

# 文化的キーワードによる異文化教育：深い洞察へ Using Cultural Keywords in Intercultural Education: Looking Beyond the Surface

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**Abstract:** The aim of teaching intercultural understanding is to transfer knowledge about other cultures and the culture learning process, as well as to develop learners' awareness of their own culture. Too often Japanese university students' awareness of their own culture and descriptions of it are limited to visible objects. This paper examines the use of cultural keywords as a means to teach learners to look beyond the surface of culturally symbolic objects to the deep culture of values and basic assumptions about society. An assignment to describe three Japanese keywords was given and the responses were analyzed typologically based on Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner's levels of culture. The results showed that 77% of the keywords described by the 57 Japanese students described deep culture.

**概要：**異文化教育の目標は、多文化や異文化適応の過程についての情報を与えることと、学習者の自文化についての理解を高めることである。日本人大学生の自文化についての理解は表面的である場合が多い。本稿は、五つの国の文化的キーワードによる教育によって、学習者が表面的な文化の説明の段階から、より深い文化を認識する段階に至る過程を扱うものである。日本文化の三つのキーワードを説明する課題を用いて、57人の課題の答えを三つの文化のレベルで分析した結果、学習者の日本文化のキーワードの77%が、より深い文化についてのものであった。文化的キーワードによる異文化教育の注意点と将来の研究課題についても述べた。

**Keywords:** intercultural learning, keywords, deep culture

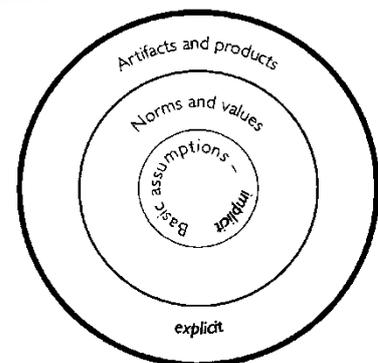
**キーワード：**異文化教育、キーワード、深い文化

## Introduction

The aim of teaching intercultural understanding is to transfer knowledge about other cultures and the culture learning process, as well as to develop learners' awareness of their own culture. Too often Japanese university students' awareness of their own culture and descriptions of it are limited to visible and physical elements such as removing shoes and eating rice. However, to prepare students for intercultural relations their understanding of culture must go deeper than the surface elements of culture. In this study cultural keywords were used as a way to teach university students about other cultures, and as models for an assignment to describe cultural keywords for Japanese culture. Would this teaching method lead students to discover the invisible yet foundational elements of their own culture?

Visible elements of culture, often called explicit culture, are surface manifestations of deeper values and ideas about life. Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner in *Riding the Waves of Culture* (1998) illustrate the layers of culture as a sliced onion with concentric circles; the surface level represents explicit artifacts and products, the middle layer comprises norms and values, and the

### A model of culture



Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner, 1998, p. 22

core is the basic assumptions about existence.

The outer layer represents the visible elements of culture. Artifacts and products include all human-made products such as food, festivals, rockets and art. The middle layer includes norms that a group of people have agreed is the 'right' behavior in order for society to run smoothly, such as where to stand while waiting for a train to arrive. The middle layer also includes values held by people, consciously or unconsciously, about what is "good and bad," for example pushing to be first in line on the train platform is not good because it is selfish. The core of culture consists of ideas about why society is the way it is, which can be discovered when people ask why certain norms and values exist, for example, "Why is it bad to be selfish?" These deep values and basic assumptions of a culture are implicit, unquestioned and rarely discussed by the members of the culture group.

When values and basic assumptions are identified they create a web of meaning that assists insiders and outsiders in understanding surface culture and norms. Joseph Shaules in *Deep Culture – The Hidden Challenges of Global Living* (2007) writes,

The terms *explicit/implicit* and *surface/deep* can be useful pedagogically because they provide a conceptual lens through which to examine intercultural experiences and cultural phenomena. The challenge for learners is not understanding the concepts per se, but coming up with examples from their own intercultural experiences, or explaining the implicit elements of their own cultural background. (p. 230)

Therefore, an assignment was created to cause learners to discern and describe three elements of their implicit culture. Descriptions of culture were written following the idea of cultural keywords.

### Cultural Keywords

A keyword is a word that functions as a key

which opens a door to hidden meaning providing understanding to something of importance. In the eighteenth century keywords referred to words that unlocked mysteries. The meaning broadened in the nineteenth century to include words used to label categories for filing written data. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century when data became digital, keywords took on an important role in searching through metadata available on the internet.

Cultural keywords were first used as a way to deepen people's understanding of their own culture. Raymond Williams' *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (1976, 1983) initiated the analysis of common words used in discussion about culture and society as a way of "seeing our central experiences" (1983, p. xxvii). *Keywords* is a collection of essays on English words that were important to public discussion of British culture and society. Williams' purpose was to distill word meanings, and how these meanings developed due to historical and societal influences. The 131 words, or groups of words, he called "keywords" (1983, p. xxvii). Consistent with Williams' view on the need to clarify the changing meaning of words, an updated version was published, *New Keywords: A Revised Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (Bennett, Grossberg, and Morris, 2005). The authors acknowledge the broad usage of the English language in Western Anglophone countries and thus collected essays from writers in four countries. Likewise, keywords were used to summarize changes in culture and society, in *Keywords for American Cultural Studies* (Burgett and Hendler, 2007) which is a collaboration of authors writing essays on words in the field of American culture. Interestingly, this book, used as a university textbook, is accompanied with a website on which students can add their ideas about keywords for American culture. *Uncovering the Codes: Fifteen Keywords in Korean Culture* (Kim, 2005) was written foremost for Koreans, living in Korea or abroad, to help them understand their own deep culture, and secondly, to describe Korean culture to non-Koreans.

Anna Wierzbicka took up the term keywords with a different purpose. As a linguist, influenced

by Sapir's view of vocabulary describing culture, she sought to develop a model for using keywords to understand different cultures (1997, 2003). Her method of cultural pragmatics used a framework for analyzing keywords across cultures. In *Understanding Cultures through Their Key Words* (1997), Wierzbicka posits that certain vocabulary of a language plays an important role in the culture of the speakers of the language, and that these words can offer insights into the culture. She aimed to show cultural patterns through the study of keywords. She explains that there is no finite set of keywords for a language or an agreed on method for identifying them. However, to be a keyword, first, the word must be a common word with a proven high frequency. Second, the word should refer to emotions or values (a departure from the sociological guidelines of former keyword authors). The word also may appear frequently in song lyrics, poems and word clusters. Wierzbicka argues that keywords often relate to one another and can illustrate *a deep and nuanced view of a culture*, not a piecemeal view of a culture. The lexicon of a people, as described in keywords, and demonstrated in discourse reveals a multidimensional definition of not only a word but an idea of value that is often unique to the culture of the speakers of the language.

Keywords have been recognized as a way to overview core elements of culture for outsiders, for example, *Dictionary of Korea's Business and Cultural Code Words* (De Mente, 1998) in which two hundred culture-laden words in the Korean language are explained with reference to history and current daily life. Cultural keywords can be a way to overview a people's culture, observe changes overtime and observe connections between the keywords people use. Thus, Hua in *Exploring Intercultural Communication Language in Action* (2014) includes cultural keywords "as a means for understanding culture and developing intercultural understanding" (p. 184).

The present study observes the influence of teaching about cultures with keywords. Preceding the assignment students learned about five countries using the cultural keywords paradigm. Then the students were given an assignment to

write three keywords for Japanese culture. The question researched is, does teaching cultural keywords of five countries enable Japanese university students to articulate values and basic assumptions of their own culture?

## Method

Japanese college students enrolled in a class on intercultural understanding by the author were introduced to the cultural keywords of five countries, Australia, Singapore, America, Korea and Canada.

**Table 1 Keywords Taught in Class**

Country	Keywords
Australia	mate, yarn, shout, dob in, bloody
Singapore	multicultural, kiasu, Singlish, fines
USA	freedom of choice, equal opportunity, diversity, individualism
Korea	han, kikkajuui, aboji, chodae, myongye, kiddokyo
Canada	bilingual, multicultural, modesty

Lectures were taught in English with Japanese support. Each keyword was explained with a definition, cultural background, examples of usage, and examples of the word manifest in current society. Following these lectures, students received an assignment to describe three keywords for Japanese culture. The students were given a handout with spaces to write, the Japanese keyword, an English translation, a definition of the keyword, the historical background for the keyword, two example sentences to show how the word is used in common speech, and an example of the influence of the keyword on society. The students wrote their handout in Japanese or English. The assignment was 9% of the course grade. Complete data was received from 57 students.

## Participants

The participating students were second-year college students at a college in central Japan. They were primarily female, with only 4 males participating. The students were in the

Multicultural Communication Department, studying international and local culture, English language and culture, or Japanese language and culture. Only one student had lived overseas for more than a month.

**Data Analysis**

The data was analyzed typologically (Hatch, 2002) using Trompenaars and Hampden-Turners’ description of the three levels of culture: artifacts and products, norms and values, and basic assumptions. Next, data within each typology was divided into categories. Artifacts and products data were divided into three categories, food, events, and objects. The data in the middle layer of culture, norms and values, were divided into two categories, norms of communication practices and values admired by Japanese people. The data for basic assumptions of culture were not categorized.

**Results**

The cultural keywords described by the participants are listed by category, and when a keyword was written more than once the number of responses is written in parentheses. The participants’ assignments produced 170 keywords of which 30 (17%) described surface layer culture (Table 1).

**Table 2**

Outer layer of culture	Artifacts and Products Data
Food	Japanese cuisine (2), Japanese sweets, rice, New Year’s dishes
Events	cherry blossom viewing (2), New Year’s Day, Coming of Age Day, Girl’s Day, 7-5-3 celebration, tea ceremony, fireworks
Objects	kimono (2), rice mats, living room, religious doll, yarn ball, flower arrangement, fan, comics (2), animation (2), cute things (3), hot springs, expert craftsmanship

The keywords included five words for food, eight words for events, and sixteen words for objects. Most of the descriptions of foods, events and objects showed that the writer was only

thinking on the visual level and did not relate the object to any deeper meaning in culture. For example, the keyword ‘kimono’ was defined as “clothing people wear, a type of Japanese clothing” and the examples of the word in current society were a list of occasions when a kimono is worn. A few descriptions of surface keywords revealed that the student viewed the object as representative of a deeper value in Japanese culture. For example, the keyword ‘cherry blossom viewing’ was described as “Japanese people feel deeply moved by the change of the four seasons and the beauty of nature.” Four students who had many absences did not understand the assignment and wrote keywords that were on the surface of culture.

**Table 3**

Middle layer of culture	Norms and Values Data
Norms	don’t be wasteful (12), hospitality (11), being observant of others (6), using greetings (2), using honorific speech (2), using vague speech, using set phrases, bowing, (2), apologizing, laying prostrate to beg, using flattery, after receiving a gift returning a gift, indifference, lip service,
Values	simplicity (8), modesty (8), spirit of unity (6), cooperative (3), humility (5), curtesy (4), elegance, delicate, subtle and profound (2), warm hearted (2), just and dutiful (2), methodical, punctual, sincere,

Cultural keywords that were evaluated as norms or values numbered 96 (56%). Table 2 shows these keywords as divided between norms or values, however this categorization is not absolute because descriptions of the same keyword described a communication or lifestyle pattern (norm) and a desired valued among Japanese people (value). For example, the keyword ‘don’t be wasteful’ was described as a norm, “People do not waste things and try to use things until it isn’t usable,” and as a value, “To waste something that could still be used is regrettable.” Along with ‘don’t be wasteful’ and ‘hospitality,’ 10 other keywords describing communication patterns were grouped together as norms. Fifteen keywords described desirable values clustering around harmonious relationships (spirit of unity,

cooperation, humility, modesty, warm hearted, and curtesy) and the Japanese sense of beauty (simplicity, elegance, delicate, subtle and profound).

**Table 4**

Core of culture	Basic Assumptions Data
	true feelings and a person's public stance may not be the same (10), relationships are hierarchical (6), the group priorities come first (6), shame is more influential than conviction (10), religious beliefs (5)

Keywords that described basic assumptions of Japanese culture comprised 21% of the data in four keywords and one topic, religion. The four keywords are commonly included in descriptions of Japanese culture. Even if the student referred to some resource material in choosing a keyword, in order to complete the assignment they needed to write historical background, examples of usage and examples in society which would require them to think on their own, thus making the assignment valuable.

Did teaching cultural keywords of five countries enable Japanese university students to articulate values and basic assumptions of their own culture? The results of the assignment showed that 77% of the cultural keywords were beyond the surface level of culture describing values and basic assumptions. This study did not form a control group that did not receive the teaching on cultural keywords, and the study did not measure students' ability to describe Japanese cultural keywords before the model lectures of country keywords and the keyword assignment. Thus, I cannot say the results are due to this class alone. I can only suggest that there may be a relationship between the lectures, assignment, and the results. Future development of this research could measure the student's ability to describe Japanese cultural keywords at the beginning of the term and then at the end in an attempt to measure learning.

Teaching culture using cultural keywords or any other means of summarizing the complex culture of a group of people has two cautionary elements. First, culture keywords are stated as a description of the culture of a people group at a

certain time; however changes in technology, society, and the environment, can cause gradual change in culture and the definition of a keyword. This is exemplified in the Australian cultural keyword, mate. Originally mate was used only by men to describe the other men they labored with and depended on while living in the outback. However, the definition of the word has expanded in contemporary society to include office co-workers and sports team members, along with women using the word.

A second caution is that no group of people, whether regional, racial or national are homogeneous; there will always be people who do not fit the norm of a group. Shaules comments, "It is difficult, however, to describe cultural difference in a way that both recognizes the diversity and dynamism of particular behaviors, and the deep patterns of similarity that unify people in cultural communities at differing levels of abstraction" (Shaules, 59). These two limitations should be explained in any lecture attempting to summarize the culture of a group of people.

In conclusion, this paper has reported on the use of cultural keywords in lectures and an assignment as a way to develop learners' ability to describe their own culture. Becoming aware of one's own culture, which was formerly neither recognized nor analyzed, is thought to be the first step in being able to understand intercultural relations. Awareness of one's own culture is also necessary for maintaining one's identity in a multicultural situation which is one factor in the government's definition of global human resources (The Council on Promotion of Human Resource for Globalization Development, 2011). A future development of this method of teaching would be to have students make slides to describe the keywords, following the lecture model, and then present their keywords to classmates.

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