able to communicate, even if it wasn't in perfect English. I think this is an important point to touch on because Japanese students are usually afraid to made mistakes, and they feel they have to speak perfect English. Through these activities, they learned that communication, not perfect English, is the most important thing. I also feel it gave students a look into the future at what their study abroad experience will be like. Typically, foreign students are more outspoken and assertive than Japanese students, so Japanese students can get a feel for what foreigners are like, how they act, and what level of English they will be dealing with. I also hope that our Japanese students became less intimidated by the thought of interacting with foreigners.

Conclusion

Overall, I was very pleased with the way the activities went. Students from each university seemed to enjoy getting to know each other through the activities. They were given a chance to meet people they might not have met if they were left alone to meet people. One thing I also noticed is that because the American and Brazilian

students were so outgoing, it forced our students to come out of their shells a little bit. I think seeing and interacting with the foreign students helped our students relax and open up more than they would have in a simple classroom setting.

I look forward to meeting the next group of foreign students in 2016, and seeing how our new students interact with them. I also look forward to seeing how much progress our second and third year students have made in their English abilities.

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