

# “CHILDREN CROSSING BORDERS” AND THEIR LANGUAGE EDUCATION: FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF LANGUAGE, CULTURE, AND SOCIETY

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## 1. Introduction

Along with the phenomena of globalization and increasing large-scale population movements substantial changes have taken place in the fields of first and second language education. Interest has been drawn not only to teaching the forms and functions of language, but also to developing the competence learners need for intercultural understanding. Discussions about language education from a cultural point of view have intensified, giving rise to comments like Zarate's (1993) “knowing how to relate to otherness” and Kramsch's (1993) statement that “every attempt to communicate with the speaker of another language is a cultural act”.

Such discussions have been particularly prevalent in Australia. For example, Lo Bianco et al. (1999) refer to the issue as “intercultural competence”. In these discussions the authors also emphasize the importance of finding what they call “the third place” at the heart of “intercultural competence” and of taking into account the fact that language learners experience cultural differences in contact situations.

It is particularly important to anchor such discussions on intercultural competence to practical approaches in language education for children. This is certainly so in the context of Japanese second language education. The dramatic increases in the number of children in Japan without background speaker competence has created urgency in defining best practices in Japanese as a second language (JSL) education. This search for best practice is closely tied to the issue of intercultural competence.

In this paper I will discuss language education for children from a ‘language and culture’ perspective by outlining the challenges in providing JSL education to children. I will do this through examining discussions of intercultural competence in Australia and the challenge of practicing Intercultural Language Teaching (ILT) in the Australian context. Finally, I will argue that JSL education for children in Japan should be reestablished.

## 2. Challenges for Japanese language education for JSL children

Japanese citizens comprise ninety eight percent of Japan's population and Japanese society is considered to be highly homogenous. However, some cultural diversity exists even among Japanese citizens. Moreover, the greater influx of migrants has led to Japanese society becoming increasingly multilingual and multicultural. More than two million foreign citizens from more than 180 countries now reside in Japan. As a result of this increase in foreign residents in Japan educating children that are JSL learners has recently developed into a social issue of growing concern. It is evident that these children require Japanese language education in order to live successfully in Japanese society. However, the continually changing nature and goals of JSL education has prevented a clear consensus as to its direction.

For instance, some have argued that JSL education for children as it presently stands is a language education based on assimilationism with an inherent ideology of nationalism. Others have criticized it for neglecting language education and instead providing only a cultural education that places too much emphasis on the native languages and cultures of JSL children. In order to allay fears of assimilationism and to maintain ethnic identity and pride, teachers often include discussions of the food, fashion, songs, and dances from the home country of JSL children in their classroom activities. The concern here is that this may actually reinforce cultural stereotypes. The question here is whether Japanese second language education for children is an education in

assimilation and/or cultural stereotyping?

Establishing intercultural communication is important not only to JSL education at the primary and secondary school levels, but also to the field of language education in general. Because it is closely associated with what kind of society we should be heading towards the challenge is very political in nature. Here we are asking what sort of language competence to nurture in learners, how to perceive “language and culture” and ultimately what type of education to provide. In order to answer these questions, I will next examine the recent discussions about language education in Australia.

### **3. Discussions about intercultural language education in Australia**

Discussions on “intercultural competence” in language education in Australia have recently intensified, as indicated by publications and presentations by Lo Bianco, Crozet & Liddicoat (1999), Liddicoat & Crozet, (2000), Papademetre & Scarino (2000), Lo Bianco & Crozet (2003), and Liddicoat, Parademetre, Scarino & Kohler (2003). Here I proceed mainly with discussions by Lo Bianco, Crozet & Liddicoat’s (1999) that attempt to conceptualize notions of “the third place”.

First of all, based on points made by Kramsch (1993) and Zarate (1993), Crozet & Liddicoat (2000) state that what should be nurtured in language education is “intercultural competence”. These authors, however, suggest that “interculturality” can neither develop automatically nor be developed by teaching language aspects like written grammar. They argue that interculturality is fostered through communication, complete with communication failures, more so than by smooth communication, because communication is a complex behavior that originates in relationships with others.

Crozet & Liddicoat (2000) further claim that by understanding culture through language learning, a learner gains a sense of the dynamic and voluntary nature of the culture. As a result, the learner can construct “the third place”, where he/she reflects on his/her own culture, respects the cultures of others, and relates comfortably to others by comparing these cultures. They also suggest that promoting the development of such competence requires a paradigm shift in the field of language education, one that will help learners adapt to the “internationalization” of communication in a multilingual, multicultural society. However, there remains the question of whether “discussing cross-cultural perspectives” and “teaching culture” in language educations risks giving learners a fixed view of culture and language norms.

Lo Bianco (2003a) asks whether, assuming that norms, variation, and deviation exist in the language community, it is possible to discuss communication in a given language without invoking stereotypes. He believes that language educators every day face the difficult task of explaining variation and deviation as well as linguistic patterns, and that they can neither attribute linguistic patterns to infinite variation, nor deny the variation. According to Lo Bianco, it is especially important for learners outside the language community to learn the patterns and norms of the language while paying attention to variation and deviation, because this is a way for them to learn the culture of the language community.

Lo Bianco (2003b) also states that intercultural language teaching requires an understanding not only of the relationship between a language and its culture but also of how a language affects the attitudes and behavior of its speakers. He claims that learning a language is to be associated with the culture and the ideology of the language. He believes this is because it includes the development of perspectives on the following: attitudes and behaviors when the language is used (verbosity), changes in language use and attitudes depending on the speaker’s relationship with or position relative to the other party (interpersonal relations), attitudinal communication such as expressions of appreciation, requests, refusals, and acceptance (politeness), and the relationship between ritualistic behaviors that produce the common norm and the language (ritualisation).

In addition, Lo Bianco (2003c) says that, although culture is something that is learned from societal patterns, in reality it undergoes constant changes and

reconstructions, and as a result, hybrid intermediates are produced. In other words, when the social environment changes the language changes and a new culture is created. Language is at the heart of each change and this new culture is created through the language. To summarise, Lo Bianco believes that, future language learners should acquire not only linguistic patterns and information about the culture but also cultural behaviors that will be adopted after contact with the culture.

#### **4. Education of “language and culture” as a language education policy**

Recently in Australia, comprehensive language education has been introduced as a policy in Languages Other Than English (LOTE) education at the primary and secondary school levels. In 2003 the Department of Education, Science and Training of the Commonwealth of Australia published an interim report entitled *Report on Intercultural Language Learning*. It summarizes the second plan of the National Languages and Studies in Australian Schools (NALSAS) which was carried out from 1999 to 2002. The report praises the plan and calls it “Intercultural Language Learning” that consolidates “language and culture”.

The report emphasizes that the “communicative competence” required for second language learners is different from that required for native speakers of the language. This relates to fostering “intercultural speakers”, as emphasized by Byram & Zarate (1994), Kramsch (1998), and Liddicoat, Crozet & Lo Bianco (1999). Here the term “intercultural speakers” does not mean those who can behave like native speakers, but rather those who can make their own decisions as to how they respond, namely, those who can find “the third place”.

Presentation of several models that illustrate the language competence required for learners of a second language follows these discussions. Subsequently in the report, Liddicoat (2002) introduces a non-linear model of the acquisition of intercultural competence in which a learner responds to situations in a cyclic process by correcting his/her own behavior. The cyclic process proceeds as follows: when contacting a foreign culture (input) the learner notices differences (noticing), thinks about how to respond (reflection), takes action (output), finds reactions to his/her action (noticing), further evaluates his/her behavior (reflection), and finally moves to the next action (output). The learner adapts to situations while repeating trials and errors rather than moving linearly from his/her first culture to the target culture. During the process, the learner may find “the third place” by constructing the first intermediate culture, the second intermediate culture, the third intermediate culture, and so on. Consequently, even when “the third place” does not resemble the target culture his/her learning is not regarded as a failure.

Furthermore, based on the “multiple levels of perception” model defined by Kramsch (1998), the report presents a basic framework of intercultural language learning. First, it confirms that “language”, “culture”, and “learning” are interrelated within the framework. The report then presents several basic viewpoints on intercultural language learning. For instance, the report suggests that learners better understand their own languages and cultures through comparison with the target culture. This suggests that the learners understanding is deepened through “dialogues” and that any of the various views resulting from this process are recognized, shared and accepted. The report further speculates that learners will also gain a perspective that enables them to reflect on their native and target languages and cultures as well as accept the diverse languages, cultures and individuals in the world. Learners who become multilingual by receiving such an education are expected to know how to respond to situations differently than monolingual speakers. They should also be able to see things from various points of view. As a practical consideration the report presents a method of obtaining procedural knowledge. According to the report, procedural knowledge enables learners to go beyond just the declarative knowledge level of understanding other cultures to recognize the diversity of language and culture. The authors of the report propose that this is done through inferring, comparing, interpreting, discussing, and negotiating. Thus, intercultural language

learning constitutes a dynamic process that enables learners to subjectively and consciously seek suitable ways of interacting with other cultures and thereby construct their own identities.

Bearing all of this in mind though, how then do Japanese language teachers in Australia adopt and practice intercultural language learning as explained above?

### **5. Education of “language and culture” seen in Japanese classrooms in Australia**

*Teaching Invisible Culture: Classroom Practice and Theory*, edited by Lo Bianco and Crozet (2003), is a collection of studies on practices of teaching Chinese, French, German, Italian, and Japanese as foreign languages. In this section I will examine an article entitled, “The teaching of culture in Japanese” (Toyota & Ishikawa, 2003), which discusses Japanese language education.

Toyota and Ishikawa (2003) discuss the “tendency of the Japanese people” and “characteristics of the Japanese language” that have been frequently discussed in the past. For example, they present supposedly Japanese-specific social and cultural characteristics such as “*ishin denshin* (non-verbal communication)” “*omoiyari* (empathy)” “*uchi to soto* (inside and outside)”, and “*meue to meshita* (superiors and subordinates, or seniors and juniors)”; and related expressions such as “*iisashi* (an abrupt termination of speech)”, “*iiyodomi* (hesitation in speech)”, “*keigo* (honorifics)” “*taigu hyogen* (hearer-oriented attitudinal expressions)”, and “*aisatsu kotoba* (greetings)” and phrases such as “*Odekake desu ka?* (Are you going out?)” “*Tsumaranai mono desu-ga* (this is a trivial thing, but ...)” “*Nani-mo arimasen-ga* (there is nothing worth serving you, but ...)”, and “*Tondemo arimasen* (not at all/definitely not)”. They also compare examples of language and cultural practice between Japanese and English to emphasize the “uniqueness” of the Japanese language: expressions of request, agreement, refusal, praise, and appreciation, omissions of subjects and adverbs, the use of personal pronouns, writing styles, supportive responses, attitudes, mannerisms, bowing, pronunciations, and vocabulary.

There are two points of concern here that need to be addressed. They are, the “explanatory discourses” that are used to clarify language and culture points to non-native learners of Japanese and prominent ways of thinking pertaining to “language and culture” of people involved in Japanese language education. These can be illustrated by the following episode.

In February and March 2005, I interviewed many Japanese language educators in Sydney and Brisbane about how they put intercultural language learning into practice. Contrary to my expectations, the majority of interviewees replied along the lines that “Because language and culture have always been taught in Japanese language education this new initiative hasn’t brought about any perceivable changes.” This strongly indicates that Japanese language teachers in Australia believe that they can provide “explanatory discourses” as they have always done when discussing “language and culture” or intercultural language learning.

Here I present another example. The Queensland LOTE Centre in Brisbane is a resource center run by the Queensland Department of Education. It supports LOTE education at the primary and secondary school levels within the state by providing teaching materials and realia as well as training opportunities. In 2004, the Centre produced a series of new materials for Japanese language education entitled *Intercultural Language Learning: Arriving at the Third Place*. For example, a file of teaching materials about marriage contains a congratulatory envelope for a Japanese wedding, a congratulatory telegram, a Japanese magazine about weddings, and laminated photos of Shinto-style and western-style weddings at churches, and of wedding receptions. The attached guides include a questionnaire asking, “How was the wedding?” “What did they wear at the wedding?” “Was there a reception after the wedding ceremony?” and other similar questions. I assume that a lesson incorporating these materials would introduce weddings in Japan and Australia for comparison, ask learners what kind of wedding they would like to have, and make them present their ideas orally. One might think that the

lesson produced intercultural language learning and directed learners toward “the third place”.

The question that needs asking here is whether learners would acquire the ability to find “the third place” in lessons designed as the one here? If Japanese language educators in Australia think that nothing has changed regarding the teaching of “language and culture”, then discussions about intercultural language teaching involving “the third place” are not reaching these practitioners in Australia. Why, then, are these discussions making no progress? What is indeed lacking?

The thing to point out here is not the challenge for Japanese language educators but the question of whether the discussions are even mature enough to advance beyond conventional language education, or whether they are somehow flawed. Therefore, weaknesses in the discussions about intercultural language teaching must be explored further.

## **6. Weaknesses in the discussions about intercultural language teaching**

Put simply, the overarching reason for developing a focus on “the third place” in language education is to nurture individuals who can adapt to social environments in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Societies are expected to be places in which people with diverse social and cultural backgrounds cross borders to meet and communicate with one another. It goes without saying that this is the task of education in general. However, if this aims are to be achieved then conventional pedagogy based on fixed and static views of society, culture, and language requires reevaluation. That means reconstructing pedagogy to include perspectives such as social diversity, cultural hybridity, and language fluidity. A similar paradigm shift would then be necessary in language education.

However, language education is different than other forms of education in that it is more obviously associated with education for language competence. In other words, language education is an educational field that aims to foster competence in a language. This is where language educators believe the essence of their work lies and that they are already achieving this through tried and tested methods. Therefore, language educators are likely to think the current discussion on intercultural language teaching to be nothing new. This is based on a belief that the teaching of a foreign language already involves educating learners in communicating with people that belong to a different cultural group with different ways of thinking. Here again language educators are not convinced there is anything new in the current discussions on intercultural learning and are unable to see the necessity of a paradigm shift in language teaching.

If this is the case, then I strongly believe that we should reevaluate discussions on intercultural language teaching from the beginning. The following points elaborate on this suggestion.

Before doing so however, I would like to confirm the assumptions drawn above relating to intercultural language teaching. The first assumption is of the fluidity, diversity and hybridity of language, culture and society. Second, is the idea that linguistic communication is itself a culture. The third assumption is that the goal of future language education will be to foster speakers who can adapt to different cultures (intercultural speakers).

Assuming these assumptions to be correct I would next like to discuss methodology. Although Lo Bianco (2003a) states that language educators every day face the difficult task of explaining variation and deviation as well as linguistic patterns, there is not necessarily a dichotomy between variation and deviation on the one hand, and linguistic patterns on the other. What is important here is what kind of language competence is nurtured through the process of teaching a language. In this case, it is not the same language competence that native speakers have, nor is it the ability to act like a native speaker. Rather, it is language competence in a second language, which enables a learner to respond to different cultures.

The next point I would like to raise is how we interpret the statement

“competence in a second language that enables learners to respond to different cultures”? Despite much debate, there is still no clear answer on this. All models agree that communicative competence is required, but opinions vary as to what other types of competence help second language learners respond effectively to different cultures. One key indication of progress is Kramsch’s (1998) work on “multiple levels of perception”. She points out that a learner who is in-between his/her own culture (Culture 1) and the target culture (Culture 2) possesses self awareness as well as awareness of the other in both Culture 2 and Culture 1. In other words, as a second language learner moves from Culture 1 to Culture 2, his/her perception shifts. We do not need to consider Culture 1 and Culture 2 as dichotomous. They are “cultures” that each learner perceives as he/she learns another language and these perceived cultures are not fixed but rather fluid. They change during the process of language learning.

Given this argument, the next important problem to tackle is how to understand the relationship between perception and language. The perception of self and other within these imagined cultures changes. At the same time, “the competence in a second language that enables learners to respond to different cultures” changes cyclically. Perception and language competence differ depending on the situation, the conditions, and the speaker’s relationship with the other party. Therefore, the solution to our problem lies neither in the perceptions of speakers of the target language, nor in its norms. Neither should “the competence in a second language that enables learners to respond to different cultures” be viewed as a distinct item or as a fixed entity. Instead, both learners and educators must consider in more depth how this concept applies in their daily practices. In this way, the concept of language competence determines what intercultural language teaching and Japanese language education should be (Kawakami, 2005).

Methodology and formulas presenting Cultures A and B to reach Culture C are not sufficient for a reevaluation of the concept of language competence. Instead, it is important to recognise that the search for what language competence is begins with a search of the relationship between what learners voluntarily and consciously describe in their opinions or views in the target language and the language competence fostered by doing this. The search for competence in crossing cultural borders is none other than the search for the concept of language competence. The result of the search will be revealed through repeated efforts in education, both theoretical and practical.

## **7. Reevaluation of language education and the concept of language competence**

Finally, I will discuss JSL education for children from the perspective of the challenge raised in the above discussion, on the reevaluating the concept of language competence.

Currently Japan has no national policy on JSL education for children. There are no JSL teachers who are specialized in teaching only JSL children. Additionally, neither the number of children who need JSL education nor their actual conditions are known. What sort of language education should JSL children be given?

JSL children do not necessarily settle in Japanese society. They may migrate on to other countries after Japan. Nevertheless, whether these children are native Japanese or JSL children, all must receive language education that promotes their development. Nurturing the ability to adapt to multilingual, multicultural societies, whether using Japanese as a second language or their own native languages requires the creation of a new language education that goes beyond the scope of conventional national education approaches.

In regard to JSL education for children, “education for multicultural cohabitation” (learning to live together, learning to live with others) with the formula  $A+B \rightarrow C$  has been proposed as part of intercultural education (Sato, 2001). However, like the discussions of “the third place”, this discussion must proceed beyond a formula that seeks Culture C as a compromise between Cultures A and B; it must ask exactly what type of language competence is desired. Thus, in reevaluating the concept of language

competence by asking what type of language competence JSL education should nurture, we must also reevaluate the nature of Japanese society and the way we relate to others. In this sense, the discussions around intercultural language teaching in Australia have a strong correlation with those on JSL education for children in Japan.

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