

Ideological Complexity, National Subjectivity, and the Cultures of English in Tokyo High Schools

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I investigate the intersection of language ideology, educational practice, and identity within segments of English lessons in two different public high schools in Tokyo, Japan, one a technical high school, the other a liberal arts high school. This study explores the complexity of values concerning English language constructed during lessons. In lessons in both schools, a piece of text, the design of an activity, or a teacher's elaboration will thematize explicitly a distance between English language and Japanese national subjectivity. However, at a different level of explicitness, utterances and words often display moments of simultaneity (Woolard, 1999), where words come to inhabit a kind of translinguistic space somewhere between English and Japanese. Differences in practices between the two schools construct different educational class identities.

1. Introduction¹

This study explores the processes that construct language ideologies during English lessons in Japan. Participants are oriented via the evidential and affective resources of grammar toward ways of learning and knowing English language. These participant frameworks (Goodwin, 1990) are also organizations of responsibility (Hill & Irvine, 1992) through which participants maintain a distance between Japanese identity and the animation of English words. But in participating in English language lessons participants also sanction and socialize places for English words as resources within Japanese communication. So despite this structured control of participation single English lexical items sometimes become “internally persuasive” (Bakhtin 1981, p. 345), that is, at home within the accomplishment of immediate activities during lessons.

The data in this paper were recorded in English lessons in two different high schools in Tokyo, Japan. Though two types of English lessons (English Grammar and Oral Communication) are taught to students in both schools, I will focus on segments of talk from a Grammar lesson at Nishi (a liberal arts school) and on segments of talk from one Oral Communication lesson at Higashi Tech (a technical high school). I do this because

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these particular segments are good examples of the overall attitudes and methods that pervade these schools' respective English language programs, delineated in the chart below.

- (1) *Contrasting Qualities of English Language Lessons at Nishi and Higashi Tech.* Certain qualities can be said to be characteristic of an institution's English program as a whole, that is, present in both Oral Communication and Grammar lessons.

| General qualities of the broad English language curriculum at both schools | |
|--|---|
| Nishi High School | Higashi Technical |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ affect-neutral use of language ▪ confirmation of meaning ▪ precision ▪ students are cast as conveyors of knowledge regarding "Japanese culture," and the distinctions between separate but equal cultures | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ participant frameworks characterized by empathy ▪ approximation ▪ Students are cast as a part of a group that contends with English |

At Nishi I focus on a Translation activity, and at Higashi Tech I focus on a Listening activity. Within these activities, I focus primarily on the turns of talk in which the teacher provides elaboration on a response given by a student.

Higashi Tech trains technicians, scientists, and workers with skills that are suited toward the development of new technology and industry. Nishi, on the other hand, graduates students who will go on to schools like the University of Tokyo, Waseda University, or even Stanford or Harvard, an experience which makes them likely to have to be the face of Japan to the world. Interactions in English language lessons, by differently orienting students to and through English language, articulate students differently along educational class lines within Japanese society. At Higashi Tech students are socialized into what I call an empathetic participant framework into a cautious encounter with English. This results in a view of English as something that must be contended with and controlled from within Japan, and consequently, as I will show, filtered through a Japanese phonemic system. At Nishi, on the other hand, students are socialized through what I call an analytical participant framework to regard English language as an expressive tool they must master in order to pass college entrance exams, and ultimately represent Japan as a cultural entity. Thus I find that the pedagogical moves within English learning sites are just as much about the construction of local identities within Japanese society as they are about the most effective acquisition of English. In this way this study follows others that have shown that classroom interaction is both situated in relation to and constructive of broader institutional and social processes (Heath, 1983; Mehan, 1979; Mertz, 1998; Philips, 1983).

In addition to ideological differences *between* the two schools, ideological complexity *within* lessons constructs a discursive system (Hill, 1998) of ambivalence where English is both distal and proximal. Teachers may position themselves and students as distant from English, while simultaneously inserting English words into Japanese or alternating languages, presenting brief moments of simultaneity. In this paper, by “ambivalence” I mean something of the idea of syncretism (Duranti & Ochs, 1997; Hill & Hill, 1986; Kulick, 1992), which holds that speakers often operate to some extent within two cultures or languages. But I also invoke the idea of the “ambivalent margin” of the nation (Bhabha, 1990, p. 4), where cultural authority is “in the act of “composing” its powerful image” (p. 3). English lessons in Japan are thus sites of contact where a syncretic language is formed, elided, and organized in relation to participants’ identities.

2. Encountering English at Higashi Tech

Akari sensei (“Teacher Akari”) at Higashi Tech always begins a unit of study in her class with a listening activity. Throughout the activity she casts participants in an empathetic framework. This type of framework has a variety of implications for the organization of responsible participation and consequently an impact on the positioning of English and participants with respect to one another.

In the particular instance I will discuss here, the class has been watching a video (designed to accompany the textbook), which consists of a series of English-speaking high school students describing what they would like to do in the future. After watching, Akari sensei elicits responses from her students. She calls on students, some of whom have raised their hands. After students give a response, Akari sensei elaborates on the answer.

2.1. *Technological Mediation and the Framing of English*

The oral communication classroom at Higashi Tech is organized into banks of desks embedded with computer monitors and headphones. The desk at the front of the room is where the teacher controls a video stream, PowerPoint presentation, overheads, and audio feeds which can be routed to all or various of the students’ desks. Thus the spatio-technological organization of the Oral Communication classroom at Higashi Tech provides a number of English voices that emerge from videotapes primarily. In order to hear English, students must wear headphones and watch computer monitors. During this aspect of the activity, Akari sensei is merely the activator of the English voices, the one who puts the tape in the machine and pushes the button. The organization of responsible participation throughout the subsequent lesson casts these English voices as something that must be faced and contended with.

Thus there is an ornate mediation at work even before the teacher or any students utter a word of English in that several actions need to be taken in order to access English. What lesson activities involve, as I will show, is an intense mediation and casting of the listening experience, a shaping of the appropriation of pieces of English in specific ways, and an overall insertion of English words and voices into Japanese.

2.2. *Framing Empathy and Difficulty at the Outset*

At the outset of the particular listening activity I discuss here (a unit on the topic of “What do you want to be when you grow up?”), and at the beginning of several sub-segments of the activity (e.g. when there is a shift in speaker on the videotape), Akari

sensei frames discussion of the video segments by casting herself and her students in a joint-assessment of difficulty. For example, the following remark in line 1 is the first statement Akari sensei makes after she shuts off the video. Endo is a student.

- (2) 1. **Akari:** uun wakannai^{yone} muzukashii to omou^{yo}
yeah don't understand (I) think it's difficult

(2 lines skipped)

4. **Endo:** cho kikitori nikui.
It's incredibly difficult to catch.

In the above example, the interactional particle *-yone* casts *wakannai* (a contracted form of the verb *wakaranai*, “not understand”) as a sentiment that is emphatically (with the particle *yo*) and jointly (with *ne*) felt by the speaker and her students. Akari sensei further emphasizes this sense of difficulty with the statement—marked emphatically with the particle *-yo*—that *she* “thinks (it) is difficult” (*muzukashii to omou yo*). A student, Endo, takes up this stance shortly thereafter in line 4 above. Although Akari sensei herself has the full text of the video in her teacher’s guide, this empathetic stance is a pragmatic tactic to encourage participation by showing an understanding of the students’ position. But she has also positioned herself and her students as struggling together, assessing the voices speaking English that come through the headphones as difficult. As the following section illustrates, empathy extends beyond the teacher’s opening statements to the framework of IRE (Initiation, Response, Elaboration) exchanges further on in the activity.

2.3. Empathy During (IRE) Initiation, Response, Elaboration Exchanges

After students have listened to the voices on tape and Akari sensei has indexed an empathetic frame, she calls for participation from the class with the general request that students tell her what they were able to catch. Upon receiving a response, Akari sensei elaborates. I describe here how her elaborations are utterances that are directed simultaneously to different contexts: accomplishment of the listening activity, accomplishment of an institutional “doing of English learning,” and maintenance of participants’ national identity,

The segment of video that the class is discussing here features an actor portraying a female North American high school student who explains that she wants to be a reporter when she grows up. She explains that there are several topics she needs to study in order to prepare to become a reporter. The teacher has elicited responses, and Kushima, a student, utters an English phrase he was able to pick up from the video: “I have to, learn (a lot).”

- (3) “What do you want to be when you grow up?” Higashi Tech 2001
 1. **Kushima:** I have to, learn a lot.

Akari sensei’s elaboration:

2. **I have to learn a lot** (1.0) sou ne **a lot more about all these things** (tte itteta) **sou**
I have to learn a lot (1.0) right (she was saying) a lot more about all these things
3. de sono **all these things** tte iunoni atarunowa (1.0) **politics, politics** tte nani (2.5)
right and the referent of all these things is? (1.0) politics, politics is what (2.5)
4. **politics** (1.0) sei::ji dayo (1.0) ne, ima superu wa dasanai keredomo, katakana
politics, (1.0) 'sei::ji' however I won't give you the spelling now, because
5. demo iikara **politics** tte seiji, jya atowa, **economics** (2.0) kore kei:zai desho
katakana is fine politics is seiji, so also? economics (1.0) this is 'kei:zai' right?
6. (1.0) kouiu tangowa mou oboete kudasaiyo hitsuyou nanndakara, sorekara
(1.0) please memorize this vocabulary because it 's necessary, and
7. **environmental issues** tte kankyou mondai souiu kotowo mananda manabanaito,
environmental issues is 'kankyou mondai' "(I)'ll learn those kinds of things,
8. terebi no repoutaa niwa narenai yone, sou ittenno, sou sou sou, de sugoi ne,
if I don't I can't become a t.v. reporter right," (she)'s saying that, right
9. taihen dakedomo (1.0) >korewa tottemo< **challenging**, sugoi taihen charenji
right right, (she)'s saying, "however this is extremely you know tough, this is very
10. (kore wa) chousen ne shinaito damena koto dakedomo naritai, yaritaina:: tte
challenging, extremely tough challenge, (this is) a challenge right, but it's
11. ittenno (1.0) hai (3.0) sontsugi wa muzukashii kamo shirenai::,
bad if I don't do it, I want to become, I want to do," (1.0) right (3.0) okay the next one might be difficult,

Akari sensei is here a mediator and an indirect quoter of English voices. She inserts the words and phrases that students have offered, then requests translations for them in lines 3-7. However, in lines 4-5 she tells the class that she is not going to give them the spelling of these English vocabulary words, but that they can, for the time being, record them in *katakana*, a native phonemic script used for writing foreign words. Thus the entire listening activity, beginning with the technological mediation of voices, constitutes a series of displacements, insertions, and re-insertions of an already remote English. But in these elaborations Akari sensei must also traverse the constructed remoteness between participants and English language, providing stations along the continuum from English to

Japanese. In indirectly quoting the character's voice in lines 7-11, Akari sensei supplies three different expressions, first a code-mix (*kore wa totemo challenging*), then a word appropriated into the Japanese phonemic system (*sugoi taihen charenji*), and finally in Japanese (*(kore wa) chousen ne*). The following chart clarifies this reformulation.

- (4) Traversing the distance between English and students
- | | | | |
|----------------------|--------------------|-------------------------------------|-----------|
| >kore wa totemo< | challenging | (this is very challenging) | (line 9) |
| sugoi taihen | <i>charenji</i> | (extremely tough <i>challenge</i>) | (line 9) |
| (kore wa) chousen ne | | (this is a challenge right) | (line 10) |

Akari sensei thus seems to be moving the word gradually into more familiar linguistic terrain, simultaneously maintaining and contending with remoteness. At the same time she is presenting three ways of expressing this thought that emphasizes the use of challenging and charenji as shared resources in the lexicon (Muysken, 2000, p. 69).

2.4. Socializing Ambivalence: Language of the Activity, Institution, and Self at Higashi

Interactions in English lessons at Higashi are attending to several contexts at once: the need to attend to students' comprehension within the immediate activity, and the need to institutionally "do English learning" in line with a broader institutional discourse about the identity of students as problematic recipients of English, and the articulation of national selves that are preserved in the presence of English language.

Here, the empathetic elaboration on a student response actually leads to the linking of national identity with a metapragmatic directive about how best to hear English. In line 1 Akari sensei repeats a word "maybe" that a student has offered, then elaborates on the methodology of hearing English.

- (5) "What do you want to be when you grow up?" Higashi Tech, 2001
1. **Akari: maybe** (1.5) nantoka (1.0) sou hora dakara souyuuno wa souzou
maybe (1.5) so (1.0) right look so this is (done) by using your
 2. ryokude, hora tsunagun dakara, warewarewa bokokugo ga eigo (1.0)
imagination, look because it makes a connection, we (use imagination)
 3. [ja nain] dakara sa, souyatte tsunagun dakara, minna de motto tango
to make a connection cause our mother tongue isn't English, everyone give
[[*(nods twice)*]]
 4. dashite, hai ushiro.
more vocabulary, yes, next, in back.

Here, Akari sensei provides an explicit framework for comprehension of English: using ones “power of imagination” (*souzou ryokude*, lines 1, 2) because this is how one makes a connection to the English. Then in line 3 she indexically connects this stance toward comprehension of English with the articulation of a group identity: “because our mother tongue is not English.” Akari employs the pronoun *wareware* (“we”). This “we” explicitly positions all participants in a collective stance.

In order to accomplish the listening activity, then, Akari sensei must mediate for students. English is picked up in disparate pieces and inserted into Japanese for ease of comprehension; it is mixed, expressed as loanwords, and recorded in a native phonemic script. Here, participant frameworks overwhelmingly construct a sense of incompetence and cast students as contending with English. This evidential stance is linked to a “we” voice through the use of pronouns such as *wareware* (“we”) and through the explicit invocation of the idea of a “mother tongue” constructed in opposition to English.

3. Producing Linguistic and Cultural Facts at Nishi High School

While students at Higashi Tech are cautiously encountering English, students at Nishi are deploying words as ways of expressing cultural difference. Students are positioned as expert translators of Japanese identity into English. Teachers at Nishi are much more likely to alternate (Muysken, 2000) English and Japanese than to insert one within the other. English words in these lessons must be produced so that an international audience (and more specifically, a native English speaking audience) can understand them. They are never elements of a shared lexicon. Teachers at Nishi do not work to maintain an empathetic framework. If anything, they urge students to go quickly (*kyu ni nihongo ni shite mite*; “try to put this in Japanese quickly) or admonish them not to skip over the difficult English words when reading (*mm to nihongo no tokoro dake jya nakute*; “this isn’t just ‘mm’ and the Japanese only”).

In the following, the teacher Hata sensei guides students in performing English translations of Japanese phrases and unscrambling English phrases that are embedded within an exercise paragraph on a handout created by the faculty. The following is an excerpt from this exercise:

- (6) The written text of the worksheet used in “Advertisements in Japan and America,” Nishi 2001. Students are asked to unscramble the lists of words, as in (3) and (4), and to translate from the Japanese, as in (1), (2), and (5). (1) should be translated: “exotic images and heartwarming scenes,” (2) should be translated: “concrete facts and reasons,” and (5) should be translated: “so that people will want to buy them.”

Advertisements reflect a nation’s culture. The Japanese generally find (1) エキゾチックなイメージや心暖まるシーン more appealing than long explanations. As a result Japanese advertisements tend to have more imagery and emotions than (2) 具体的な事実や根拠. Americans, on the other hand, feel that they need information to (3) a a to buy help reach them product decision. In American advertisements, therefore, (4) as as is not logic feeling important. In Japan, you can see many kinds of TV commercials about beer and cigarettes. Actors on TV can drink or smoke. **They show how good these things taste** (5) 人々がそれらをかいたくなるように. However, in

the United States, they can't have commercials about cigarettes. They have commercials about beer, but the actors can't actually drink it. This is because Americans think that (6) to or not drink smoke encourage should they people.

In the following Hata sensei guides students through this written exercise, as shown above. In line 1 Miyazaki, a student, has just read the sentence “they show how good these things taste,” highlighted above. Hata sensei accepts this and then preps him for the translation, which is (5) above. She reads the Japanese that needs to be translated and then begins the first part of the English translation, in line 4. As the words of the correct answer are spoken by the student, Hata sensei conveys them to the blackboard.

(7) “Advertisements in Japan and America” Nishi 2001

1. **Miyazaki:** **they show how good these things taste,**
((reading from handout))

2. **Hata:** **a::nd (1.0) they sho::w, how good these things taste (1.0) kay, these**

3. **show how good these things taste** >hitobito wa sorera o kaitaku naru
show how good these things taste >so that people will want to buy

4. **yoo ni< so[:::**
them < so:::

5. **Miyazaki:** **[so tha[t**

6. **Hata:** **[tha::t**
((writing on blackboard))

7. **Miyazaki:** **peop[le=**

8. **Hata:** **[(t-) people[:::**

9. **Miyazaki:** **[=want to[:::**

10. **Hata:** **[ae[h.**

11. **Miyazaki:** **[aeh, uh uh uh, (why?)**
 (2.0)

12. **Hata:** **aeh (2.0) before want, you need something, so that people:: (1.0)**

13. **so people,**

14. **Miyazaki:** **people[:::**

15. **Hata:** **[not now but in the future?**

(2.0)

16. **Miyazaki:** **(w-)**

(2.0)

17. **Hata:** **(uh?) [uh, huhhuh**

[(writing on blackboard))

18. **Miyazaki:** (w- uh?)
(2.0)
19. **Hata:** (people) [will (3.0) want
]((writing on blackboard))
20. **Miyazaki:** to,
21. **Hata:** to,
22. **Miyazaki:** buy,
23. **Hata:** buy,
24. **Miyazaki:** it.
25. **Hata:** aeh? want to buy *notto itto batto* (1.0) more than one. uh?
huh? want to buy not it but (1.0) more than one. huh?
26. **Miyazaki:** (them)
27. **Hata:** hai.
yes.

Hata sensei intercedes in the answer at micro levels, scaffolding precision rather than allowing the student to finish with the wrong words. The student's utterances are consequently very short, often one or two lexical items. This is because there is an urgency in touching on all of the pieces of information and bringing them to students' attention, as they could show up on an entrance examination. There is very little time for mistakes. In line 25, when the student produces the wrong word—"it" in line 24 instead of "them"—Hata sensei code switches into an instruction that is produced in Japanese phonology (*notto itto batto*, "not it but") in order to prompt the correct answer. These kinds of adjustments and corrections, fine-tunings, are often slipped into another channel at Nishi so that they do not interfere with the production of the complete target phrase. Hata sensei's utterance is a simultaneity (Woolard, 1999), a phonetic interference, providing a partial perspective from a stance that is perhaps closer to the responding student's perceived stance. Thus here participants are apprenticing to the production of statements about cultural difference in English. English words only get moved into a Japanese phonology in order to target a problem.

3.1. *Socializing Objectivity: Language of the Activity, Institution, and Self at Nishi*

Grammar classes at Nishi consist primarily of translation activities. Students are positioned as objectively viewing both English and Japanese. Students are positioned almost as anthropologists, as cultural and linguistic experts, who can translate between cultures.

The "doing of English learning" at Nishi is directed toward a different vision of how students should be articulated with respect to the nation state. At one level precision is

demanded so that students can pass entrance exams. But precision in language production is also frequently made to index accurate representation of Japan on the international stage. Thus the content of the lesson in the second excerpt constructs a neat distinction, packaged for the expression of cultural difference, so that students will know *how* to say something definitive about “Japanese” culture. Along these same lines, the following is a joke a teacher at Nishi distributed one day during a Grammar class. It acts as a caution to students about the necessity of learning English precisely in order to represent Japan on an international level.

(8) Joke/Exercise in grammar class, Nishi High School, 2001

Just before leaving for the Okinawa Summit, Japanese Prime Minister Mori, who was the host of the convention, took a last-minute English lesson from his secretary.

Secretary: When you greet your guests, just say ‘How are you?’ and shake hands with them. Then they will ask you the same question, so just say, “Me, too.”

Mori: Easy, easy!

At the summit, the first guest to come was U.S. President Clinton. Just as he had been lectured, Mori approached the President, and greeted him. But instead of saying ‘How are you?’, he said, “Who are you?”

President Clinton got surprised a little, but with a smile he answered, “I’m Hillary’s husband.”

Confidently Mori replied, “-----”

The work students at Nishi do in English lessons is preparation for college entrance exams, but it is recontextualized frequently within a framework of effective communication with the American other, represented in the document above by President Clinton. Effective mastery of English in these lessons—the precise production of one-to-one translations between Japanese and English—thus stands as well for the clear articulation of Japanese interests and Japanese national “face” within international relationships.

4. Discussion: Complex Stances toward Knowing, Learning, and Using English

Susan Gal writes, “different ideologies construct alternate, even opposing realities; they create differing views arising from and often constituting different social positions and subjectivities within a single social formation” (1998, p. 320). I have shown how different English lessons across these two schools contribute to the construction of two different educational class trajectories. A student in an Oral Communication class at Higashi Tech is socialized to be part of a group that is jointly contending with and piecing together an English that is distantly sited. Participants in lessons at Nishi are learning to make objective equivalences between English and Japanese. It is possible to say that participants at these two high schools are learning to animate English at different distances (Goffman, 1974), and that this is accomplished through very different replaying practices, at Higashi Tech a tendency toward indirect quotation of English voices, and at Nishi a tendency toward direct quotation of English. During such practices students in these two schools are occupying different stances with respect to a Japanese cultural interior: one

that stands on the inside and “filters” English language, and one that is socialized to face out and to speak on Japan’s behalf to an international audience.

I have also argued that ideological multiplicity resides within a single lesson, where teachers maintain a distance between Japanese identity and the animation of English language, but where Japanese and English words often come together. Pragmatic instructional interaction creates brief moments of simultaneity in order to traverse the distances erected between participants and the target language (as at Higashi Tech), or to suppress oppositions that get in the way of understanding (as at Nishi). Bilingual elements of language in Japan are brought into focus and into service. Thus students are also being socialized into different stances toward and uses of languages in contact.

Transcription Conventions

| | |
|---------------------------------|--|
| ((reading from handout)) | non-verbal information |
| (why?) | conjectured utterances |
| (.5) | pauses measured in tenths of seconds |
| >korewa tottemo< | rapid speech |
| so::: | elongation of a vowel |
| = | turn-latching |
| muzukashii | Japanese words |
| maybe | English words |
| <u>charenji</u> | words produced as phonologically Japanese, “katakana words” |

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