

A report of practices

Presentations by a Croatian High-school Teacher by means of Lectures on Ethics and Philosophy in Japan

—Presentations in English to Japanese students by Ms. Majda Praiz—

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I) Outline of the Presentations (by Tomoyoshi Iizuka)

Ms. Majda Praiz came to Japan from Croatia in October 2013, on the teacher training program, to study Education of Philosophy in Japan. After Japanese language training for six months, she started her study training under my guidance from April 2014. She was a high-school teacher of philosophy, ethics and sociology in Croatia. Therefore, I suggested to her that she give some presentations to the students in my lectures on ethics and philosophy, which she accepted willingly.

1 . Purposes of Presentations

①My lectures on ethics and philosophy are about western ethics and philosophy. I thought that it would be very significant for Japanese students to listen to presentations given by a European high-school teacher of ethics and philosophy.

②Japanese society has been expected to be more internationalized, but one of the most difficult problems is that of the language. Most Japanese are not good at listening and speaking in English. In Japan, there are few opportunities to have a conversation with people from other countries in English. Therefore, it would be useful for students to listen to her presentations in English.

③I thought that giving presentations would be useful for Ms. Praiz too, for it would enable her to study the education of philosophy in Japan directly, and to understand a lot of characteristics of Japanese society and culture.

2 . The Presentation Method

- As regards students who attended the lectures: The number of the students was about twenty. They were all second-year students of the Faculty of Education.
- Regarding the way of the presentations: I lectured on ethics (philosophy) in Japanese for about sixty minutes and then Ms. Praiz gave her presentation in English using Power point for about twenty minutes. The contents were related to my lecture.
- Related to comments and questions of the students: After her presentations, students wrote about

what they felt, or their questions (in English or Japanese). Ms. Mariko Yoshida translated those written in Japanese into English and Ms. Praiz answered questions in English at the next lecture. (Their comments and questions were not reflected in their evaluation of ethics and philosophy.)

3. My instructions in advance about her presentations

- Self- introduction (January 23rd, 2014)

I asked her to introduce herself and Croatia to the students.

- Presentation ① (April 14th, 2014 on ethics)

I asked her to explain the following.

- How much influence do famous ancient Greek philosophers (e.g. Socrates, Plato and Aristotle) have upon European (Croatian) people today?
- Today is the scientific age, so isn't the theory of "idea" of Plato losing people's respect?
- Are classical languages (Greek, Latin etc.) taught in school today?

- Presentation ② (May 19th, 2014 on ethics)

- Do traditional religious thoughts (e.g. original sin, eschatology etc.) have a great influence upon people's minds and lives still today?
- Please make some comments about Xun-zi's view that human nature is inherently evil, for some students are interested in his view. (Xun-zi is one of the most famous ancient Chinese thinkers.)

- Presentation ③ (June 30th, 2014 on ethics)

- The ethics of Kant seems to be idealistic. Utilitarianism seems to be realistic. Which of the two thoughts would Croatian students choose as their guiding principle for their lives?

- Presentation ④ (November 18th, 2014 on philosophy)

- Please speak about your interests in Pascal (about his thought, his life, and the relations between his philosophy and religion.)

- Presentation ⑤ (December 16th, 2014 on philosophy)

- Please speak about your interests in Max Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*.

4. What I thought after her presentations.

① Reading the comments and questions of students, I found that they understood her presentations more than I had expected. Though few students could comprehend matters of detail, especially about the Christian religion, they seemed to find that Europeans had also many common interests in ethics and philosophy with themselves. I thought that these experiences would open a new horizon to them.

②Some students said that it was difficult for them to follow her speech because of their lack of ability in English. In presentation ④ and ⑤, I gave some short explanations in Japanese in the middle of her presentation. I thought that Japanese students' English proficiency would be much improved if only they had more opportunities to talk with foreigners.

③In every presentation, Ms. Praiz spoke to the students honestly and earnestly. Though Japanese students were reluctant to embark on real discussion, I thought that they certainly felt her sincerity and passion. I expected that Ms. Praiz understood many things through her presentations. I hope that she may have some interests in Japanese society and culture from now on.

II) Practice (by Majda Praiz)

During my "In service teacher training program" at the University of Nagasaki, I participated in several lectures as a part of the Ethics and Western Philosophy course, conducted by Professor Iizuka. The aim of my lectures was to familiarize Japanese students with certain subjects of western ethics and philosophy from the viewpoint of the very same western culture. All my lectures were conducted in the English language, and as such, were a curious experience for most of the students that took part in them.

1. Summary of the lectures

In my first introductory lecture, the students were acquainted with Croatia, its culture, religion and language. The students' reactions were extremely positive. Although many of them knew little or nothing about Croatia, they showed a significant interest in Croatia and its culture after the lecture.

After the introductory lecture, 5 more were held during 2 semesters on the following subjects:

1. Greek philosophy in Croatia and Europe today: the intent of this lecture was to portray how Greek philosophy influenced the development of European and Croatian culture where this influence is present still today, and in which manner Plato's and Aristotle's thoughts were incorporated into Christianity with the help of Thomas Aquinas and Aurelius Augustine;
2. The traditional religious thoughts of people in Croatia – the focus of this lecture was Original Sin and the reason why the idea of the Original Sin is still easily acceptable to Christians;
3. On the ethics of Kant and Utilitarianism – the aim of this lecture was to try to assume which of the two ethical principles (Kant's Categorical Imperative and Utilitarianism) was closer to Croatian students' thinking patterns;
4. Blaise Pascal - "God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob, not philosophers and scholars" – during this lecture, I focused on the difference that Pascal had made between the philosophical and

religious perspective of God;

5. Max Weber "Protestant Ethic and Spirit of Capitalism" – through this lecture I sought to portray why Protestantism was good breeding soil for the development of capitalism.

All the lectures were held within the framework of the classes of Professor Iizuka, who provided a detailed insight in Japanese of the subject and thereby enabled for the students not fluent in English to gain a general idea into what my section of lectures would be talking about. Upon completion of my lectures, the students were given a questionnaire to write in their impressions, and possible questions connected to my part of the classes.

Their comments were a sort of evaluation of the lectures and an indicator of their experience and their ability to listen to the lectures in English.

2. Differences between Japan and Croatia in the teaching of Philosophy

As well as this being the first time for many students to participate in lectures in English, it was also the first occasion on which I had to hold lectures in English, which is not my mother tongue, and additionally to students of a completely different cultural background, which automatically implies a different set of values and norms than those present in so-called western culture and philosophy.

Through this invaluable experience, I have noticed many differences in holding philosophy classes in Japan and Croatia. The differences are obvious in terms of the style of lectures and in the teacher-student relationship. My former experience as a philosophy teacher has showed that philosophy demands discussion and that students in Croatia do not hesitate to ask questions and express their opinions, which need not to coincide with the teacher's opinion. This type of in-class student participation is considered desirable. On the other hand, Japanese students are withdrawn and passive during lectures. I presume one of the reasons for the lack of interaction during lessons is not only the language barrier, but also the cultural factors. During my stay in Japan, I have noticed that hierarchy is very important in Japanese culture and that students hold a high level of respect toward their professor, and are therefore hesitant in expressing their opinions. All questions and ambiguities were written down by students on the previously-mentioned questionnaire, and I also provided answers to them in writing. The teacher-student relationship is much more casual in Croatia contributing to a more relaxed climate in the classroom, and thus to the style of lectures.

This type of behavioral culture required me to change the style of lecturing I usually use in Croatia and to adjust it to Japanese students.

Due to the aforementioned apparent introversion and reluctance of Japanese students in expressing themselves in English, at first I thought that my lectures were not comprehensible to the majority of students. However, although there were some of them that initially had difficulties with understanding classes in English, based on the comments students wrote in the questionnaire, I have realized that most of them completely understood and could follow my lectures, which provided me with additional motivation to make them even more interesting and easier to understand.

3. Conclusion

Despite the above - mentioned difficulties, I believe that lectures in English bring great benefit to Japanese students and are a significant factor in the much needed internationalization of the Japanese educational system. To be able to be competitive in the modern world of globalization, Japan needs to raise a new generation of students who will be competitive at an international level. Although Japan is a country with a strong national identity, it is evident and commendable that Japanese universities are increasingly striving toward internationalization. The Japanese government offers many scholarships that promote the globalization of higher education and thus encourages universities to expand and develop their international programs. Japan has opened its doors to many international students, but, being one of them, I realize that there are still many obstacles that need to be overcome for Japan to be fully adjusted to foreign students and professors. Individuals who are not fluent in Japanese are significantly hindered in their participation in the academic sphere. Considering that Japanese is not a language that is widely used in the world, only a small number of international students have the ability to fully benefit from regular classes. Lectures in English are scarce, and in many universities, practically non-existent. Introducing it would greatly facilitate the study of foreign students and thereby attract more of them to Japan. On the other hand, professional lecturing in English would facilitate Japanese students to become competitive in the international market and also provide them with the opportunity to be more exposed to a foreign language, as well as being more relaxed when using it.

Based on my current experience, I think that Japan is on the right track when it comes to the globalization of its educational system. With additional effort, Japanese universities will make an important contribution to Japan's exposure to, and inclusion in the process of globalization.

III) Students' responses to Ms. Praiz's presentations (by Mariko Yoshida)

1. Introduction

First of all, I would like to introduce myself and explain my involvement in this research paper. I am a second-year graduate student of English education, and have also been a tutor to Ms. Praiz since October 2013. Whenever I had enough time, I attended the class and observed the students during her presentations. In addition, I translated the students' comments and questions into English for her. On this paper, thus, I would like to show some students' comments and questions about Ms. Praiz's presentations. I expect that the students' positive attitudes toward her presentations will be apparent.

2. Students' comments and questions from each presentation

- Class 1 (January 23rd, 2014)

Comment ① "I think that Croatian language is very difficult! So, I like Croatia and other Europe

countries. Because, I like soccer in Europe! I want to visit Croatia. What I think about Miss. Majda's presentation is Croatia is very beautiful country. Especially, national parks are wonderful. Recently, I'm interested in journey! So, I want to visit Europe!

Q.

Is Japanese culture and history famous in Croatia? For example, temples, historical city (Kyoto)."

- Class 2 (April 14th, 2014)

Comment ② "Philosophy is related to religion deeply. The Croatia and Europeans is studying Greek philosophy & Latin language. I was impressed that philosophy influence on today's society and culture is amazing."

(Comments ① and ② were written in English by the students, and you can see them trying to express their feelings and opinions as much as possible in English. These are original transcripts.)

Comment ③ "It was the first time for me to listen to a presentation in English and it was a great experience for me. I was surprised at the fact that children in Europe learn about philosophers from an early age."

- Class 3 (May 19th, 2014)

Comment ④ "I think it is the idea 'human nature is fundamentally evil' that causes humans to easily get attracted in a bad direction, but we overcome it and become better humans. I learned this idea in moral education classes when I was an elementary school student. Do you have moral education in Croatia?"

Comment ⑤ "I'm not good at English, so I couldn't understand the details. However, I think that sin is regarded as important in the Catholic faith. The story of Adam and Eve was easy to understand for me. Besides, you talked about Xun-zi, which was easy to understand too."

- Class 4 (June 30th, 2014)

Comment ⑥ "It was a little difficult for me to understand the presentation in English. However, your opinions and thoughts were really helpful to me. Also, Kant and Mill's ethical thoughts are very interesting. I would like to know more about 'the purpose's kingdom'".

- Class 5 (November 18th, 2014)

Comment ⑦ "I could learn much about Pascal. Some explanations, such as what Pascal thought, were difficult for me to understand in English, but it was fun to listen to your presentation."

Comment ⑧ "Majda's idea about the bet is a little different from Iizuka sensei's, and I felt it's interesting that people have different views about it."

3. Conclusion

At first, the students looked anxious and hesitated to ask Ms. Praiz questions in English. However, when I read their comments on the question sheets after the classes, most of the students wrote many questions in Japanese and I could see their positive attitudes and enthusiasm about her presentations in English. I noticed that they were very interested in her presentations, but did not have confidence about their English skills, and did not know how to express their opinions in English.

Also, I noticed the comments of the students changing through Ms. Praiz's presentations. Their comments became more and more related to her presentations, and I could see they actually understood what she said in English. It is because they may have become accustomed to her English little by little, and able to catch what she said. Moreover, even if they did not understand all, I think they tried to connect what she said to their own knowledge. It was good to see that they made more questions about her presentations than before.

I am sure that the students learned a great deal from Ms. Praiz about, not only philosophy, but also something international, as I did. I hope that they continue to think of philosophy from different points of view, including other countries' views, and try to communicate more actively with people from all over the world in the future.

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