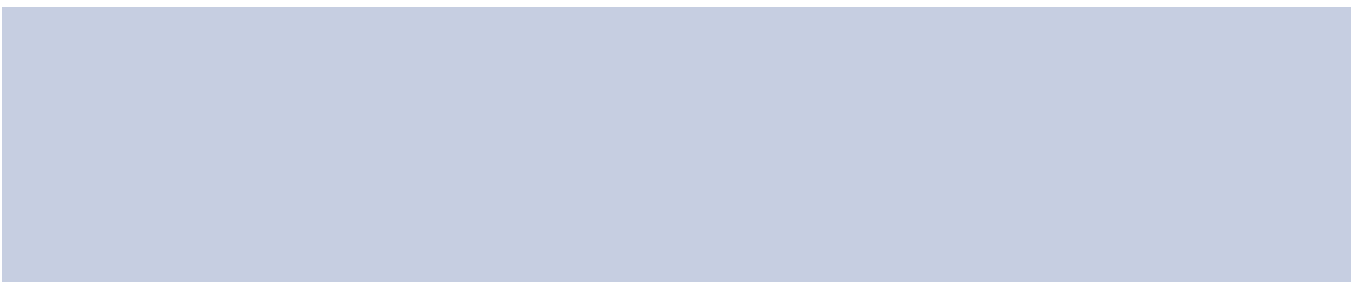


Gesture lesson for Japanese English language learners

by Ronald Schmidt-Fajlik

In teaching English to Japanese students, the focus is understandably on the English language. The current emphasis on communicative approaches in language teaching focuses on speaking and listening using various kinds of conversation strategies based on a variety of situations. Often an important aspect of cross-cultural communication is overlooked which may lead to misunderstanding.

One student described to me her experience of using the Japanese gesture for 'no' by waving her hand in front of her face in response to a question by a member of her homestay family in Utah. Her host family did not understand the meaning of this gesture. This demonstrates the shortcomings of merely teaching communication in terms of functional language without a consideration of the use of nonverbal communication when communicating with



someone from a different culture. An awareness of the use of gestures may also serve to promote better communication as the verbal components of what one is trying to say are integrated with the nonverbal components. The following gesture lesson may serve to improve students knowledge and awareness of the use of nonverbal communication when communicating with someone from a different culture.

The gestures introduced are generally those used in English speaking countries.

Part A: Pre-Lesson Activities

The following activities are intended to increase student awareness of nonverbal communication in terms of gestures. The activities are intended to give students better insight into the different ways in which gestures can be used to convey information. An understanding of students own use of gestures in the pre-lesson activities serves to better prepare students for differences in culturally determined nonverbal behaviour in terms of gestures which will be dealt with later in the lesson.

Activity

1. Charades

A game of charades is an effective 'warm up' by which to introduce the topic of gestures. The variety of ways gestures can be used to communicate various meanings build student awareness in the use of gestures to communicate meaning in a different culture. The game may be played using English words that are already known to the students. Students may use gestures to guess objects in the classroom (pencil, desk, book, etc.), animals (dog, cat, bird), various types of food (spaghetti, hot dog, apple, carrot), or occupations (doctor, teacher, pilot, etc.)

Procedure (charades)

- 1) Divide the class into groups of 3 or 4 students.
- 2) All groups begin in a standing position. A member from each group comes up to the teacher who writes down the item to be gestured. Alternatively the students may contribute the items to be chosen by writing down an item on a slip of paper. The slips would then be collected and placed in a draw bag. The item would then be drawn and presented to the members of each group who have come up to the teacher.
- 3) Once the item has been seen, the members from each of the groups quickly go back to their groups and gesture the item. Once a member of the group has guessed the item, the group sits down. The game continues until all groups are sitting.
- 4) The teacher asks each group to demonstrate the gesture(s) which helped the group guess the item. The teacher notes any differences (or similarities)

between the gestures used by various groups to make students aware of the various possibilities.

5) The game continues as above with each member of the group taking a turn at gesturing.

Activity

2. Japanese gestures

This activity is designed to make students better aware of the different types of gestures used in their own culture. As these gestures are generally used spontaneously during interaction, this activity makes students better aware of the types of gestures that they use in communication. The activity may be prefaced by the teacher's observations of Japanese gestures which would give students insight into what people outside their own culture think about Japanese gestures. The instructor may discuss different gestures such as that of raising the little finger to indicate a girlfriend, pointing to the face to indicate 'me' or waving a hand in front of the face to indicate 'no'.

Procedure (Japanese gestures)

1) The students are given a list of gestures to communicate which are generally used in Japan or are different from those gestures typically used by native English speakers. The students are to read the following gestures (written on the black board) and perform each particular gesture based on how it is done in Japan:

- 1) crazy
- 2) come here
- 3) money
- 4) me
- 5) no
- 6) the number six

*Teacher's key to Japanese gestures:

1) crazy:	a flip of the hand away from the head.
2) come here:	waving with the palm down as opposed to having the palm up as used by English speakers.
3) money:	the same as the O.K. sign used in North America.
4) me:	pointing to the face.
5) no:	waving the hand in front of the face.
6) number six:	a spread hand indicating five with the index finger from the other hand
place	in the palm of the spread hand to

2) The students are called upon to demonstrate each gesture to ascertain that there is agreement amongst

the students as to the gesture used in each case.

Original Gestures

(optional extension of Japanese gestures)

3) In order to determine if other types of gestures could be used to communicate the above messages students are asked to think of an original gesture for each of the above items. The students then find a partner to whom they try to communicate the item using their original gesture. Their partner then tries to guess which item is being gestured.

4) Students demonstrate some of their original gestures to the rest of the class.

Part B: Cross Cultural Gestures

The following activity describes the main lesson material concerning the types of gestures generally used by native English speakers.

A. Introduction

The teacher may introduce the topic of gestures used in cross-cultural communication by referring to the currently used textbook. Although the textbook may not directly teach nonverbal communication, it may contain photos and illustrations where gestures

are used. These may be used to discuss the meaning of the various gestures.

Procedure

1) Various types of gestures found in the course textbook are chosen.

2) Students 'brainstorm' in groups of three or four the meanings of the gestures used in the pictures. A group secretary records responses.

3) The responses from each group are taken up and discussed.

B. Native Speaker Gestures

1) Students are handed out the work sheets (appendixes 1 and 2) incorporating pictures of gestures used by native English speakers. Alternatively the teacher may gesture live or prepare a video of the gestures which would be preferable to static pictures as gestures generally take place through time and space involving an integration of movement of the entire body along with gestures involving hands.

2) Students match the gesture to the correct written interpretation in question 1 and continue with questions 2,3,4. 3) Answers to Part A are taken up and discussed.

__answer key:__

A(1), B(12), C(13), D(4), E(3), F(2), G(5), H(6), I(10), J(11), K(7), L(14), M(8), N(9)

- 4) Students act out the gestures as indicated in Part B
- 5) Role plays using gestures are practiced and performed.

Gestures

Name: _____

Do you know what the following gestures mean?

Part A

1. Fill () with the correct picture number.

- A () come here
- B () victory/peace
- C () cut/stop
- D () good luck/wish for
- E () I promise/Scout's Honor
- F () me
- G () good
- H () quiet
- I () I don't know
- J () I give up
- K () bad
- L () ok

- M () angry/not pleased
- N () one moment please/wait

2. Which of the gestures below are used in Japan?

3. Which of the above gestures are not used in Japan?

4. Are there any other gestures used in Japan that are not illustrated below? Describe them below.

Part B

- 1. Act out the gestures shown on the sheet. Say the item as you gesture to add emphasis to the gesture.
- 2. Find a partner. Act out the following. Use gestures.
 - A: Come here
 - B: Yes?
 - A: Do you know when my birthday is?
 - B: No. I don't know when your birthday is.
 - A: My birthday is...

