

Authentic Voices: Insights into a Japanese Education Practicum

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This paper examines how opportunities for Japanese second language students to engage in Japanese language events are socially constructed. The language events in this case occur within a primary school setting in Japan in which the students are engaged in a teaching practicum. Aspects of the social organization that assist or inhibit the participation of second language learners in a Japanese language community are also investigated. Particular attention is given to Norton Peirce's (1995) assertion that second language acquisition (SLA) researchers have a responsibility to challenge the artificial distinction, evident in the work of many SLA theorists, between the language learner and the language learning context.

Data reveals that students are undergoing a process of negotiating legitimacy and the right to speak in a Japanese second language context that is supported by their role as in-service teacher. Candid comments reveal processes that are significant in assisting, or are detrimental to, participation in the social arena. It is hoped that this paper will act as an impetus for further discussion of social dynamics and their effects on second language learners and, in addition, contribute to our understanding of the dynamics of study abroad programs.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to analyze the manner in which participation in the authentic language environment of an in-country workplace setting facilitates language acquisition by tertiary students of Japanese language. Various commentators have noted the value of students engaged in second-language learning undertaking a period of prolonged study in a country which provides a

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natural target language environment (Opper et al. 1990; Teichler and Wolfgang 1991; Marriot 1993; Marriot 1994; Brecht et al. 1995; Marriot 1995). Some uncertainty exists regarding the degree of effectiveness of such programs, with Marriot (1993), for instance, referring to the variation in the acquisition of sociolinguistic norms evident after study abroad. Nevertheless, it is true to say that generally progress greatly exceeds the degree of improvement that might be expected as the result of a similar period of study in a first-language environment.

The objective of the present discussion is to examine some aspects of the social processes within which language acquisition occurs. To date, few researchers appear to have actually probed the social nature of the language experience. As Marriot's observation cited above implies, previous research into in-country programs has generally focused on linguistic outcomes, such as proficiency in the use of polite language. The present project is, however, less concerned with outcomes and more with investigating what conditions might prevail in order to facilitate the legitimate participation by students in the natural or informal environment of a target language community (Spolsky 1989).

Such a discussion inevitably examines the relationship between social setting and language acquisition. Like Fairclough, we see the relationship between language and society as "internal and dialectic" (1989: 23). In other words, while discourse is "shaped and constrained by social structure in the widest sense and at all levels," it is also "socially constitutive" in that it contributes to those same aspects of social structure by which it is shaped and constrained (Montgomery 1995: 64). Accordingly, we are of the opinion that, in order to understand and devise effective strategies for language acquisition, researchers must be prepared to examine the social settings impinging on the language experiences of learners.

Specifically, acknowledgment is given here to Norton Peirce's (1995) assertion that second language acquisition (SLA) researchers have a responsibility to challenge the artificial distinction, evident in the work of many SLA theorists, between the language learner and the language learning context. Recognition is given to the validity of Peirce's articulation of the interaction between language use, social structures, and power relationships, an articulation that is also made explicit in Fairclough's ideas cited above. Our specific concern is the identification of salient characteristics of social relationships in the natural language environment of a Japanese workplace setting, namely a primary school, which facilitate or inhibit language learning. This includes an examination of power relationships in that setting, although our interest in power is more oblique than that of Peirce or Fairclough. Our primary concern is the identification of those elements in the social setting which permit learners to be involved in language events and, if necessary, to take the initiative and, to borrow from Bourdieu (cited in Peirce 1995: 18), appropriate the right to speak.

Accordingly, the direction of the paper is shaped by the following questions:

1. How are opportunities for second-language learners to engage in Japa-

nese language events socially constructed within a primary school setting in Japan?

2. What aspects of this social organization assist or inhibit the participation of second language learners in a Japanese language community?

The Study

From a broad perspective, this study aims to contribute to existing research on in-country or study abroad programs. To date, there has been significant research into various aspects of study abroad programs (Opper et al. 1990; Teichler and Wolfgang 1991; Kanagy and Futaba 1994; Brecht et al. 1995; Feed 1995; Marriot 1995; Siegal 1995). However, research into study-abroad programs in Japan in particular is somewhat sparse. Marriot has commented on this lack of research as follows:

Given the commitment to student exchanges and study abroad programs in both Australia and Japan, the scarcity of research on outcomes of the various programs which are in operation is surprising. (1994: 69)

Opper, Teichler, and Carlson (1990: 203) have noted the importance of “giving primary consideration to the effect which participation in [study abroad] programmes has on the students themselves.” As mentioned previously, much prior research focuses on language proficiency outcomes. In other words, “effect” is interpreted as an end point phenomenon. While research of this nature is undoubtedly significant, this project seeks to complement outcome data with data relating to process. We are seeking specifically to document some aspects of social processes which accompany language acquisition. Accordingly, the specific focus of this paper is the effect participation in the social structures of an in-country practicum has on the development of a student’s second-language proficiency. In other words, when analyzing data, researchers have focused on the social dynamics of a student’s experiences and how those dynamics impinge on language acquisition.

Study Participants

All study participants were students enrolled in the Languages and Cultures Initial Teacher Education Program (LACITEP) at Central Queensland University. This is a partial immersion undergraduate degree program in which between 50 and 80% of material is delivered in Japanese. The course is an initial teacher education program designed specifically to graduate language proficient teachers of elementary level Japanese. A detailed account of the program is given in Erben and Kato (1995).

The LACITEP In-Country Component

A feature of LACITEP is the in-country component, operated since the program's inception in accordance with the Leal (1991) recommendation regarding the desirability of incorporating in-country learning experiences into tertiary language education courses. This local concern reflected widespread acknowledgment among researchers from various countries regarding the significance of in-country study as a critical element in the development of second language proficiency (see Opper et al. 1990).

Funded in recent years by University Mobility in Asia and the Pacific (UMAP) monies through DEETYA, the LACITEP in-country component features a number of complementary elements. Students commence the experience with a three-week intensive Japanese language program, which has the secondary objective of assisting students to adjust to living in a new environment. This is followed by a three week practicum in the workplace setting of a Japanese primary school and a further three weeks of organized school visits. These three elements, which run for nine weeks in total, comprise the formal aspect of the in-country component, although students are encouraged to remain in Japan for up to six months. LACITEP in-country study, then, features a balance of language learning in an artificial classroom environment and language acquisition in the natural setting of both a school workplace and a home-stay environment.

The Practicum-Study Location and Its Significance

The location of this study is the natural language environment of a workplace setting, namely a Japanese primary school. During their time at the primary school, LACITEP students are required to participate in the school community as pre-service teachers. The purpose of the practicum is to provide students with the opportunity to gain Japanese sociolinguistic competence while experiencing and learning about professional and cultural aspects of school life in Japan. It is also considered that an experience of this nature will greatly enhance the ability of program graduates to use authentic "teacher talk" in their own classrooms.

Practicum students are assessed by a supervising teacher in the Japanese primary school, according to criteria derived from the objectives of the practicum. These criteria relate to professional and teaching skills, rather than to Japanese language proficiency. In addition to teaching, students are expected to observe lessons taught by their supervising teacher and discuss these observations with the teacher. Some schools require LACITEP students to teach lessons based on the Monbusho curriculum. Others request that students confine their teaching to lessons about Australia within a social studies framework. In either instance, lessons are always conducted in Japanese. Depending on the individual schools, students are also required to participate in school events,

such as undōkai (sports day), as well as attend teacher meetings.

The significance of the practicum with respect to this project is that it provides students with a natural language setting in which they participate as legitimate social agents, namely student teachers. For this study, then, the social and language settings assume a particular importance. It is our claim that the social and language environment of a workplace setting in which second-language learners have active agency, for instance in the role of student teacher in a Japanese primary school, has a degree of authenticity lacking in many study abroad language environments, even in the three-week intensive language program that precedes the practicum under discussion here. This authenticity resides, to some extent at least, in the fact that, since LACITEP students enter the language community of the Japanese primary school as pre-service teachers, they are ascribed a role in that community which might legitimately be ascribed to a local participant. Scollon and Scollon have discussed the importance of understanding the roles taken by participants within speech events (Scollon 1995: 27). Although the issue is not directly addressed by these writers, their discussion implies the necessity for participants to be ascribed a legitimate role prior to involvement in such events.

When examining discussions of other study abroad experiences, it becomes apparent that some of these experiences are characterized by a significant degree of artificiality and contrivance and, therefore, sociolinguistic impoverishment. To some extent, this artificiality and concomitant impoverishment is the result of the second-language learner participant being unable to adopt a legitimate role, that is, a role which might be adopted by a first-language-speaking local participant. In Seigal's (1995: 234) study, for instance, the subject Arina is invited as a resident foreigner in Japan to participate in what Seigal herself labels as "foreigner-only" speech events. These events include a cultural exchange luncheon, acting as guest station master for a day in commemoration of a new service instituted by Japan Rail, and delivering a speech at a businessmen's club annual meeting. While each event occurs within the informal, natural target language environment referred to by Spolsky (1989), the tasks assigned to Arina are to a large degree artificial. Arina is, in fact, required to do little more than perform. The fact that Arina has no legitimate role, in terms of the definition given above, clearly creates difficulty for her. It also creates difficulties for the local first-language participants who appear somewhat nonplussed with respect to roles that might be ascribed to Arina. As a result, a range of "foreigner-only" speech events are created.

These events fail, however, to provide the second-language participant with any significant opportunity to interact with local speech participants. Self-initiated, spontaneous interaction, in particular, is largely absent. It is assumed that study abroad programs provide an ideal situation for interaction with background speakers, thereby facilitating language acquisition. Nevertheless, as Arina's experiences demonstrate, the so-called natural target language environment can still be characterized by a significant degree of

sociolinguistic impoverishment, and lack of opportunity for learners to initiate interactive speech events with background speakers of the language.

The speech environment to which LACITEP students have access during their practicum, however, is one in which students encounter a wide range of speech opportunities. Specifically, the fact that the visitors enter the community in the role of pre-service teacher generally obligates local participants to recognize the LACITEP students right to impose reception. In other words, they are permitted or able to initiate, without antagonism, spontaneous interaction with speakers in a variety of social relationships. The primary school environment is comprised of administrators, such as principals and deputy principals, teachers in organizational roles, classroom teachers, parents, other pre-service teachers and, of course, pupils. This results in a particularly rich sociolinguistic environment, especially within the complex Japanese social context where various social status agents are present. Being sent to the school in the capacity of pre-service teachers gives LACITEP students an opportunity to interact with this range of social roles in a variety of contexts, including formal classroom settings, after hours teacher meetings, PTA meetings, sports days, and informal lunch-time activities. As Montgomery, in his discussion on social relations and the management of discourse, might have put it, the admittance of LACITEP students into the Japanese primary school creates around them an “interactive space” that is best filled by their “being” a pre-service teacher (Montgomery 1995: 209). Furthermore, although they remain a pre-service teacher, the wide range of social roles occupied by other participants requires the second-language participants to draw on a number of diverse, although complementary, subject positions. As Fairclough (1992: 67–68) has observed, these subject positions cut across “different settings and activities of [the] institution.” The presence of dialect and non-standard speech forms further enriches the language environment of the school.

Method

This study involves six students who were interviewed after their in-country experience on their return to Australia. The data was collected and transcribed with salient features coded and analyzed. Central themes were recorded and a concept map was created. From this data, further analysis was made. Clearly, data collected during the practicum would have had greater immediacy. Logistical restraints, however, prevented this.

Prior to data collection, there was concern that subjects would perhaps be either unable or reluctant to recall experiences which had occurred six months previously. Nevertheless, as with subjects in Ruth Kanagy's (1994) study, participants did not merely speak candidly, but appeared to welcome the opportunity to reflect retrospectively on their experiences.

Discussion

It needs to be stated at the outset of this discussion that, in spite of the fact that LACITEP students are generally granted the right to reception, this does not diminish the fact that, as learners of Japanese, albeit advanced, they have an incomplete understanding of language and social convention of the Japanese primary school. Problems they would normally face in a practicum situation are inevitably complicated by this accentuated lack of familiarity with social and language practices.

Neustupny has discussed the concept of being foreign in the target language culture (Neustupny 1985). Although this discussion has drawn criticism from Clyne (1994: 208), it has relevance here. As Neustupny (1985: 44) points out:

When one or more of the constituent factors of a [communicative] situation is foreign to the cultural situation in question . . . communication in the situation differs substantially from communication in native situations.

He adds:

As a result of the presence of foreign factors a typical contact situation is packed with communication problems and attempts are constantly made for their removal.

Our data would certainly support the notions expressed in these statements. However, as the following discussion will demonstrate, it would also support the hypothesis that the natural language environment of the Japanese primary school, in which the second-language learner participates as a pre-service teacher, is a particularly positive site for the resolution and removal of communication problems.

Nevertheless, LACITEP students do enter the Japanese primary school speech community as a “foreign” subject. It is important to note that this “foreignness,” has both a linguistic and a social basis. That is, when students enter the school, they introduce an element of difference both as discourse participants and members of the school social community. As Peirce (1995) has observed, because of this difference they can become vulnerable and likely to be accorded a position of disadvantage and powerlessness. Both the language and discourse communities operate according to various conventions (Fairclough 1992: 28–31). The degree to which “foreign” agents become disadvantaged and powerless is often dependent on the response of the other participants to violations of conventions committed by the “foreign” participant. If agents who are conversant with the conventions are prepared to compromise those conventions and admit the validity of the LACITEP student’s contribution, then the student will be able to participate in language events without undue impediment. If, however, compromise is not forthcoming, then there is little likelihood that the problems referred to by Neustupny will be removed.

In most cases, other speech community participants were seemingly willing to compromise discourse and social conventions to include LACITEP students in local events. Unlike the migrant women featured in Norton Peirce's study, who had to aggressively justify their right to impose reception, or Seigal's Arina, who had few opportunities for communication outside fairly restrictive parameters, LACITEP students were generally given the communicative run of the school.

For instance, all students reported positive relationships with their principals. In some cases, principals went to extraordinary lengths to introduce students to significant cultural traditions and generally make them feel welcome, as demonstrated by the following comment:

With my principal, Matt and I had a really good relationship with him, too. He would do anything for us . . . It seemed like anything we (asked for), happened. It was like he was this genie . . . With the Deputy Principal, too, Matt would always have a cigarette with him. I had a good relationship with him too, he would always be joking around.

One less voluble student made the comment that "The principal, yeah, she was excellent." Another student felt confident enough to interact at will with the principal.

I used to go flying past his room and say hello. I wouldn't even ask. I would go in and sit down and say *konichiwa*. So it was sort of positive and quite friendly.

Clearly, this response was the result of a significant relaxation of discourse convention by the school principal, for it is highly unlikely that a similar greeting by a first-language local pre-service teacher would have elicited such a response. In addition, it is interesting to note that the principal concerned only responded in this open manner under certain circumstances. The student who provided this information also told of one or two occasions when she was puzzled by apparent rebuffs. Further investigation revealed that on such occasions the principal had visitors, such as education authority officers, in his office. It seemed that his preparedness to compromise discourse convention was a function of his perception of how such a compromise would be regarded by other local participants. Discussions concerning address forms, such as that conducted by Ralph Fasold (1990), are usually based on the assumption that choice of address form is largely the prerogative of the speaker initiating the dialogue. The above, however, demonstrates the degree to which the interlocutor also can play an active role in determining how she or he might be addressed, depending on the social context.

Pupils at the school were as equally welcoming and tolerant of discourse convention violation as the principals. The relationship of all six subjects, with one exception, with pupils in the school was extremely positive and provided

opportunity for speech events in a variety of contexts.

The most obvious of these social contexts was the classroom where LACITEP students assumed the role of classroom teacher. All subjects spoke about the demands that teaching in an authentic classroom environment made on their language skills. There was a uniform perception among students that, in spite of the relatively brief period of the practicum, these demands had greatly facilitated language proficiency development. This proficiency development was sometimes at a technical level:

I have come to understand . . . the classroom language, like instructions and those sorts of things that I never knew properly how to use before, didn't have the confidence to use before whereas, you get used to using it in Japan because you have to.

The comments made by this student, particularly regarding her increased confidence in an ability to manipulate certain sorts of classroom-related language, support a number of observations made by Gass and Selinker about the importance accorded by second-language learners to expansion of the lexicon. The skills involved in vocabulary building may appear to be of a lower order. However, research cited by Gass and Selinker (1994) attests to the frustration felt by second-language speakers in the absence of adequate lexical knowledge. These writers also comment on the manner in which insufficient lexical knowledge impinges on the ability of the first-language-speaking interlocutor to comprehend the utterances of their second-language-speaking companions.

For some, however, the process was more complex, involving on-going interaction. One LACITEP student reported:

The kids just loved you, just absorbed everything you said. Like if you said, "Well in Australia," you know, something about koalas, they would go, "Oh really, tell us about this," and "What are your friends like in Australia?" They were so interested. They were great. I didn't really have any problems, discipline problems, because they were always so attentive. If you said something in Japanese that was wrong they would correct you, but they wouldn't say, "Oh look, dummy, you say it like this." They would say, "Oh maybe you're trying to say this." Often when I am teaching and I am trying to teach them a certain concept and they're not understanding it, someone in the class would say, "Oh guys it is this," and they'd say, "Yeah we understand." So they would always be helpful as well, even the kids. I was teaching them, but they were teaching me as well.

The observations made by this student are significant from a number of perspectives. Firstly, her experiences highlight the inherently ambiguous nature of all communication, a point emphasized repeatedly by Scollon and Scollon (1995: 5). These writers discuss the necessity for effective communica-

tion to be based on a process of “finding and clarifying sources of ambiguity as well as learning to deal with places where miscommunication occurs” (1995: 161). The suggestions made by the local participants, namely the Japanese primary students, to supplement the incomplete lexicon of the second-language speaker, namely the LACITEP student, is a practical example of detection and clarification of ambiguity.

Furthermore, this student’s observation highlights the value to second-language learners of other speech-event participants being prepared to adopt a scaffolding role. Montgomery (1995: 40) has noted the crucial support provided by conversational partners who provide dialogic scaffolding in the process of first-language acquisition by small children. Such scaffolding includes both acting as a prompt and returning utterances in an expanded form for the child to either accept or reject. In the case of the small child, the partner providing the scaffolding is often the mother or other carer. It is much more difficult for the second-language learner, particularly the adult second-language learner, to find partners willing to play the role of what might be termed “language parent.” Nevertheless, in keeping with the Scollon and Scollon observation concerning the manner in which “enculturation, oddly enough, is often carried out across the lines of institutional status” (Scollon 1995: 179), the primary school children clearly adopted that role with respect to the LACITEP student quoted above. The value for the second-language learner is that opportunities are created for the expansion of her or his restricted language through on-going negotiation with the partner, or in this case, partners. To adapt Montgomery’s observations with respect to the child and her or his scaffolding partner, as long as what is said “can be made to seem meaningful in the context of the world they both inhabit, then it’s allowed to pass as an appropriate contribution to the joint construction of the dialogue” (1995: 41). The value of participation in language events of this nature, as opposed, for instance, to the “foreigner-only” speech events forced upon the unfortunate Arina of Seigal’s study, is that opportunity is provided for what Montgomery terms “the active appropriation of language” (1995: 42). Adapting once again what this writer says about the child, the meaning of an utterance as spoken by the second-language learner is not closed off in advance. On the contrary:

[It] can be relatively fluid and unstable at the time of speaking. It only becomes fixed or stabilized to any degree by the conversational partner in the continuous negotiation that dialogue provides. Thus, the [second language learner] in effect is actually discovering what some of his/her utterances can mean in the act of using them. She/he remains . . . an active innovator and experimenter with the language. (1995: 41)

Speech events involving the students at the school continually forced the LACITEP visitors into spontaneous language production and exchange. This was in spite of the fact that students who were not confident about their lan-

guage ability tried to control the speech environment by preparing material with which they were relatively familiar. One student in particular found his best efforts to remain within set language parameters thwarted by student curiosity.

It was good in a way: it taught me how to cope quicker. I couldn't just rely on sitting down, using the dictionary, and writing out something to teach and then just rely on that. I had to learn how to be more impromptu—especially with the kids' questions, you get some interesting ones.

One subject was actually requested to act in an impromptu relief capacity for other staff, placing her in an environment for which no specific preparation was possible.

Say if a teacher had to quickly go away somewhere, they would say, "Oh, can you just jump in here. Here's the sheet. Can you just get them to do this for me?" So I would look at the sheet and go, "Okay, you guys are doing social studies, you're working in groups, so go to it. If you have any questions come and see me."

Sometimes spontaneity of this nature overtaxed the student's ability, as in the case of two students who unexpectedly found themselves teaching an Australian bushdance to two hundred children.

There was one situation where it was only our second day and they put Belinda and I teaching the whole of the grade five class. That would have been two hundred students and it was our second day and the teachers didn't help at all, they just stood back. We had to do the whole thing, tried to control two hundred kids teaching them the heel and toe polka. . . . Afterwards, they said, "You should have done this, and you should have done this." We were taken aback by the fact that obviously our Japanese wasn't to the level where we can say certain instructions and those sorts of things. We weren't used to it the second day. I got really angry at that: the fact that they hadn't helped, and then they turned around and said, "This is the way you should have done this and this and this." I thought, oh well.

It is worth noting with respect to this experience that the chaos that ensued was probably as much a result of the social structures impinging on the situation as the language inadequacy of the student teachers. Fairclough has noted how textual production is not, in practice, available to people as a limitless space for innovation and play, but is socially constrained and conditional on relations of power (1992: 103). In the incident described above, the textual production ability, in other words the ability to generate the language necessary to adequately organize the children, is constrained by the LACITEP student's lack of familiarity with such a social situation and exacerbated by the power being

exercised by the local teachers, who failed to intervene when they observed the lesson deteriorate. In fact, even in a first-language environment, inexperienced student teachers on public display would probably be hard-pushed to effectively teach such an unreasonably large number of children. This hypothesis is supported by research cited by Gass and Selinker (Gass 1994: 178). Although their discussion related to conversational dominance, Gass and Selinker refer to studies by both Zuengler, in 1989, and Woken and Swales, in 1989 (see Gass 1994), in which data gathered supported the notion that effective language performance was as much a function of knowledge of a topic or setting, as it was of available language resources or language proficiency.

However, undoubtedly, the most significant social relationship into which LACITEP students enter during their practicum is the relationship with their supervising teacher. Regardless of the nature of their relationship with other participants in the language environment, if the relationship with the supervising teacher was inadequate, it appeared to be very difficult for LACITEP student to participate to any worthwhile extent in spontaneous speech events. Even in a first-language environment, the relationship between supervising teachers and student teachers is critical in terms of student teachers successfully completing practicum requirements (see Kwan 1996). The power imbalance inherent in this relationship becomes even more pronounced when the supervising teacher is also the individual with access to appropriate language forms, as is the case with supervising teachers participating in the LACITEP in-country practicum. In this respect, supervising teachers can be regarded as operating in a gatekeeper capacity (Fairclough 1989: 117; Roberts et al. 1992), that is, as one who has the power to admit or exclude the LACITEP student to the school community. Whether they decide to share or withhold this information is dependent on the goodwill of the individual supervising teacher.

Fortunately, most students have very positive relationships with supervising teachers, with teachers voluntarily adopting the role of what might be termed social and language mentor. As one student explained:

I used the language that I knew to get through things, and then I sort of picked up other aspects of the language My teacher was a lot of help; she helped me I was basically with my teacher the whole time. I followed her around like a lost puppy dog.

This teacher also played an important role in bridging the socio-cultural divide that sometimes existed between the LACITEP students and the children. In tears on her final day, the young Australian student tried to hug some of the children goodbye.

I was so emotional at the time, and I would probably never see them again; I just wanted to give them this big massive hug. I gave a hug to one of the kids, and they were like very rigid. But my teacher would like be, "Oh it's okay, you can give a hug."

Many LACITEP students had immense respect for their supervising teachers, who they generally perceived, correctly or incorrectly, to be much more hard-working than their counterparts in Australia. One student at a school in Chiba Prefecture made the following comment about his supervising teacher, who commuted for several hours by car from Tokyo each day.

He was, as I say, he was one of the most dedicated teachers in the school, considering he was always the last to leave, and he did live so far away.

However, what most impressed this student about his supervising teacher was the fact that the teacher did not give undeserved compliments, either about the student's language proficiency or his teaching ability. Clearly this supervising teacher's assistance was greatly valued by the student.

He was always helpful, he gave me great feedback and he didn't, from that respect, he was one of the few (staff members at the school) that didn't actually sit there and say, "That was great, that was great." He would say, "That was great, that was interesting, you can fix this up." He gave constructive feedback which I was grateful for. He told me some things were my strengths, and some things sounded a bit stupid. He just sits there with no expression on his face and you find out afterwards what he thought.

This student's reflections are particularly interesting since it was his own perception that his Japanese language ability "wasn't that high," with his actual "verbal communication still (leaving) a lot to be desired." Like several other students who lacked language confidence, the subject was initially attracted to the possibility of communicating in English with some staff members. Nevertheless, he soon realized that given the natural Japanese language environment, it was far more beneficial to himself as a language learner to negotiate meaning in Japanese, no matter how "imperfect" that Japanese might be.

But just the fact that you are there everyday and everything is in Japanese, you do have a part to talk in English. But to get through the day, when you need help planning something, or when you want to know something, you have to resort to Japanese, which means that pretty soon you have got to use it.

In other words, in spite of some students' best attempts to avoid confronting the imperative of the natural language environment, the social nature of the environment, namely a school practicum, forced them to eventually come to terms with this imperative and meet its demands to the best of their ability.

In all of the above, it can be speculated that LACITEP students made numerous deviations from discourse and social norms and therefore were in a state of on-going violation of discourse and social convention. As Neustupny's work cited earlier implies, in a foreign contact situation this violation is a given.

What occurs subsequent to that violation is, however, very much dependent on the response of the local interlocutor. This interlocutor can assess the violation negatively and, in some instances, impose punitive sanctions. This often results in a breakdown in communication. Alternatively, the interlocutor can dismiss the violation as immaterial and continue to negotiate meaning with the LACITEP student. This is what generally occurred, as in the case of the pupils who suggested possible meanings to one subject's flawed attempts to express her ideas in Japanese. It is also probably what happened in the case of the student who bounced unannounced into the principal's office. In both cases, participants conversant with local convention were prepared to overlook violation of that convention on the part of LACITEP students. In the words of Fairclough (1989: 47), as the more powerful participants in the exchange, in terms of knowledge of language and social convention, they were able to "treat conventions in a more cavalier way as well as to allow or disallow varying degrees of latitude to less powerful participants."

This generosity of response, however, was not always evident. In one particular instance, a supervising teacher, who, as mentioned previously, played the crucial gatekeeper role for LACITEP students, adhered more rigidly to the conventions and refused, or was unable to share her language, professional, or social knowledge with the practicum student. The breakdown of this relationship caused the LACITEP student considerable personal distress in addition to abandoning her to a relatively sterile language environment.

The difficulties encountered by this student resulted in her being deprived of access to interactive speech events in which she felt confident enough to participate. Unlike Peirce's (1995) subjects, Martina and Eva, who developed confidence in their right to impose reception over a period of time, this student was not in the environment long enough to develop imposition strategies. Instead she spent much of the practicum, certainly when interacting with her supervising teacher, in a language torpor, struggling to negotiate the teacher's apparent impatience.

Yeah, I found sometimes when we were discussing the lesson that, like she would say something to me and I would say it back how like I thought it was the same, but then she'd go and say it another way again. That would confuse me more I was a bit limited, and when I tried to say things back to her to reinforce it, then she would get a bit annoyed. Like I didn't understand just because I was asking.

From the outset, this teacher signaled a desire to distance herself from the procedures by not attending scheduled planning meetings with the two LACITEP students assigned to the school. This caused the student some distress since she had thought that, "because I was going to the school . . . they would want me more." In addition, when the student tried to use the recognized and usually successful, communication strategy of repeating the

interlocutor's statement to confirm meaning (Plough and Gass 1993), the supervising teacher appeared unwilling or unable to react to the cue. Not surprisingly, the student was quite depressed by the nature of the relationship, which was also noticed by her teaching partner.

K noticed it too She seemed to have a real down view of me, like made me feel like I was stupid. That's how she made me feel when we spoke and that got me down a bit while I was over there.

As might be imagined, this student felt somewhat bereft about her practicum experience.

From the time of their arrival in the school, data collected indicates that LACITEP students were engaged in a continual struggle to make sense of their environment. Lacking what Scollon (1995) refers to as "world knowledge" about their social and language communities, they constantly struggled to explain phenomena which surrounded them. This struggle led them to resort to what Bartlett et al. (1996) have referred to as residual representations of the school community and its participants. In other words, they based their judgments on limited, residual information about the phenomena observed.

Often, this process of residualization resulted in romanticized, exoticized views of primary teachers in Japan and the nature of the teacher-student relationship in Japanese schools. Australian teachers were often compared, quite negatively, with their Japanese counterparts. As one student observed:

In Australia, it's a burden, and just I think it's the attitude of the teachers in Australia as well. Like it must have been the pracs I've done, but I've always sort of had the old boys' teachers and so at lunch time and things like that instead of interacting, cause they hate the kids you know, it's like, "Oh god, let's migrate to the staff room let's hide, let's run." So automatically you feel that way too. So at lunch time you don't really associate with the children in Australia.

Undesirable though romanticization of this nature may be from the perspective of Japanese essentialness, there is no doubt that it allowed students to affiliate freely with the language community in which they were participating, and accordingly, to increase their access to speech opportunities. This, it would appear, was the result in the case of the student who perceived herself as becoming a member of the extended family of the Japanese primary school.

I didn't mind staying there until nine if I had to It was fun It was just so different to Australia That bonding relationship that the Japanese teachers have They just seem to act like family, like brothers and sisters It's really great to see and you can see the dedication that they have for kids It's really great.

CONCLUSION

This discussion was conducted within the framework of two complementary questions: how are opportunities for LACITEP students to engage in Japanese language events socially constructed within a primary school setting in Japan? And, what aspects of this social organization assist or inhibit participation in a Japanese language community?

As the discussion has demonstrated, the majority of LACITEP students have a range of opportunities to spontaneously engage in language events in the setting of a Japanese primary school. The social construction of these events is related primarily to the manner in which the visitor enters the language community of the school in the role of pre-service teacher. This is a role that derives its legitimacy largely from the fact that it might also be performed by a first-language-speaking local participant in the community. Accordingly, LACITEP students are spared the discomfort, the consequences of which must be endured by both themselves and local participants, of being assigned a “foreigner-only” speech role in which little spontaneous, self-initiated language is possible. Instead, LACITEP students are, on balance, freely granted the right to impose reception. Furthermore, again recalling Montgomery’s discussion of the child in the process of acquiring language, they are able to engage in the type of innovation and experimentation which results in “the active appropriation of language” (1995: 49). Harris has commented on the manner in which the English language system specifically, although his observations apply to all language systems, “is undergoing incessant change over time and open to unpredictable innovation” (1988: 87). As pre-service teachers in a Japanese primary school, LACITEP students are confronted by and forced to deal with this incessant change, while simultaneously being in a position to contribute to some extent to the unpredictable innovation.

Language acquisition by language learners is not a process that is located in an isolated sterile environment within a language classroom. This is being accepted as evidenced through recognition given to the importance of in-country experiences in language learning programs. As more programs in which a workplace setting is integrated with traditional study experiences are introduced, recognition of the social dynamics and their concomitant effects on students needs to be given serious investigation.

Limitations in this study prevent generalizations being made; however, there is little doubt as to the significance of the social dynamics discussed here. As indicated by the participants’ responses, the teachers with whom they interacted has a crucial role to play in facilitating the right to speak and giving them true legitimacy in the social arena in which they were participating. In other words, successful negotiation of the social context, or, conversely, denial of the full right to the access to this social context was dependent on the supervising teacher.

The *jōge kankei* context of the Japanese primary school environment provides

us with an opportunity to investigate how Japanese second-language learners deal with a multilevel social strata in which they negotiate their position according to interaction with Japanese colleagues. This social strata is especially important when Japanese second-language learners are endeavoring to assert a social role that is expected of them by the legitimacy of the teaching practicum they are participating in.

This investigation will hopefully act as an impetus for further discussion on social dynamics and their effects on second-language learners and therefore contribute to our understanding of the dynamics of study abroad programs. Further investigation of a more in-depth nature would undoubtedly reveal more interesting insights which would be of value to Japanese second-language learners and educators.

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