

***Exploring CLIL Tasks in EFL Classrooms: Development of Mock English  
Television Advertisements for Raising Intercultural and Media Awareness***

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**Abstract**

This study aimed to investigate the effects of having Japanese university students create mock English television advertisements as a CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) task for developing intercultural and media awareness in English communication classes. After a preliminary study in a different class, an advertising development task was introduced as a part of the unit on international business. Specifically, 32 students from two EMI English communication classes in a soft CLIL setting participated in the study. They first learned about cross-cultural differences in advertisement as well as related vocabulary and expressions. They then planned, shot, and edited in pairs a mock television advertisement of a Japanese product for an American audience, followed by discussion and feedback. For 10 different products such as Japanese sweets and green tea, 16 mock television advertisements were produced in total. The advertisements along with the discussion sheets were analyzed qualitatively from three perspectives: linguistic expressions used in the advertisements and other expressions learned in the class (language), the types and contents of the advertisements including comparison with television commercials of the same product aired in Japan (contents), and others such as students' feedback. The students were able to develop a range of creative and well-edited mock English advertisements, carefully considering the target audience by integrating techniques such as comparative advertising. The results showed that this task can be an engaging way to help raise EFL university students' intercultural and media sensitivity, having them learn relevant English terminology and expressions at the same time.

Keywords: English education, CLIL, EFL, communicative task, authentic material, intercultural awareness, advertisement

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## Introduction

The importance of using authentic materials has been emphasized in English education as they reflect English used in the real world (Ciornei & Dina, 2015; Gilmore, 2007; Hwang, 2005). Nunan, in early 1990's, observed that "the introduction of authentic texts" had been one of the cores of the communicative approach to language teaching (1991, p. 279). The concept of authenticity has continued to play an important role in English classrooms, and authenticity is considered as one of the key features of content and language integrated learning (Mehisto, Marsh, & Frigols, 2008, pp. 29-30). Content and language integrated learning (CLIL) is defined as "a dual-focused educational approach in which an additional language is used for the learning and teaching of both content and language" (Mehisto et al., 2008, p. 9). The present study was conducted in English communication classes in Japan which followed a CLIL syllabus. Japan is an EFL context, that is, English is primarily learned as a foreign language with limited amount of communication in English outside the classroom (Seargeant, 2009, p. 60). In Japan, the CLIL approach has gained popularity in the past several years as the increase in the number of publications on CLIL indicates (Takahashi, 2019, pp. 307-308).

Topics related to international business often appear in English textbooks used in Japan (e.g., Beglar & Murray, 2016; Kisslinger, 2009; Shishido, Murphy, & Takahashi, 2020), and this topic can be taught with a CLIL approach (Baranova, Kobicheva, & Tokareva, 2019; Contero Urgal, 2019). Advertisements are closely tied to business. They have been used as authentic materials in EFL classrooms (Picken, 1999). For example, Patahuddin, Syawal, and Bin-Tahir (2017) observed that reading English advertisements was considered as a method of acquiring English vocabulary among EFL students (p. 134). English advertisements have also been used as a part of a pedagogical linguistic landscape project. Rowland (2013), for instance, had Japanese university students analyze English used on advertisements in Japan and pointed out the positive effects of the task on developing students' multimodal literacy skills, pragmatic competence, and multicompetence.

People are exposed to advertisements on a daily basis on various media including television programs, newspaper, magazines, the internet, signboards, and digital signage displays. Preferred styles of advertisement differ between cultures. For example, comparative advertisement has been more widely used in the United States compared to Asia (Muk, Chung, & Chang, 2017). Comparative advertisement was defined by the Federal Trade Commission as "advertising that compares alternative brands on objectively measurable attributes or price, and identifies the alternative brand by name, illustration or other distinctive information" (1979). It has been one of the frequently investigated topics in the literature on advertising including intercultural comparison (e.g., Beard, 2018; Kim, Jeong, & Hwang, 2018; Putrevu & Lord, 1994).

Researchers on intercultural theories have identified characteristics of different cultural groups. One of the influential models has been the cultural dimensions theory developed by Hofstede (1980, 1984), in particular the individualism-collectivism dimension. Another influential model has been the context theory proposed by Hall (1976). Hall (1976) observed that different cultures are associated with different

styles of communication depending on the degree of reliance on the context. More specifically, high-context cultures are associated with indirect and implicit communication styles, whereas low-context cultures are associated with direct and explicit communication styles. Cultures can be conceptually categorized along the continuum from high-context to low-context, and based on Hall's model, studies such as Rosenbloom and Larsen (2003) have categorized and placed countries along the continuum. Hall's model has not always been fully supported; for example, Gudykunst, Matsumoto, Ting-Toomey, Nishida, Kim, and Heyman (1996) developed a measurement for assessing the degree of contexting and pointed out that the level of contexting is more closely related to the individual than the culture as a whole (p. 539). A systematic review of cross-cultural research has also shown that studies have classified countries differently (Kittler, Rygl, and Mackinnon, 2011, p. 75). Nevertheless, the context theory has been widely adopted in the literature on intercultural business and technical communication, according to Cardon (2008).

As such, research on advertisements has looked into effectiveness of various types of advertisement in cultures with different characteristics based on models including the context model. Donthu (1998) compared attitudes toward comparative advertisements in the USA, Canada, UK, and India. The study showed that the recall rate was high with comparative advertisements regardless of the country, but attitudes to them tended to be negative in UK and India, where comparative advertisements were not common at that time. Liang and Kale (2011) found that the amount of image generation differed between Americans and East Asians depending on the concreteness of the advertisement. Hornikx and Le Pair (2017) then observed that complex advertisements were preferred by people from higher-context cultures. Kim et al. (2018) pointed out that comparative advertisements tended to elicit more positive responses from Americans than from Koreans, indicating a more favorable reception of this type of advertisement in low-context, individualistic cultures. However, Muk, Chung, and Chang (2017) had Taiwanese and American consumers evaluate direct comparative, indirect comparative, and non-comparative advertisements and found that Taiwanese consumers showed a higher level of purchase intention after viewing direct comparative advertisements as well as non-comparative advertisements, possibly due to a novelty effect (p. 114).

Results have not been conclusive regarding the effectiveness of different types of advertisements, however, Teng, Ye, Yu, and Wu (2014) have shown that advertisements which integrate cultural characteristics "congruent with the cultural values of its target market" can elicit favorable attitudes (p. 293). It is understandable that advertisements reflect different cultural values since the main purpose of advertising is to promote and sell products. Therefore, learning about advertisements of other cultures is likely to help university students become aware of cultural differences in a concrete manner. This means that they can be used as authentic materials in EFL classrooms combined with English language learning for raising intercultural awareness. Moreover, they can also be used for raising media awareness by having students analyze advertisements on different media and by having them actually develop mock advertisements using their smartphone and editing applications. Having students produce videos in the target language has been a technique used in EFL classrooms (e.g., Huang, 2015). Accordingly, the purpose of the present study is to investigate the effects of having Japanese university students create mock English

television advertisements as a CLIL task for developing intercultural and media awareness in English communication classes.

## **Methodology**

The main part of the task was to have participants plan, shoot, and edit a mock television advertisement for an American audience. A preliminary study was first conducted in a different classroom of 20 students. Based on the preliminary study, the target audience was modified from an “international” audience to an “American” audience to make it more culturally specific. The reason for choosing the American audience as the target was that American culture has been regarded as a low-context culture in contrast to Japanese culture, which has been regarded as high-context (e.g., Rosenbloom and Larsen, 2003). American culture has also been associated with comparative advertising (e.g., Muk et al., 2017), and as American products are widely sold in Japan, participants would have some familiarity with American culture. It was not necessary to assess participants’ knowledge on American culture because the task fulfilled its purpose as long as participants aimed their mock advertisement for a culturally different group of audience. The task was also changed from a group task to a pair task in order to have all participants closely engage in the task.

## **Participants**

In the main study, 32 Japanese university students from two English communication classes participated. Twenty of them were first-year students, and the rest were second-year students. Both classes followed a CLIL syllabus, and the first-year class was labeled as upper-intermediate and the second-year class was labeled as advanced. The main medium of instruction was English in both classes. These classes were taught by an English language teacher, with the primary aim of developing students’ language skills. This means that the classes fell under the weak/ soft CLIL approach, not the strong/ hard CLIL approach whose primary focus is on contents, according to the classification by Ikeda (2013, p. 32).

## **Materials**

The task was conducted as a part of the classes on international business. There were assigned textbooks to the classes by the department of the university, and the instructor had already spent at least two classes on the unit and related activities including vocabulary, listening, note-taking, discussion, and reading exercises. Namely, the first-year students had finished Unit 7 “Team Building” from *Contemporary Topics 2* (Kisslinger, 2009, pp. 62-71) and the second-year students had finished Unit 4 “Core Business Skills” from *Contemporary Topics 3* (Beglar & Murray, 2016, pp. 32-41). For the task itself, four materials were prepared: slides for introducing the topic, products for making advertisements, a worksheet, and a discussion sheet.

## **Procedure**

First of all, participants learned about cross-cultural differences in advertisement along with examples. Second, they learned vocabulary and expressions on advertising. PowerPoint slides prepared by the instructor were used for these two steps (see the

results section for more detail of the slides). Third, participants were divided into pairs and assigned a Japanese product by lottery. The instructor gave the actual products to participants so that they could use them however they wanted in the mock advertisement. Fourth, they planned and shot a mock television advertisement for an American audience. Fifth, they edited the advertisement on their smartphone by using editing applications. They then discussed the task and its implications in the pair. Finally, as a class, participants viewed the mock advertisements together, voted on the best advertisement, and gave feedback to each other.

On the worksheet, participants were asked to write and draw a rough outline and pictures of their mock advertisement. There were three discussion questions, and participants had to summarize and write down what they talked about on the discussion sheet. The first question asked them what was special about their advertisement. The second question asked them how they would change their advertisement if it was for an international audience instead of an American audience. The third question asked them to write comments and suggestions to the task itself.

Ten Japanese products were prepared for the main task: Ilohas water (producer: CocaCola Japan), Iemon green tea (Suntory), Pure gummy candy (Kanro), Pocky chocolate snack (Ezaki Glico), Milky candy (Fujiya), Jagarico fried potato snack (Calbee), Soyjoy cereal bars (Otsuka), “Consommé double punch” potato chips (Calbee), Sarasa pens (Zebra), K-coat highlighters (Tombow). They could be categorized into beverages, sweets, snack, and stationery.

## **Results and Analysis**

The participants learned intercultural differences in advertising as well as advertising language in the first part of the task. In the main part of the task, 16 mock television commercials were developed. The advertisements along with the worksheets and discussion sheets were analyzed qualitatively from three perspectives: linguistic expressions used in the advertisements as well as other expressions learned in the task, the types and contents of the mock advertisements, and others such as comments from the participants. The words “advertisement” and “commercial” are used interchangeably in the following sections. The students gave the author permission to use the data and images anonymously in this paper.

## **Linguistic Aspect**

In the first part of the task, the participants learned linguistic expressions related to advertising and also learned about cross-cultural differences in advertising. This means that there was some explicit learning on vocabulary and expressions on advertising. The vocabulary list included key words such as agency, budget, campaign, audience, brand image, copywriter, sponsor, visual appeal, and zapping. The students also looked at examples of American advertisements on different media and learned about expressions used in them such as “it’s the real thing,” “a new kind of..,” “buy one get one free,” and “Have a...” More specifically, the instructor for example showed Coca Cola posters from different periods of time and asked the students to put them in a chronological order by paying attention to the phrases and images on the posters. They also watched television commercials aired on the Super Bowl day in 2018 and 2019.

The participants then looked at American and Japanese advertisements on the same or corresponding products and tried to identify similarities and differences. Examples included television commercials on smartphones and pet food as well as posters on automobiles, hamburgers, coffee, and fruit juice. For instance, the participants compared a car advertisement produced by a leading Japanese automobile company in Japan with an advertisement produced by its branch office in the United States of America. The Japanese version highlighted safety functions of their new cars as ordering a course rather than ordering a la carte, featuring pictures of French-style dishes arranged in the shape of a car. The American version, on the other hand, featured a large picture of the advertised car with a detailed description. Through comparison like these, the students learned not only the linguistic expressions used in advertisement but also concepts used to explain intercultural differences in advertising such as comparative advertisement, high-context, indirect communication style, and low-context, direct communication style.

The students then planned a mock television advertisement, drew an outline on the worksheet, and then shot and edited it in pairs as the main part of the task. The average number of tokens was 27.3. The instructor had told the students to aim for 15 seconds because that was the average length of short television commercials. The preliminary study had also shown that it was the maximum length they could work on within one class. The average length of the mock advertisements by first-year students was 14.2 seconds (21.1 tokens on average). Second-year students, however, developed somewhat longer mock commercials, averaging 22.8 seconds (37.7 tokens on average). Three examples of mock television commercials are given below in italics. The instructor did not correct grammatical mistakes during the task unless asked by the participants because she wanted to assess what they were capable of doing without detailed language assistance.

The first example is on strawberry Pocky, strawberry flavored chocolate snack. *It was born from one strawberry. It grew up juicy, crunch, delicious.. Pocky! Do you wanna try this new texture? Let's take Pocky your home!* Figure 1 shows the outline of this mock advertisement. The package of the product and its brand name are hidden for copyright protection. This mock advertisement emphasized the strawberry flavor by gradually increasing the number of strawberries on the screen in tune with the narration and background music, and it was voted the best commercial in the first-year class. The second example, also from the first-year class, is on a ballpoint pen. A ballpoint pen is called a "ball-pen" in Japanese. *This is a ballpen. Name is SARASA. Color is blue. Ballpen's size is 0.5. It is water-based ink pen and we can write smoothly. Let's try to use!* The third example is on the same product but by a second-year pair. *Guys! This is a SARASA pen! You have a problem with your pen, don't you? But, if you use a SARASA, I'm sure you can finish your task sooner! This is, 100 yen! Can you believe it? This is a SARASA pen! ZEBRA.* The audience highly enjoyed this mock commercial especially because the narrator spoke very fluently, imitating a Japanese-style television shopping program.

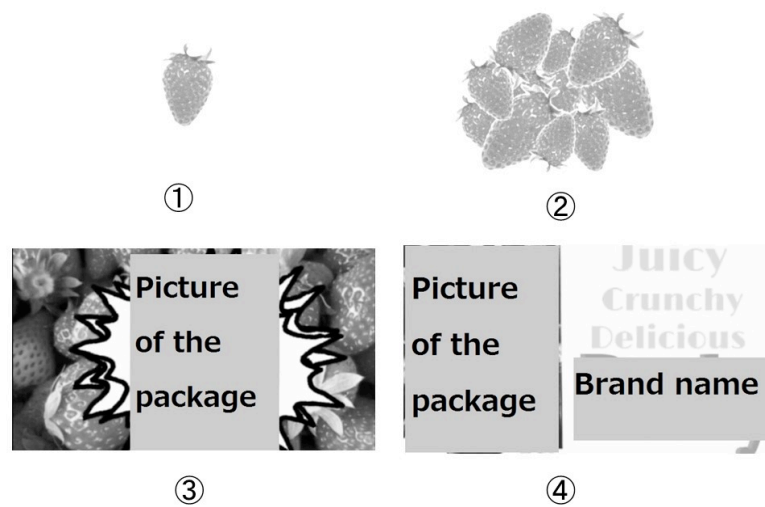


Figure 1. Mock Advertisement on Strawberry Flavored Chocolate Snack

As can be seen in the examples, simple, terse, and clear phrases and sentences were selected. The following example on fried potato snack illustrates this tendency concisely. *Oh, Look! Potatoes, carrots, parsley! They are turned to Jagarico! L size, longer, bigger! It's yummy, so let's try!* The participants carefully chose words to descriptively highlight key features of the product to convey essential information within the short mock advertisement. All of the commercials included and emphasized the product name, and for the three products with a well-known catchphrase in Japan, they included it in their commercials. In addition, 13 mock advertisements had the pronoun “you” in them and used expressions such as “let’s try” “you have to buy” to call the audience to action.

## Contents

The contents of the mock advertisements could be categorized into three types: information-based, comparative, and story plus information-based types. A few examples are given for each category below. The first category is information-based because the emphasis of the commercials was on giving as much information as possible within 15 seconds. The following example is on bottled Japanese green tea. *Twenty kinds of tea leaves, include tannin, stone miller Matcha, change tea leaves, pesticide check, lemon tea!* The students who made this crammed main features of the green tea in this short commercial. They used green leaves as the background of the narration and showed the product at the end. The next example is on soft candy. The final phrase is the catchphrase of the product in Japan. *Milky is fragrance free and no coloring. Using particular fresh cream, condensed milk, and milk from Hokkaido! So you can feel rich milk taste and strongly clear sweet taste! No additive, natural flavor! Milky is always mom's taste.* The camera focused on the package and the candy throughout the video.

The second category is comparative. In the following two examples, the advertised product was compared with a product of a competing brand. *There is a special highlighter. In the case of another product. In the case of our product. Let's compare! Our highlighter's features are pen point is strong. Ruler doesn't get dirty. K-coat!*

This was a mock advertisement on a highlighter, and the students directly compared features of the highlighter with those of a competing brand by showing them side-by-side in the commercial (see Figure 2). The following example is on green tea. *Hi, everyone. This is Japanese tea. Green tea comes from Kyoto. Size changed to big: 500 to 600 ml. Once you drink it, you can reduce your body fat. This drink makes you fat, but this, this drink makes you fresh! Get your slim body. Yo, Iemon!* After telling about new features of the product, it was compared with a competing product directly side-by-side in this advertisement as well. The other comparative advertisement was on the ball-point pen mentioned above produced by a second-year pair, and the comparison was indirect without mentioning specific competing brands.

The third category is story plus information-based. For example, the following mock advertisement was on gummy candy. *Pure gummies! Collagen, vitamin C, sweet and sour like youth! You have to buy.* “Sweet and sour like youth!” is the catchphrase of the product in Japan. This mock advertisement featured good friends enjoying the gummy candy on the lawn at a university. The second to the last scene showed the friends making a big heart with their shadows, with the advertised product in the center of the heart (see Figure 3), and the last scene was the picture of a product with a phrase “you have to buy.” It contained some information; however, the product was advertised mainly indirectly. Another example of this category was a mock advertisement showing a morning routine of a university student to promote a cereal bar. *It’s time for school, but I don’t have time, so I eat SoyJoy!* The final example of this category is on potato chips. *Oh, I’m hungry. Hey! Do you wanna eat this together? What is this? This is consomme double punch! Wow, that looks very good. I wanna eat it. Yeah! I wanna eat it too. Thank you. Yaaay. Double flavor makes double friends, double flavor makes double happiness. Yaay. Well, price is not double.* The students were able to use the final phrase, which was not typically in Japanese commercials, but this advertisement focused on friends enjoying the chips and did not give a detailed information on the product compared with the other advertisements.

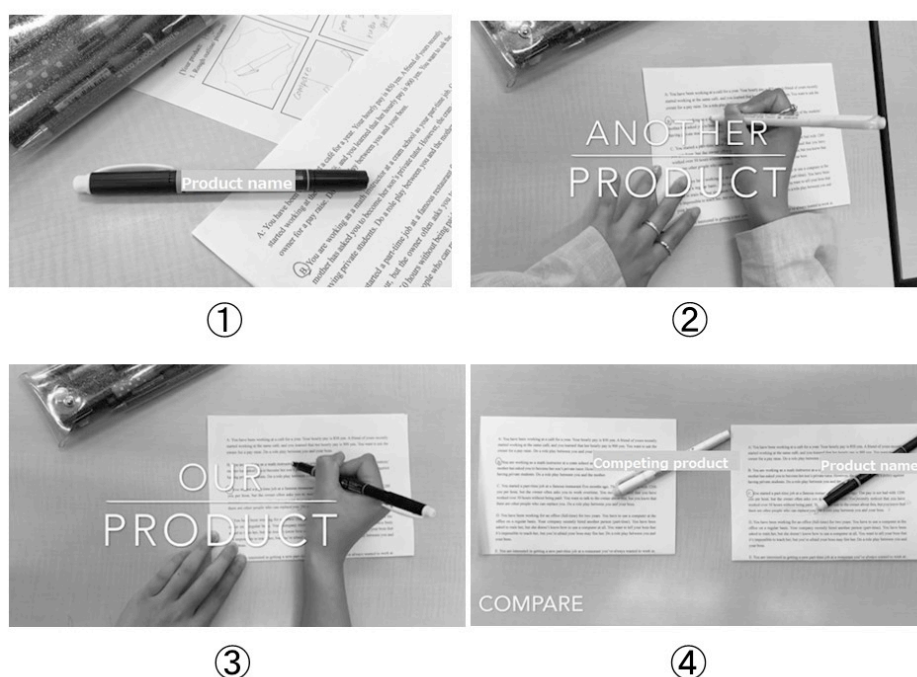


Figure 2. Comparative Mock Advertisement on a Highlighter





*Figure 3. Scene from a Mock Advertisement on Gummy Candy*

Out of the 16 mock commercials, 10 were information-based, three were comparative, and three were story plus information-based. The comparative mock advertisements were all developed by second-year students. The participants had to aim for the American audience, and they had learned at the beginning, that American advertisements tended to be more explicit and direct than Japanese advertisements. However, in order to see if they actually had the American audience in mind, the author checked the television commercials of the same products in Japan which were airing around the same time when the task took place. Out of the 10 products, commercials for six products were story-based. In other words, the information was only given indirectly in stories which almost sounded irrelevant to the product. For example, the 30 second commercial on green tea had three people talking about life in front of a Japanese traditional house, and the product itself did not appear in the advertisement until one of them started drinking green tea toward the end. Commercials on three products were music or rhythm-based, that is, they simply repeated the product name many times without further information. There was one information-based commercial, but it was only online, and not aired on television. These dramatic differences show that the participants intentionally chose different advertisement types for the American audience.

The target media was television, and 10 mock advertisements had background music. They were all developed by first year students, who spent more time on editing compared to second year students. Fourteen advertisements had the product name and/or company name at the very end to leave a clear impression of the product on the audience. It also shows that the students were conscious about the format of television commercials. Popular editing applications were InShot, iMovie, and TikTok as all the participants were iPhone users. By editing their videos, they had to consciously choose what to include and what not to include in their final product. They also had to use their editing skills to make the mock advertisements look like real television commercials as much as possible.

## **Others**

After completing the mock advertisement, the participants discussed the task and filled in the discussion sheet. Based on the question asking what was special about

their advertisement, it became even clearer that the students were well aware of the target audience. Keywords included “informative” “clear” and “comparison,” as in “there is more information than the Japanese advertisement,” “it is easy to understand the features of the product,” “it is informative,” and “it compares two products.”

The next question asked how the participants would change their advertisement if the target audience was an international audience rather than an American audience. This turned out to be a difficult question, but the participants gave answers such as “we would like to change it funnier and more creative” and “we will include more Japanese elements.” Comments to the task could be classified into two types. Half of the pairs wrote that the task was fun and interesting, and the other half answered that the task was difficult even though they enjoyed it. One pair insightfully observed that the task felt difficult because they had been surrounded by commercials that did not provide a lot of information about the product.

## **Discussion**

The purpose of this study was to assess the effects of having Japanese university students develop mock television commercials as a CLIL task in a soft CLIL setting. The students who participated in this study were able to design and produce a creative mock advertisement that could convey information clearly, concisely, and directly regardless of the product they were assigned. Based on what they learned in the first part of the task, they were able to develop an advertisement that was different from what they were used to seeing in Japan by using techniques such as comparative advertising.

The data have shown that the task can cover the 4Cs of CLIL as outlined by Mehisto et al. (pp. 29-30). Cognition: The participants gathered information on the product, thought creatively and made a plan, and then assessed their video and edited it carefully. They then analyzed their final product objectively and discussed the task. Content: The participants engaged in a task based on daily life by using authentic materials. Communication: The participants learned linguistic expressions and concepts related to the topic in English as scaffolding. Based on what they learned, they planned a mock advertisement and carefully chose expressions to convey the information effectively. Community: The participants became aware of cultural differences by developing a mock advertisement for people in a different community. They also worked collaboratively with classmates in a safe, friendly learning environment.

This task was a part of the English class on international business, and it became clear that the task can help raise intercultural awareness and media awareness. For raising intercultural awareness, the students were taught about cultural differences on advertising along with necessary vocabulary and expressions through analytical activities. They then put the knowledge into practice by developing a mock television advertisement intended for a target audience from a different culture. After making the advertisement, they reflected on the task together and further discussed cultural differences. For raising media awareness, the students were first asked to look at advertisement on different media and learn how information was represented. They then used their smartphone and shot and edited a mock television commercial. They

had to consciously make choices about what to include in the video and also discussed the advertisements with their classmates.

In other words, the main strength of the task included raising awareness on cultural differences and media awareness in an engaging way by promoting active, creative, and cooperative learning. As a CLIL task, it was effective to include an explicit instruction on related concepts and English expressions to make sure the students paid attention to linguistic forms as well. It is also possible to tailor the task to classrooms of different English levels, for example, by adjusting the target length or by introducing additional reading or listening activities before the main part of the task. On the other hand, the task presupposes students' information and communication technology skills as well as the availability of the devices and applications. As this task requires cooperation between classmates, it may only work in a class with a friendly and autonomous learning environment with motivated students. There is also the risk of over-generalization of cultures, and instructors should tell students about individual differences as well.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, having students develop a mock television advertisement for an audience from a different culture can be an engaging university-level CLIL task combined with explicit instruction on concepts and relevant English vocabulary and expressions. By planning, shooting, and editing a mock advertisement with classmates, students can consciously think about intercultural differences and become aware of how information is represented in different types of media.

To improve this task, instructors could spend more time on the explicit instruction part to further promote language learning. For lower-level classes, more language support would be necessary to help with the accuracy of English. It is also possible to make the mock advertisements longer to have students produce more English. In this study, the mock advertisements were viewed by their classmates and the instructor. As the purpose was to have students become aware of intercultural differences, it was not actually necessary to show the mock advertisement to the assumed target audience. However, to make the task more authentic, it would be helpful to have the target audience watch the mock advertisements and give feedback to students.

This CLIL task integrated authentic materials to have students think about real life situations outside the classroom. By using authentic materials students are familiar with, this CLIL task became engaging and effective. Tasks with authentic materials would help students learn the target language and contents in a relevant and active manner regardless of the topic. Accordingly, it would be necessary to continue to conduct further research on CLIL activities and tasks for various topics at the tertiary level in EFL contexts.

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