Mediating ingroup/outgroup perceptions to engage in perspective taking for
the promotion of cultural understanding in EFL education

オストマン・ディビッド

Introduction

Perspective taking, the skill to step outside of one's worldview and into that of others, is a dimension of cognitive empathy, which Goldie (2000) characterizes as "a process by which a person centrally imagines the *narrative* (including the thoughts, feelings, and emotions) of another person" (p. 195). Not to be confused with affective (emotional) empathy, defined by Eisenberg and Strayer (1987) as "an emotional response that stems from another's emotional state or condition and that is congruent with the other's emotional state or situation" (p. 5), perspective taking involves imagining oneself into the situation of others to gain insight into their motivations, attitudes, and feelings, in contrast to the "feeling your pain" popular understanding of empathy.

Among political thinkers, the importance of cognitive empathy has begun to garner a grudging recognition. Despite the age-old adage to "know thy enemy," or as famed Samurai Miyamoto Musashi wrote in *The Book of Five Rings* ""To become the enemy" means to think yourself into the enemy's position" (Miyamoto, 1645/1974, p. 75), increasingly strained geo-politic tensions between global rivals reveal a conspicuous inability to understand the world from *the opponent's* perspective. Writing about the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine in *Responsible Statecraft*, political commentator

Robert Wright (2022) levied criticism at successive American administrations, asserting that: "a series of American presidents—Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, and Barack Obama—have led us toward the current crisis by repeatedly failing to take serious account of the Russian leadership's perspective." Miyamoto's ageless injunction notwithstanding, placing oneself into the shoes of others is seldom an effortless, involuntary exercise.

In psychology, perspective taking refers to a range of conscious and unconscious acts. For example, there is the perspective-taking commonly referred to as *mind–reading* or *mentalizing* (Smith, 2006), that relates to the development of a theory of mind, or an understanding that another's thoughts may differ from one's own (Baren-cohen, 1997). Based on visual signals provided by interlocutors, as children we typically learn to "read" the emotional states of others. As we grow, we also gain life experiences which we utilize to predict how others with similar experiences may think and feel. According to Hodges and Myer (2007), "successful perspective-taking probably frequently requires drawing on both strategies" (p. 297). The social value of reflexively reading body language and connecting experiences becomes clear when one considers disorders such as autism, where individuals exhibit a diminished ability to engage in perspective taking (Oberman et al., 2005; Hadjikhani et al., 2006).

In contrast to this largely unconscious form of perspective taking are concerted efforts to *feel or project oneself into a novel situation* (Titchener, 1915) or to *imaginatively transpose oneself* into another's thoughts (Allport, 1961). This is Miyamoto's perspective taking, where one consciously attempts to see the world through the eyes of others—a challenging task, particularly when the perspective taker perceives few similarities in experience or life situation with the subject. While one may struggle to see the

world through the eyes of the leader of a rival nation, it is often no less challenging to imagine oneself into the shoes of a young child or an elderly relation, more still a member of another cultural group.

Despite the potential value of empathy (e.g., for parents, medical professionals, teachers, etc.), perspective taking can be challenging, with the difficulty of empathic engagement varying depending on *whose* perspective we are trying to take. In the case of an individual with whom we perceive similarities in gender, age, life situation, and cultural background, perspective taking may be a relatively simple exercise. However, when such similarities are not perceived, the difficulty of empathic engagement increases. Stated differently, perspective taking is more challenging when the shoes we are attempting to stand in belong to a member of an outgroup.

While previous studies have focused on the development of perspective taking ability in ESL learners through flash fiction narratives (Ostman, 2019), and video interviews utilizing the Database of Immigrant Narratives (DIN) (Ostman, 2022), the present research considers the mediative effect of ingroup/outgroup perceptions on learner ability to engage in perspective taking, a problem that has been identified in attempting to use the DIN. Further, it introduces a potential strategy to address the challenges experienced by learners attempting to take the perspectives of members of outgroups through a scaffolded prefacing of such interactions with exposure to individuals with whom the learner perceives areas of similarity or as a member of an ingroup (or both), before gradually increasing the degree of dissimilarity in subsequent empathy targets.

The Database of Immigrant Narratives: Perspective taking through immigrant interviews

Developed in 2022, the Database of Immigrant Narratives (www.icnresearch.net) is a video resource consisting of forty interviews of immigrants to Japan created to assist ESL learners in developing perspective-taking ability. A complete list of interviewees' occupations and countries of origin is provided in Appendix 1.

The primary benefit of employing interview-centered media is that it affords learners the opportunity to take multiple perspectives both during and following video viewing.
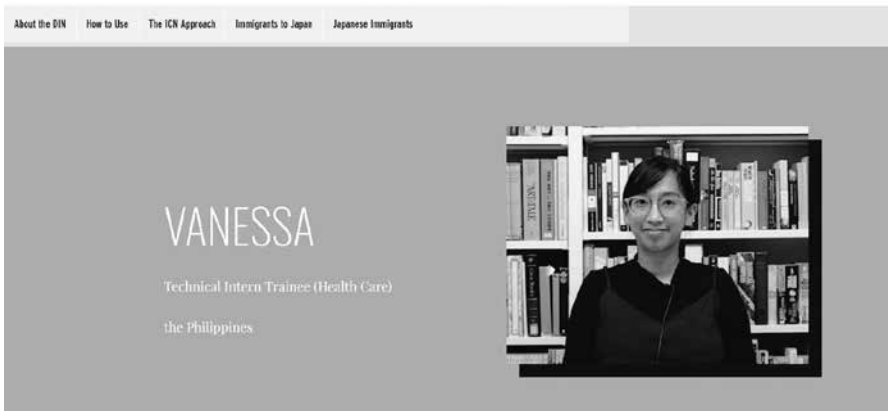

Figure 1 : The DIN interface

Unlike physical encounters, which often proceed at the pace of one interlocutor, videos can be paused, rewound, and watched multiple times. Interviews also present viewers with narratives that facilitate character identification, a cognitive state where the learner takes on character perspectives. Character identification elicits empathic responses as learners

co-experience narrative events, from which they gain an understanding of character challenges and goals from the perspective of the character (Oatley, 1995).

In addition to complete interviews, learners are able to view video clips organized by interview question, providing them efficient access to specific information related to the immigrant experience.
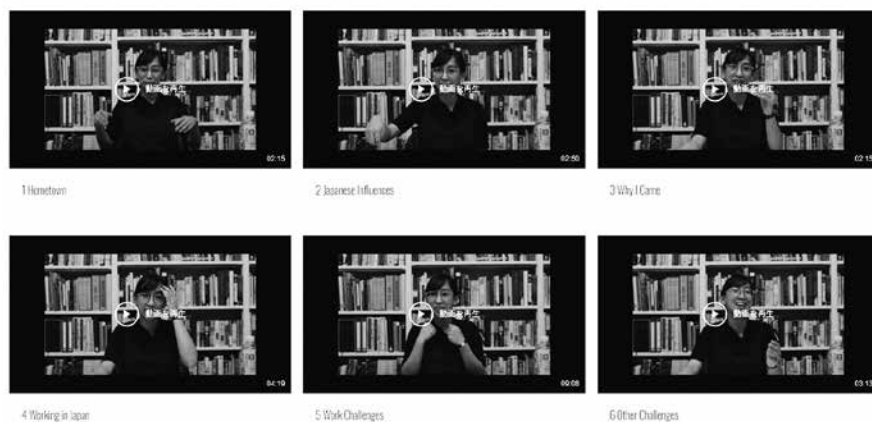

Figure 2 : Video clips organized by interview question

The DIN is modeled on research and practice in the field of narrative medicine, a discipline pioneered by Charon (2001; 2004; 2006) to assist young physicians and healthcare workers in developing the ability to engage in care from the perspective of the patient. Narrative medicine emphasizes the story-like experience of illness, primarily through an understanding of the patient's thoughts and feelings, but also through an increased awareness of the physician's role in the patient's narrative. Immersing medical trainees in the lives of patients allows them to understand patient needs from the

perspective of the sufferer, an antidote to the clinical insensitivity produced by a medical tendency to view patients in terms of symptoms and medical outcomes. A narrative medicine approach emphasizes the importance of empathizing with patients to provide superior care. According to Ratka (2018), "(t)he correlation between empathy of health care providers and improved patient adherence, satisfaction, and treatment outcomes is well-established" (p. 1140).

The core components of many narrative medicine curricula are 1) learner interactions with patients, 2) post-encounter reflective exercises through which the learner is encouraged to take character perspectives, and 3) group discussions through which learners share personal discoveries to learn from one another. In addition to physical encounters with patients, literature-based interventions have been repeatedly demonstrated to increase learner empathy in medical students (see Shapiro et al., 2004; DasGupta et al., 2006), as have video-based encounters (see Shankar, 2019; Gorring et al., 2014; Cambra-Badii et al., 2020).

Similar to a narrative medicine approach, the DIN provides learners the opportunity to empathically engage with individuals whom they may perceive to be different (in age, culture, and life experiences, etc.). Learners follow video viewing by completing written exercises in which they imagine themselves in the life situations presented by the interviewees. Learners also collaborate to compile cultural information specific to the interviewee and engage in group discussions to share reflections and conclusions acquired through the perspective-taking exercises and investigation of the target culture.

The DIN is a resource created for use with Japanese learners, who research has posited may be significantly influenced by ingroup/outgroup

constructs (Gudykunst et al., 1992). In constructing the DIN, minimal attention was afforded to how learners would perceive interviewees, who with two exceptions had no Japanese ancestry and all of whom spoke Japanese as a foreign language. To date, the DIN has been tested in a 2022-23 one-year seminar course for third-year English majors. In the final class, students completed an exit survey where they provided feedback on the database, as well as the structure of the course.

In directing learners to use the DIN, an issue that arose related to the difficulty experienced by students in attempting to engage in perspective-taking from the position of individuals whom they perceived minimal similarity (Ostman & Xethakis, 2023). In particular, post-course analysis of student surveys indicated that students reported a greater impact from interactions with interviewees who were similar in age and, in many cases, the same gender. Conversely, interviewees with interview content similar to that those indicated as "impactful" failed to elicit student interest when they differed significantly (e.g., in age; in appearance) from the perspective taker. While the perception of interviewees as members of outgroups may have generally functioned to inhibit the degree to which empathic engagement was possible, the cultural foreignness of some interviewees may have been exacerbated by the fact that they also significantly differed in age, gender, and life experience.

To explore this hypothesis, the current research considers factors underscoring ingroup/outgroup perception and their role in attempting to facilitate learner engagement in perspective taking. Furthermore, it presents a novel strategy—the use of video interviews with Japanese emigres—to assist learners in overcoming outgroup perception to engage in perspective taking.

Ingroup/outgroup perception and perspective taking

The connection between ingroup/outgroup perception has been variously reported, with studies demonstrating that people tend to have more empathy for individuals in their ingroup, or perceived group of similarity, and less empathy for individuals in an outgroup, or perceived group of dissimilarity (see Cialdini et al., 1997; Galinsky & Moskowitz, 2000). Conversely, removing cues that highlight dissimilarity between groups and emphasizing areas of commonality has been posited as effective in addressing biases (Wilder, 1986). In studying the relationship between ingroup/outgroup perception and individuals in distress Cikara, et al. (2011) note that "if an individual is a member of an outgroup, they are more likely to fail to initiate our empathy, and could even be targets of Schadenfreude in competitive contexts" (p. 12). Similarly, Tarrant et al. (2009) conducted a series of experiments to affirm Miron and Branscombe's (2008) assertion that the traumatic experiences (e.g., wartime loss of life) of outgroup members are interpreted less empathically (i.e., minimized) than are the identical experiences of ingroup members.

Neuroscience provides further insight by comparatively analyzing neural responses towards ingroup/outgroup members. Gutsell and Inzlicht (2010) hypothesize that neural activities, referred to as perception-actioncoupling, or "the vicarious activation of the neural system for action during the perception of action" (p. 841), only fire when the subject of perceived action (the person or object) is associated with one's ingroup. The researchers tentatively suggest that the findings provide new perspectives on prejudice against other groups based on brain activity, and that "spontaneous and implicit simulation [empathic processes] of others' action states may be limited to close others and, without active

effort, may not be available for outgroups" (p. 841). While the authors do not offer examples of "active efforts," conscious perspective taking may function to counteract implicit tendencies to limit empathic processes towards outgroups.

Efforts to define the concept of an ingroup have been undertaken in psychology, where Allport (1954) suggested that: "the best that can be done is to say that members of an in-group all use the term *we* with the same essential significance. Members of a family do so, likewise schoolmates, members of a lodge, labor union club, city, state, nation" (pp. 30-31). In *The Nature of Prejudice* (1954), he presented a "intergroup contact hypothesis" where contrary to the prevailing belief that negative consequences were to be expected from intergroup interactions, Allport posited that four positive factors (i) equal status between groups, ii) shared group goals, iii) intergroup cooperation, and iv) institutional support for group interaction) could work to reduce prejudice towards a perceived outgroup. Intergroup friendships, by virtue of satisfying most of the above conditions, became a subsequent subject of academic interest.

Among the attempts to test Allport's contact hypothesis was Pettigrew (1997), who collected information from across France, Great Britain, the Netherlands, and West Germany to conclude that friendships with members of perceived outgroups mediated prejudicial attitudes compared with individuals who did not have friendships outside their group. He suggested that such friendly interactions facilitated engagement in perspective taking from the standpoint of the outgroup, which may produce affective empathic responses (e.g., empathic concern).

Subsequent research into Allport's contact hypothesis has resulted in an increasingly nuanced understanding of the factors mediating attitudinal

changes in intergroup friendships. Conducting a meta-analytic review of the literature Davies et al. (2011), posited that more important than the act of friendship, "attitudes [towards members of an outgroup] are most likely to improve when cross-group friendships involve behavioral engagement" (p. 332), indicating that the formation of positive attitudes and reduction of prejudice towards an outgroup were pronounced when self-disclosure—the act of sharing personal information—was a component of the friendship. Such findings indicate the possibility that rather than the amount of time spent with members of outgroups or in their proximity, the act of interaction on a personal level is determinative in effecting attitudinal changes.

While such personal intergroup interactions can function to facilitate perspective taking, conversely, the degree of perceived foreignness may serve to inhibit such empathic activities. Paluck et al. (2019) found that while a review of the literature supported Pettigrew and Tropp's (2006) conclusion that contact between groups is generally effective in reducing prejudice, when analysis was limited to groups where friends perceive one another to be racially different, effects on prejudice were "substantially weaker" (p. 129). Such findings shed light on the significant role of racial constructs in the perception of others as dissimilar. Ingroup/outgroup perceptions grounded in socio-economic differences, where participants are both members of a perceived culture or national identity, may be partially alleviated when subjects perceive a degree of similarity by virtue of shared cultural or ethnic characteristics. However, when outgroups differ racially or ethnically, the degree of perceived similarity may decrease.

While perceptions of dissimilarity may function to inhibit empathy, evidence exists suggesting the efficacy of having subjects *consciously* engage in perspective taking from the standpoint of individuals who

are perceived as significantly different. Batson et al. (1997) attempted to measure the effects of eliciting empathy on attitudes towards AIDS sufferers. Subjects were divided into two groups: a low-empathy group instructed to remain objective, and a high-empathy group instructed to "imagine how the woman who is interviewed feels about what has happened and how it has affected her life" (p. 108). High- and low-empathy groups were divided into a further two groups, with one group listening to an interview in which the AIDS sufferer was portrayed as not responsible for contracting AIDS (victimnotresponsible), and another where they admitted to contracting the virus through irresponsible behavior (victimresponsible). Although responsibility partially mediated respondent answers, both highempathy groups demonstrated higher scores on an empathy instrument. Batson et al. concluded that "inducing empathy for the AIDS sufferer produced more positive attitudes toward the stigmatized group of which she was a member" (1997, p. 109110). Batson et al. (2002) published similar findings when subjects engaged in cognitive empathy from the perspective of drug addicts.

AIDS sufferers and drug addicts may be perceived as inhabiting sub-groups within Batson's subjects' greater ingroup. However, some studies have indicated that conscious engagement in perspective taking can also function to mediate attitudes towards outgroups perceived to be racially or ethnically distinct, such as Stephan and Finlay (1999) and Finlay and Stephen (2000), who reported reductions in prejudice when having subjects take the perspectives of individuals from differing racial backgrounds.

This raises the question of how conscious perspective taking functions to alter ingroup/outgroup perceptions. One theory involves the idea of alteration taking place through creation of a self-other overlap. Wright et

al. (1997) has theorized that "In an observed in-group/out-group friendship, the in-group member is part of the self, the out-group member is part of that in-group member's self, and hence part of myself (p. 76)." Galinsky and Moskowitz (2000) have further suggested that such self-other overlap alters representations of the other's greater group to be more self-like. Some studies have attempted to elucidate the neurological mechanisms underscoring active engagement in perspective taking, such as Davis et al. (2004), who showed that thinking about someone else's perspective or imagining oneself in another's position activated specific neural pathways and brain regions. However, the neuroscience of perspective taking remains an area of continued inquiry.

While it is tempting to conclude that instructing subjects to engage in perspective taking will function to mediate barriers presented by ingroup/outgroup perceptions, evidence exists warranting caution. Conducting a series of experiments to elucidate the relationship between perspective taking and the strengthening of stereotypes, Skorinko and Sinclair (2013) found that when subjects were asked to take the perspective of targets who were ambiguously stereotypic, subject engagement in stereotyping was minimized; however, "participants who took the perspective of a clearly stereotype-consistent outgroup members were more apt to engage in stereotyping than non-perspective takers" (p. 10). Galinsky et al. (2008) conducted nine studies to similarly find that when subjects held stereotypical understandings of empathy targets, subjects were more likely to be influenced by a target's positive and negative stereotypical behaviors. Such studies elucidate the necessity to exercise caution when attempting to facilitate perspective taking in learners.

Infrahumanization (the decreased attribution of human features)

of outgroups is a further concern. Zebel et al. (2009) found that while perspective taking positively predicted feelings of compassion for outgroup members who historically had been treated unfairly by the ingroup, it also produced feelings of guilt. Similarly, Castano and Giner-Sorolla (2006) found that making subjects aware of injustices that their group had perpetrated towards outgroups enhanced infrahumanization of the outgroup.

Even without the influence of stereotypes or feelings of guilt, a lack of perceived similarity may negatively impact perspective taking. Experiments by Rodríguez-Pérez et al. (2011) led the authors to conclude that "the perception of strong differences between the ingroup and the outgroup is an element that lowers humanization" (p. 685). However, the authors also suggest that "the mere perception of strong emotional ties between groups facilitates humanization" (p. 685), further noting that while their findings reinforce Allport's contact hypothesis, ingroup/outgroup interaction *need not be physical* for humanization of outgroups to take place.

A further consideration relates to the subject group who form the primary users of the Database of Immigrant Narratives: the Japanese. Beginning with social identity theory (Tajfel, 1981), it has been theorized that as groups reinforce the degree to which they perceive themselves as sharing similarities within the group, perceived dissimilarity between groups may also be increased (Brewer, 1999). Moreover, in groups where perceptions of group homogeneity are pronounced, members may be motivated to increasingly differentiate themselves even from similar outgroups to maintain or reinforce perceptions of group distinctiveness (Jetten et al., 1998). It may be pertinent that Japanese learners have been associated with pronounced attitudes of ethnocentricm (Neuliep et al., 2001; Hinenoya & Gatbonton, 2000) compared with other groups (e.g., Americans).

Mediating perceptions of foreignness through Japanese émigré interviews

As discussed above, social identity factors such as race, gender, and socioeconomic status can influence ingroup/outgroup perception and, consequently, a learner's ability to engage in perspective taking from the standpoint of an empathy target. While experiments have demonstrated the efficacy of having subjects engage in perspective taking to effect attitudinal changes, counter evidence exists suggesting that instructions to take alternate perspectives can also result in infrahumanization, particularly when attention is drawn to ingroup mistreatment of a particular outgroup. Furthermore, encouraging perspective taking with subjects who are represented stereotypically can result in increased stereotyping.

As a tool created to assist learner engagement in perspective taking, the DIN contains subjects from a wide range of cultural backgrounds. However, in attempting to use the resource Japanese learners indicated diminished impact from interactions with individuals to which they perceived minimal similarity. To enhance learner ability to engage in perspective taking, the above areas of concern need be addressed. Specifically, an effective strategy should: 1) reduce ingroup/outgroup perceptions by drawing attention to subject/target areas of commonality, 2) personalize empathy targets to avoid stereotyping, and 3) avoid the elicitation of learner guilt. Considering these three criteria, one strategy involves prefacing the viewing of interviews of immigrants to Japan with a discussion of ingroup (i.e., Japanese) immigrant experiences to other countries. To this end, a pilot interview with a Japanese émigré was recorded and uploaded to the DIN for future use.
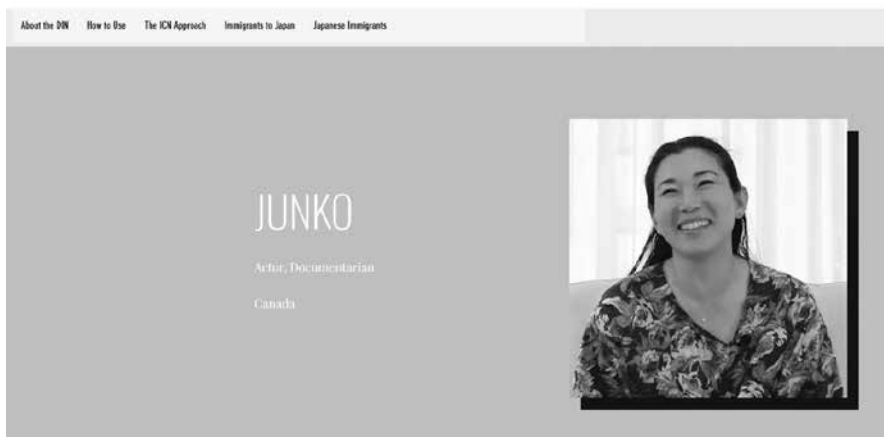
Figure 3 : Interview with a Japanese émigré

Considering the mediative role of ingroup/outgroup perception on learner ability to engage in perspective taking from the position of immigrant interviewees, a revised approach attempts to present learners with interviewees with which they may be predicted to perceive the most similarities, followed by a gradual increasing of dissimilarity, as indicated in Figure 4.

Utilizing this approach, a one-year course begins by presenting learners with an interview subject that is both a perceived member of their ingroup (i.e., a Japanese immigrant to another country) and, if possible, similar in other areas (e.g., age, gender, childhood, interests, etc.). In the case of the pilot interviewee added to the DIN (Junko), the interviewee is from Kyushu, has a keen interest in popular culture, and communicates many life experiences that Japanese learners can be predicted to relate (e.g., taking entrance examinations, joining school clubs, working part-time jobs).

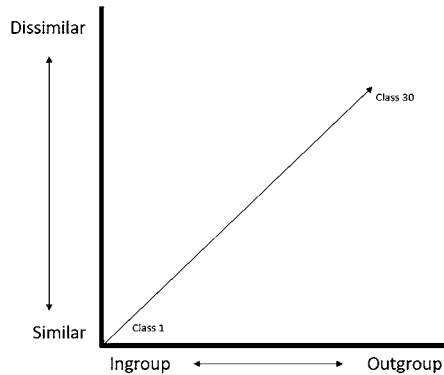Beginning a discussion of the immigrant experience by interacting with

Figure 4 : Revised application of the DIN

an interviewee from the learners' ingroup increases the probability that they will be able to engage in perspective taking from the perspective of an immigrant. Moreover, gaining an understanding of the immigrant experience from the perspective of a member of their ingroup eases the task of engaging in perspective taking from the standpoint of immigrants from other countries with whom Japanese immigrants share multiple attributes. Furthermore, before being exposed to the challenges faced by immigrants to Japan, engaging with Japanese immigrants, who relate their struggles adjusting to new environments, may work to sensitize learners to the difficulty faced by all immigrants in transitioning between countries and cultures. When learners gain an understanding such difficulties by standing in the shoes of a member of their ingroup, it can function to prepare them to transition to a discussion of the challenges faced by newcomers to their society, minimizing the possibility that such contemplation will induce feelings of guilt. Finally, engagement with the highly personal experiences of Japanese emigres can help prepare learners

to engage with similar personal experiences of members of outgroups without resorting to stereotypical interpretations.

In a revised approach to utilizing the DIN, Japanese émigrés are followed by non-Japanese immigrants, that while members of perceived outgroups, have high degrees of similarity in other areas. For example, interviewees similar in age to learners may be preferable to interviewees whom learners perceive as members of older generations. It may also be advisable to frontload interviewees who are currently functioning in Japan in typical Japanese social roles (e.g., office workers) and are more assimilated into Japanese society. Several interviewees on the DIN (Liu; Jin; Emilio; Enrico) are fluent Japanese speakers employed in positions at typical Japanese organizations, which may function to mediate the degree to which they are perceived as members of outgroups. Interviewees with a strong interest in Japan may also be preferable, as their interests (e.g., manga; anime) frequently coincide with those of learners. A further consideration are the childhood experiences communicated by interviewees (e.g., school experiences, friendships), to which learners may be able to easily relate. As indicated in Figure 4, employing this strategy involves beginning with highly relatable members of ingroups, before gradually presenting learners with interviewees who may be increasingly predicted to be perceived as dissimilar and members of outgroups.

The manner in which ingroup/outgroup perceptions may be mediated to facilitate empathic engagement has heretofore received limited academic attention. Moreover, strategies to minimize learner perceptions of foreignness in EFL curricula to develop intercultural awareness and understanding have yet to be tested in an educational environment. An area of future inquiry involves the creation of tools capable of assessing

learner perceptions of interviewee dissimilarity and ingroup/outgroup status to aid in the selection of optimal interview subjects.

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Appendix 1 – Database of Immigrant Narratives Interviewees

#	Name	Gender	Occupation	Country of Origin
1	Joe	M	University Professor	United States
2	Chris O.	M	University Professor	United States
3	Vanessa	F	Health Care	The Philippines
4	Hira	F	Office Worker (Driving School)	Nepal
5	Jin	M	Employee (Water Testing Company)	China
6	Yolanda	F	Factory Worker (Semiconductor)	The Philippines
7	Edwin	M	Entrepreneur (Music)	The Netherlands
8	Terry	M	University Professor	United States
9	Marlo	M	Entrepreneur, Restaurateur	Indonesia
10	Mercy	F	Hospital Worker	The Philippines
11	Chris	M	University Professor	United States
12	Jason	M	Entrepreneur (Translation; Bar)	United States
13	Lily	F	Employee (Tourism)	Canada
14	Deepak	M	Part-time Worker	Nepal
15	Corina	F	Singer, Bar Owner	The Philippines
16	Jeff	M	Musician	Canada
17	Liu	F	Employee (Architecture Office)	China
18	Sheraz	M	Imam	Pakistan
19	Alejandro	M	Restaurateur	Mexico
20	Luz	F	Spanish Teacher	Mexico
21	Che	M	Employee (Mindan)	South Korea
22	Tran	F	Agriculture Worker	Vietnam
23	Liz	F	Entrepreneur (Photography Studio)	United States
24	Anamarie	F	Employee (Zoo)	Mexico
25	Emilio	M	Hospital Worker	Peru
26	Nicolas	M	Entrepreneur (Training Gym)	France
27	Hasan	M	Engineer	Indonesia
28	Risa	F	Factory Worker (Liquor Bottling)	The Philippines
29	Richel	F	Factory Worker (Chicken Processing)	The Philippines
30	Enrico	M	Editor (Animation Company)	Italy
31	Ruvani	F	Designer, Restaurateur	Sri Lanka
32	Sergio	M	Italian Teacher, Wedding Conductor	Italy
33	Mickael	M	Wedding Conductor	France
34	Sander	M	Nursery School Worker	The Netherlands
35	Mario	M	Educator	Germany
36	Brad	M	Employee (Vehicle Upholstery)	Australia
37	Hillary	M	Japanese Teacher	Tanzania
38	Victoria	F	Buddhist Priest	England
39	Benny	M	Chef	Hong Kong
40	Marko	M	Exchange Student	Germany