

# Conversations about culture: How Korean and Japanese cultural products, practices and perspectives are discussed to co-construct cultural understanding in talk



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## ABSTRACT

When learning to speak another language, expressing complex ideas about one's culture and the target culture is an important aspect of communication. This study examines the co-construction of culture through the conversational actions of the participants. Utilizing the cultural triangle of the three Ps (product, practice and perspective) proposed by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) for classroom learning (National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project, 2006), this study examines whether this framework is useful for uncovering cultural talk in natural settings among Korean speakers of Japanese and their interlocutors. Cultural talk in this study is identified by demonstrating where participants display orientations through their conversational actions to culture. The findings move beyond the classroom to see how the participants display cultural awareness in conversations about culture and how ACTFL's products, practices and perspectives are accomplished in talk.

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## 1. Introduction

Research about culture and cultural learning has focused on classroom preparation of students for intercultural encounters (Lange & Paige, 2003). In many language classrooms, learners are provided some type of input about the target culture that teachers hope will assist them when they travel to or interact with those from the target culture. Some of these learners have opportunities to leave the classroom and go on to engage with speakers of that language through study abroad or travel. This study takes a different approach for uncovering how learners of Japanese express ideas about culture in naturally occurring talk. In fact, the participants in this study were not coached or prepared as to what culture is or how to talk about culture through classroom instruction. The participants engaged in cultural topics that stemmed from conversations where participants co-constructed the outcomes of that talk. As Kramsch (2003) aptly states:

“Culture is an interpersonal process of meaning construction. The meaning of an utterance is neither solely in its reference to the outside world nor only in the intention of its speaker, but, rather speaker and hearer jointly construct it in their efforts to find a common ground of understanding” (p. 21–22).

The participants in this study find common ground and reach mutual understanding through their talk about culture.

This study focuses on the conversational actions of Korean and Japanese participants in talk about culture in the Japanese language. Utilizing the cultural triangle of the three Ps (product, practice and perspective) proposed by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (henceforth, ACTFL) for classroom learning (National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project, 2006), this study will examine whether this is a useful tool for exploring cultural talk in natural settings among the Korean speakers of Japanese and their interlocutors. The findings will demonstrate that the participants engage in conversations about culture that shed light on

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how products, practices and perspectives are talked about and accomplished in talk. This study moves beyond the classroom to see how participants in and through conversations about culture and cultural differences with members of another culture arrive at shared meanings and understandings.

## 2. Korean Wave and Japan

The main participants in this study are Korean speakers of Japanese who are studying at a Japanese university. In order to understand what was occurring during the data collection, this study relies on ethnographic research for understanding the social context. The conversations analyzed in this study were recorded during a cultural shift in Japan called the Korean Wave or Korean Boom. In 1910, Japan colonized Korea. In 1948, there was a ban in Korea for the exchange of cultural goods from Japan. This ban was lifted in 1998 and Japanese popular culture was finally allowed to enter Korea. In a preemptive response to the possible increased amount of Japanese pop culture into Korea, the Korean Culture Ministry's budget initiated "its first five-year plan to build up the domestic industry." (Onishi, 2005). This led to the Korean Wave as labeled by cultural studies scholars (Cho, 2005; Dator & Seo, 2004; Huat, 2004). It began with exporting Korean television dramas to China and then Japan, Taiwan and the United States.

Internationalization, which has always been a buzzword in Japan in regard to English speaking countries such as Britain and the United States, was now being applied to the study of Korea, Korean culture, and the Korean language. The exchange of cultural goods in general and media products in particular escalated the debut of the Korean TV drama, *Winter Sonata* (Fuyu no Sonata) in April 2003. From April 2003 to December 2004, the drama was televised four times; three times with Japanese dubbed voices and the last airing in Korean with Japanese subtitles (Chae, 2014, 199). Primarily viewed by women in their 30s, 40s and 50s, this drama triggered an increased desire to learn the Korean language, to eat and prepare Korean cuisine, and to visit Korea. Interview research has shown that women in these age brackets were enthralled with this particular Korean drama (Môri, 2008; Mouri, 2004) and Korean culture (food and music). Many Japanese women sought out Korean culture and intercultural exchanges. This cultural shift in Japan has had significant impacts on the cultural discourse. However, no research to date has examined interactional discourse about how culture was co-constructed in talk during this timeframe.

## 3. ACTFL guidelines and culture

Learning a foreign or second language should not be in isolation of learning the culture of that language. The American Council for Teaching Foreign Language (hereafter, ACTFL) provides standards and guidelines for the classroom teacher and students to use for this process of cultural learning. ACTFL's products, practices and perspectives provide a starting point for teachers and researchers alike. Culture as defined by the ACTFL standards is "understood to include the philosophical perspectives, the behavioral practices, and the products – both tangible and intangible – of a society" (National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project, 2006, p. 47). Fig. 1 produced by ACTFL shows the interrelationship among these three terms.

The standards for culture produced by ACTFL in this diagram indicate the interconnectedness among these terms. In the classroom, the standards for students' learning language and acquiring knowledge about culture have been defined as the following:

Standard 2.1 Students demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between the practices and perspectives of the culture studied (National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project, 2006, p. 50).

Standard 2.2 Students demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between the products and perspectives of the cultures studied (National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project, 2006, p. 51).

Cutshall (2012) suggests that in the classroom, products and practices are more accessible to language learners while perspectives tend to be more difficult to acquire. As a language educator and one who has studied non-native speakers' of Japanese audio recorded interactions, this is an interesting point. If we are striving to promote the three P's in the classroom, are these standards exhibited in conversational data where the goal is not about cultural learning. This study wants to see how these standards would play out in unprompted conversations where cultural topics evolve as a part of the talk.

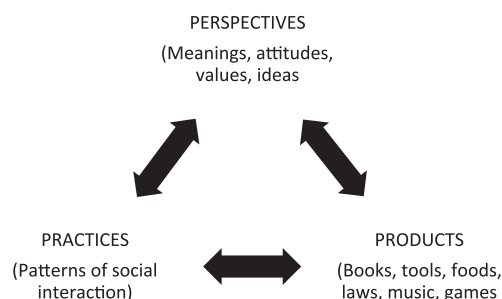


Fig. 1. Culture: products, practices and perspectives.  
From: National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project (2006, p. 47).

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