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A Social Perspective On Literacy Illustrating How Young Japanese Language Students Appropriate English

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Problems in the Japanese EFL world today

With the accelerating force of globalization in recent years, the challenges facing educators of English have never been seen to be both so urgent and consequential as they are in the classrooms of today. Due to the pragmatic economical climate that now prevails worldwide, organizations and individuals investing their resources in language learning have a stronger than ever before desire to maximize their monetary returns. Even though we as educators may not necessarily agree that economic factors should mainly underpin language learning, nevertheless these agents demand from us the best learning experience they can have in order to equip them ultimately with the necessary competitive advantage over their rivals. Naturally it is our professional duty to serve those needs par excellence. As an English junior high school teacher and university lecturer in Japan, the question I am fundamentally asking is just how the teaching of English here should better assist the given economical goals, especially since EFL has been afforded a prominent position in the nation's ever-ongoing curriculum debate? In trying to answer this, it might be useful to start by examining the extent learning of English in Japan optimally effectuates what it was originally required to do so by those who duly invest in it.

In 2000, the Japanese EFL industry alone was estimated at $20billion (De Boer, 2001). Aside from public and private formalized education, the Yano Research Institute has calculated that spending in

Japan on the cost of books, CDs, dictionaries, e-learning programs, standardized English tests and conversational language lessons is worth some $8.7 billion per annum. Even with MEXT constantly active in pushing for better English learning methodologies to be employed rigorously throughout schools and further educational establishments, unfortunately it seems that this plethora of spending is still not being translated into hard numerical results (Yano Research, 2010 & MEXT, 2010). Aside from the inability of the majority of its citizens who are able to communicate effectively in English (24 years after the JET program was established to tackle this very problem) it has been well documented that Japanese TOEFL/TOIEC scores are still very low when compared with citizens of other countries relevant to national spending. Quite surprisingly, these poor results were especially worse on the literacy sections of the tests, this considering the sizable amount of time given over to 'perfecting' reading and writing in relation to developing oral communication skills in many of the Japanese EFL classrooms today (ETS, 2010).

The weakness in English literacy can further be illustrated when we look at global university rankings based partly on the output of published papers in the field of research, which basically for them to make a global impact, requires that they be written in English (so that they are read). Not one Japanese university featured in the worlds top 200 in the field of economic or business studies. And those Japanese universities that were ranked in the overall general classification top 100 (two in total) were so placed based mostly on their electronics research alone and had little to do with English literacy (see ARWL, 2010 and T.H.E. World University Rankings, 2010). Improving English literacy then, although not the absolute panacea for better university world ranking results, would however certainly offer them a much-needed boost aside from the real benefits to society as a whole. Finally, with regards to Japanese businesses seeking to work

in an international environment and directly contributing to the national GDP output, MEXT has recognized that university and schools are failing to provide industries with graduates having the sufficient English language skills necessary to successfully operate in a multitude of international working environments. In short, the failure of ESL learning in Japan has detrimentally contributed to Japan loosing its ability to compete with rival countries and will continue to do so if these problems are not seriously addressed. So why, we may ask, has this situation come about?

In scrutinizing how English is taught in Japan, as mentioned briefly above, the amount of classroom time spent on the teaching of traditional forms of literacy shows the considerable importance it has over speaking and listening study activities. When I worked as an assistant language teacher in several junior high schools in Tokyo a few years ago, I found that at best, out of the 5 English classes per week allocated to the teaching of English, only one of those was for oral communication (if even that as once a fortnight was indeed a more common practice). When we then figure in the actual total years spent on reading and writing, this amounts to a colossal amount of time. Even so, this paper is not here to argue for greater time to be devoted to conversational skill building (though that would certainly be a desirable outcome under the present failing teaching practices) but rather to put forward the case for a different approach to literacy-one that could transform the pedagogy of teaching and thus ultimately offer Japanese students a more effective learning experience in reading and writing relevant for the world that they live and work in today and the near future.

To try and label English teaching practices in Japan, especially in the public school sector, one could try and describe them as being a hybrid of grammar-translation methods coupled with audio-lingual methods within the context of strong teacher-centered based lessons (Knight, 2001, pp.148-152). The pedagogy used in the English

classroom often entails extensive rote learning sessions inserted with vocalized drills helping to serve an accomplished feeling of 'doing English' in the classroom (see Alexander cited in Lillis and McKinney, 2003, pp.39-49). One could succinctly sum up that English teaching in Japan is rather like how Latin is taught in the UK, whereby Japanese students are more often than not taught **about** English- rather than **in** English. Perhaps relevant here, Canagarajah interestingly demonstrated how a country actively encourages the application of particular teaching methodologies to reflect its own unique history and culture. Subsequently he argues that they will use them to help recreate the social relations and values of the society in order to preserve their integrity (Canagarajah, 2001, pp.223-4). Traditionally in Japan, the teacher or *sensei* is regarded as both omnipotent and omniscient in the classroom and therefore language learners are expected to act as passive players in the processes. But before we berate the poor English sensei too much, we must understand the constraints placed upon them in order to achieve the curriculum goals imposed on them from above.

So much is at stake for the ordinary high school student that for them studying English is mostly about being able to successfully pass their university entrance exams, of which the results will have extremely strong repercussions on their future lives with little room for social maneuverability thereafter. The English tests themselves usually entail reading and writing exercises centered around snippets of archaic, irrelevant and grammatically incorrect pieces of language, often taken out of their proper contexts with all the subtleties of nuance ignored, rendering them often quite meaningless. Certainly from my own observations, English learning in Japanese public schools commonly has little similarity as to how languages ought to be constructed and applied for them to be properly acquisitioned by students. In the business world and to a lesser (though still present) extent universities, the emphasis on language learning has shifted to

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'managing' TOIEC and TOEFL test results, which are themselves largely viewed as a definitive reflection of English aptitude. These are mainly multiple-choice tests but again sad-to-say, not a true reflection of the real world of English. Basically the former primarily focuses on business situations, but once more is heavily concentrated on assessing grammatical skills with little attention paid to obtaining real fluency in literacy. TOEFL too, from its academic perspective, has sizable traditional grammar chunks though admittedly does allow greater scope for schematically structured writing, but this is still kept to a minimum. And while both types of tests encourage the student to develop strategies for reading, we should be questioning to what extent do these offer the students genuine authentic practices that they might likely to personally encounter ahead in their real working lives?

The main problem in Japan is that the testing of English is largely skewered for cost-cutting reasons rather than trying to nurture the necessary language abilities of the student. Simply acquiring multiple-choice examination skills unfortunately cannot always be effectively utilized in today's very varied and complex globalized 'Englishes' language domain (see Gradol, 2001, for an interesting discussion on World Englishes). Furthermore, if students are not able to apply this knowledge outside the examination/classroom environment then it is not only a blatant detriment to their own SLA but in restating once more, goes against the very basis of how languages are created and employed by those who use them. Aside from examining the language acquisition process in greater detail later on, I will simply add here that the over-emphasis on language tests carried-out in Japan where there is only one correct answer, not only leaves no room for mistakes in any form but simply results in directing shame at those who do while subsequently discouraging any necessary risk-taking during the English lesson. Moreover, it also ignores how languages evolve for example where grammatical structures that were once incorrect (such as making "gift" and

"friend" into verbs) are now no longer considered as such by many native English users.

I do not wish to convey at all the idea that the learning of grammatical structures has no importance for students developing their literacy in another language and therefore should be made redundant. Rather, quite the opposite. It must always be guaranteed a significant role in the EFL curriculum, especially with regards to my very much-preferred areas of systemic functional grammar, and cannot ever be completely sidestepped in the classroom. The question of how best to teach it though, is certainly another matter worthy of investigation. Nevertheless, what this paper is mainly focused on is trying to state that part of the flaw in EFL teaching starts with how literacy is defined in the first place, which in due course affects pedagogy and shapes particular applied methodologies. To try and somewhat reiterate the EFL situation here in Japan once more, basically the learning environment is not as conducive to maximizing the full learning potential of English students as it could be. Rather, it is ambivalent to the real process of how language literacy is appropriated and consolidated. The case study I carried out below explores the very active role Japanese learners can and do take in forging their own English literacy, which might offer EFL educators a better understanding in facilitating and harnessing their own students' potential skills of acquiring, appropriating and consolidating English. But to begin with, how should we correctively perceive what literacy is?

'Literacies' reviewed-a social perspective

Defining what literacy is in recent years has increasingly proven to be not only a more complex matter but has also unleashed an academic debate, the outcome of which has perhaps serious implications for how literacy should be approached in education. There are several perspectives one can view literacy from, though this

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study attempts to look at the on-going range of arguments primarily within a social one. Here, even the singular term 'literacy' is challenged as one can find support for the plural expression 'literacies' (hence from now I will refer to the plural form when appropriate even though it does not currently exist in most dictionaries). Just how correct it is to adopt such wording over the non-plural form, I will without haste explain in full below. Certainly a greater understanding from this deliberation will serve our purpose of inquiring about possible new avenues for teaching and learning in the EFL context.

One can define literacy rather simplistically as the way people communicate with each other through reading and writing. Subsequent studies of which have been carried out in various academic fields ranging from education to applied linguistics each offering their own varying conceptions of what literacy is. Recently, the argument to define literacy has primarily revolved around a psychological approach in which it is regarded as a universal cognitive skill in contrast with a sociological/anthropological one whereby literacy is seen as a social practice activity. We could add that the former sees literacy as something in which individuals acquire through their own mental ability whereas the latter argues for the ever-changing nature of literacy practices based on meaning making in a social context that reflects relationships of power. Since the psychological perspective of literacy has historically and predominantly been applied in education, it is therefore perhaps appropriate to scrutinize it first in order for us to value its merits, before turning our attention to the more recently emerging social approach.

A cognitive approach to literacy examines how people use their perceptual skills to create strategies to de-code written texts in order to comprehend them. Linked to this idea is the argument that a person who in becoming literate will alter his/her way of thinking. Olson

stretches this idea by saying that in fact the role of writing actually also provides the user with scientific cognitive capabilities that are independent of what has been written. He comes to this conclusion by first attacking the idea that the purpose of writing is to simply transcribe speech. By asking pre-school children to spell certain words and from cross-cultural studies, he demonstrates that in reality a written script provides the user with a certain consciousness for thinking about the sound structure of speech (Olson, 2003, pp.70-3).

More specifically, Olson claims it is the awareness and conceptualization of language through writing, which really brings meaning into consciousness and that gives rise to explicit reasoning and reflection. Literate cultures, he explains, tend to have a stricter criterion of verbatim than non-literate cultures. He adds however that not all literacies have the equal ability to contribute to scientific reasoning. It is basically only literacies, namely those derived from western languages that have meaning tied to knowledge in the form of proof, which can offer this skill. What Olson sees as essential to the logic of proof is his emphasis on literal meaning- what Grice calls 'sentence meaning' as contrasted with 'utterer's meaning'. Note however that Olson does not lend his support to the psychological belief of the *universal* effect of literacy (since the individual has to personally internalize it) and he also accepts the blurring of the two distinct perceptual skills needed to create speech and writing, for example because of the development in electronic communication which has recently been changing the definition of literacy, he does however still believe that literacy is developed monologically (i.e. individually attained) as opposed to dialogically (constructed between people) (Olson, 2003, pp.67-70).

In sharp contrast to Olson's view that a particular way of reasoning is developed from the acquisition of literacy, is the theory mentioned briefly above that literacy should instead be regarded as a social practice and it is the way people use language in their lives, that

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involves particular ways of thinking. Researchers aligning themselves to this social perspective of literacy have consequently been dubbed as working within the 'New Literacy Studies' group. Brian Street, belonging to this group and adopting a Bakhtian dialogical approach to language, argues that since literacy is in actuality the contested control over meaning between powers relationships, that it should therefore be labelled 'ideological' (Street, 2003, pp.79-80). That does not mean to say he readily dismisses what he calls the 'autonomous' view of literacy being an obtainable skill. Rather, he believes that the autonomous model of literacy is essentially a disguised form of the ideological one, as both are really one of the same thing but that the autonomous title given only serves to disguise the power relations held (Street, 2003, pp.80-1).

Street sees the dangers of adopting the singular term 'literacy' as that immediately associates it with a specific uniform cultural entity, which may further facilitate the incorrect idea that it is a skill easily transplanted onto a new habitat where it will have a guaranteed of outcome. Literacies in fact vary from context to context. In addition and through his research into local Iranian communities and other cross-cultural studies (see Heath cited in Street, 2003, p.80) we can also see that cultures themselves often offer hybrid and fragmented contexts where literacies are embedded in. Various multiple and complex literacies do indeed operate within single contexts such as a computer-based environment. Even though Kress, another NLS researcher, sees the irrelevance of adopting the plural form since in his opinion literacies are forever in a flux and continually recreating themselves as the contextual situation changes moment by moment, Street however counter-argues this by saying that in being restrictive in our term we may only serve to inadvertently marginalize or undervalue the full richness of all literacies (Street, 2003, p.81).

Coming from an EFL context and offering reflections that are certainly appropriate to my own immediate working environment,

Catherine Wallace contributes to the debate of how we should perceive literacies and which of them should be given pedagogical credence. Although largely acknowledging the important work carried out by Street and other NLS researchers, she does have some reservations about their claims. Wallace is first concerned about viewing literacy as a multi-pluralistic all-equal item. She makes the point that it may only unwittingly serve to mask very real power relations linked to specific literacies (Wallace, 2003, pp.89-90). More crucially, she fears that the "over-polarization" of the autonomous/ideological dichotomy will equate school literacy with the former definition and so thus wrongly accuse it of being mechanistic subsequently weakening it to the detrimental benefit of over-glorified out-of-school literacies (Wallace, 2003, pp.90-1).

Taking an alternative approach, Wallace sides with the Hallidayian systemic functional linguistic (SFL) approach to literacy partly referred to before as my favoured particular type of grammar to be taught in the classroom. It contends that literacy is the mastery or control of a secondary knowledge originally shifted from a primary one. With that declaration in mind, she promptly makes the distinction between horizontal literacies and vertical literacies. Horizontal or primary literacies are, as mentioned above, embedded in local contexts and are picked up 'on the job'. Wallace though, does not ask that these primary literacies should be discarded. However she does make the case for vertical or secondary literacies, which do need to be taught in formal education. In the world of EFL, the focus should be on teaching critical Literate English rather than Standard English. This is because Wallace considers vertical literacies to have an entirely different purpose and universal quality (that includes proponents such as explicit reasoning), which distinguishes them from horizontal literacies (Wallace, 2003, pp.92-5).

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Just how valid are the arguments about literacy mentioned above in various contexts? Certainly, there is ample evidence to show that literacy is a social phenomenon reflecting relationships of power rather than derived from a psychological model. When Hall tries to comprehend young learners mistakes using punctuation, he finds that they are caused by teachers' over-emphasis on the graphic aspect of punctuation in class, which their learners try to incorrectly adjust for in their own still not fully developed world of literacy. While this maybe a demonstration of learning taking place within a specific and influential context, it also reflects the Bakhtian idea that all language including literacy is a dialogical creation as we shall see later on (Hall cited in Lillis and McKinney, 2003, pp.73-7). Dyson too, manages to show how language is embedded in a chain of communication. In her ethnographic study of a group of children re-writing a text, we see that all communication carried out (including written texts) was a simple re-voicing rather than a pure original production (Dyson cited in Lillis and McKinney, 2003, pp.159-165).

The embedded ideological nature of literacy can also be clearly shown as well. Stubbs, through the use of corpus studies, illustrates the way word meanings can change and become ideologically loaded depending on different texts and social contexts (Stubbs cited in Lillis and McKinney, 2003, pp.53-8). Equally, Purser, using a SFL template to analyze literacy, is able to make the conclusion that no matter how neutral a text aims to be in trying to describe another culture it can never achieve this (Purser cited in Lillis and McKinney, 2003, pp.61-5). The linkage of ideology and literacies can have a powerful effect of restricting specific groups access to them for example on the basis of gender (see Zubair cited in Lillis and McKinney, 2003, pp.141-5). While Omoniyi shows a mixed combination of economic, political, ethnic and religious considerations for why some particular literacies are adopted in his native Nigeria (Open University Interview with

Tope Omoniyi, 2004).

Implications

Literacy is currently a very charged topic of discussion ranging from a national level (fears about falling standards of literacy in the UK) to a worldwide level (UNESCO's desire to alleviate world poverty through the implementation of literacy campaign drives in third world countries) (Street, 2003, pp.85-6). If we are to adopt a social perspective on literacies, what are the implications of this especially in a formal teaching context? As already stated above, the social approach to literacy does not regard it as a uniform entity to be acquired through transferable de-coding perceptual skills (ignoring just now the vertical/horizontal dimension brought up by Wallace) but instead as developed through social practice. But how do we facilitate that? To answer that, we should maybe first look at the limitations of literacy on product outcome.

In Nigeria, Omoniyi managed to link literacy with economics by stating people there, hold the opinion that learning to read and write in English, will result in some sort of automatic financial gain for them (Open University Interview with Tope Omoniyi, 2004). Carrington and Luke elaborate further that this perception is representative of a global but misconceived fear that any decline in literacy standards suffered by a society/ or individual consequently leads to economic decline (Carrington and Luke, 1997, 96-113). They name this incorrect linear cause and effect as 'Folk Theories of Literacy' based on the work by John Ogbu. This 'myth' naturally stems from the adoption of a psychological Piagetian model of literacy, valuing literacy as homogeneous and universal but also perhaps really couched in neo-liberal ideology. The problem Carrington and Luke identify is how to predict an outcome based on the creation of a *unified* social approach to literacy, something they acknowledge is difficult to accomplish.

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Carrington and Luke therefore turn to the sociological framework of Pierre Bourdieu for help. In association with literacy they use his terminology of field (where we may acquire it), habitus (how we may articulate it) and cultural capital (the value we may derived from it). They discover there is no product guarantee and quote Bourdieu and Passeron's statement that, "the acquisition of cultural capital in the schools of dominant cultures depends upon the prior acquisition of particular forms of the habitus. These further consequences are dependent upon the individual's other accumulations of capital and their value in relation to each field across which his or her trajectory leads" (Carrington and Luke, 1997, 100-113). Carrington and Luke conclude that we should therefore be immediately more understanding of the limits of literacy to protect the educators and since individuals actually move through many fields in their own lifetimes. We therefore need to create a new habitus of multiple literacy practices that is valued outside traditional schools, which hopefully will lead to a shift in the distribution of power to other fields.

Both Schleppegrell and Street identify significant and common flaws in how literacy is dealt with by educators in the fields of education and specifically university, respectively. Schleppegrell drawing from the value placed on registers by SFL theorists, explains that educators at all levels expect their students to present information in an authoritative way applying appropriate lexico-grammar (such as using nominalization to make text lexically more dense) even though this is seldom made explicit. Not only are there differences between school based and general spoken forms of lexico-grammar usage but also children may lack the ability to appropriate their language or de-contextualize it for a given situation, especially if they are non-natives (Scheppegrell, 2001, pp.431-59). Likewise at the university level, Street documents the problem students have about adapting previously obtained literacy knowledge to a tertiary educational

setting. The problem stems from these academic institutions viewing themselves as homogeneous cultures and so focusing their attentions onto supposedly 'transferable' study skills, when they should instead be attaching importance to various academic literacies linked to social context, as a remedy (Street, 1998, pp.157-72).

But how should we approach teaching literacies in a formal educational environment and what are the potential stumbling blocks to this? Street argues that we need to have a pedagogy that reflects actual real and complex literacy practices, which include taking into account those belonging to students. Schooled literacies become just one among many others that students should encounter. He cites a successful example of this in the USA where dropout kids are made to coach younger kids. The challenge now as Street sees it, is for the development of collaborative research programs that investigate further literacy practices in various contexts while educators and policy-makers need to be made aware of the concept of social literacies so as to influence education and policy (Street, 2003, pp.85-7).

Street's arguments are very convincing. However I feel that we as educators teaching in an international context may be forced to apply a caveat. Certainly the practices and intentions of UNESCO are justifiably defendable. The urgent necessity in third world countries to adopt any basic literacy program that may actually save lives, whereas the debate of ideology versus autonomous seem a luxury very far removed from reality. Of course the argument will always once more rest on how we actually define literacies be they transferable or social practices. As an English teacher in Japanese junior high schools, while I acknowledge the multitude of literacies, what is relevant in my teaching context and what Wallace declares the role of educators should be, is to, "build bridges between the domains of school and everyday life, but not necessarily by privileging the primary literacies of learners, nor by taking a narrow view of school

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Having said that, it is impossible to ignore the philosophical implications of social literacies in my own working circumstances. A couple of years ago, I taught a basic but compulsory English writing course at an agricultural university where the students had very little desire to learn English nor would most of them have much opportunity to use it in their future working lives. In terms of the cultural capital gained by them from attending the course, Carrington and Luke are perfectly correct in their assertion that economic product outcome is certainly dependent on other inheritable capital than just learning English. Incidentally, the private university tried to use this course as a selling point to recruit new students with the promises of financial rewards from learning English. In sum and briefly stated, the pedagogy we adopt in our classrooms must take into account all of these above considerations.

Exploring the role Japanese learners take in appropriating literacy in a second

Although I am naturally interested in various English language practices the learner might encounter and participate in, however in sticking with the theme of carrying out this investigation, I therefore primarily want to scrutinize the written work produced by the junior high students I teach in order to provide me with my main source of evidence of the role young Japanese learners might take in appropriating literacies in a second language. From this, I want to investigate how the writers established authorship over their own work. Can we identify any features they specifically choose to utilize in their texts that helped them do this? For example, what is the nature of the 'voice' they used to write? Can we locate the origins of the voice and identify the extent it was transformed and the possible reasons for this? Is there actually more than one voice present in their texts resulting in polyvocality? Do the student writings contain

elements of dialogism? And just how extensive is intertextuality and what are the ways is it manifested? Derived from these findings, in what way can they contribute to the on-going debate about improving English teaching methodologies in Japan in the field of literacy? I.e. how should we as English teachers best help to develop and harness our students' skills of acquiring, appropriating and consolidating their English literacies?

To answer this question we should perhaps begin by looking at the overall function of language. Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky originally defined it as having two integrated functions. The first is the use of language as a psychological tool, whereby people utilize it to organize their own individual thoughts so they can carry out basic human activities such as the planning of actions. The second is that language is a cultural tool with which we use to perpetually share and collectively construct the cultural practices of a society (Mercer, 2004, p.10). The purpose of language use therefore, is to essentially create knowledge through the discursive interaction of the participants. Meaning is brought about through its negotiation and construction in an on-going continual process (Mercer, 2004, pp.20-7).

We may observe this intricately when language is broken down to its smallest unit, the ubiquitous utterance. It was Bakhtin, who argued that all utterances belong to someone else as they always originate from other texts sources. In addition, because utterances are to an extent always reciprocal with other previously produced ones (though not necessarily in agreement with them or bound by any space and time); Bakhtin therefore (as I already mentioned before) regarded them as dialogically constructed.

Furthermore, they are also shaped in the future anticipation of their own 'addressivity' (Haworth, 1999, pp.99-100). The meaning of an utterance is not automatic but dependant on how it is socially interpreted and merely emerges through the dialogic chain (Hicks,

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2003, p.3). The so called 'electric spark' creating that meaning will only occur if the recipient is able to respond by orienting his own consciousness to internalize into thought the producers utterance. Volosinov makes the further point that meaning is finally established when that thought is used to address another thought.

One could argue from a Hallidaynian SFL approach, that utterances linked to each other in both spoken or written form become part of texts, of which themselves are discourses when embedded in context of situations. But what can be said about the nature of the voice present in the discourse that the author employs? The words people choose to use are always ideologically loaded and are never neutral irrespective of how they are used (Street, 2003, pp.79-80). They are strongly tied to particular genres and discourses (Haworth, 1999, p.100). They also contain specific beliefs and values, to such an extent that by employing them in our everyday language, we are in effect constructing our own identity- who we think we are and what we want to be (Lillis and McKinney, 2003, pp.167-8). Their dialogic nature reflects the relationships of power negotiated with other people, further shaping our identities once more.

The lexical choices made by the individual, derives from the conflicting influences of centripetal and centrifugal forces. The former could be regarded as representing authoritative discourses, which harbor little room for modification or transformation. The other force meanwhile is flexible, forever evolving and what Bakhtin described as an "inwardly persuasive discourse". The voice of the individual will depend on where it is ideologically positioned between the two. Once positioned, according to the Bakhtinian concept of heteroglossia, the moment of appropriation happens as people struggle internally to take possession of the words of others. They do so by placing those words into their own context of situation, so that those words will now be used to serve them.

But for us to properly comprehend how language is appropriated we need to examine in more detail the choice of words people make and how they internalize them. The ideological positioning mentioned above allows for various options open to the language user he/she can make. The person may decide to completely submit to the centripetal authority voice with its given power welded on to it. Or, he/she may choose to, "resist, reshape and reaccent ...so that it becomes 'half-ours and half-someone-else's' "(Bakhtian cited in Haworth, 1999, p.101). Janet Maybin in her study of reported speech was able to show the way children appropriated the authoritative voice of the teacher to achieve their own personal goals. Alternatively, sometimes the students would parody the teacher's voice (doubled-voiced utterance) to express their boredom or frustration with an activity they were supposed to do (Maybin, 2003, pp.160-4).

Research carried out by Scollon et al on student writing, and in which this case study draws its inspiration from, argued that all appropriation actually involves to an extent some form of *adaptation* rather than pure adoption. They demonstrated how a person might indeed adapt several voices (polyvocality) and various genres together, joining them all into one new discourse (Scollon cited in Lillis and McKinney, 2003, p.68-71). But even voices that are in apparent conflict with each other might be used to create a rather disjointed discourse. Kamberelis and Scott argued that this might occur if writer has not been able to construct a proper identity within the context of opposing influences. The mixing of styles and voices though usually provides the discourse with a rich intertextuality that can lead to further analysis.

Drawing from Fairclough's work on discourses of representation, Scollon *et al* were able to distinguish between manifest intertextuality -involving the direct usage of words quoted and interdiscursitivity - the adoption of a genre, style or ideology (Scollon cited in Lillis and

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McKinney, 2003, pp.68-71). With manifest intertextuality, they were able to give sufficient reasons for the appropriation of scare quotes and the passive voice by the students. Scollon *et al* suggests that these devises were injected to allow the authors to distance themselves from the original voice or to emphasize the authoritative nature of the original voice, respectively. And although interdiscursitivity was more difficult to pinpoint and trace than manifest intertextuality, they were still able to detect it in various forms.

Scollon *et al* summarized that because the learners possessed a strong awareness of various different voices, and so used them deliberately to make their own writing discourses very intertextual (Scollon cited in Lillis and McKinney, 2003, p.71). Maybin too believes that since her study demonstrated the seemingly unconscious ease and widespread use of intertextual references, that this provides strong evidence to show just how closely it is a part of children's thought and language (Maybin, 2003, p.166). Not only that, but she regards intertextuality as important for meaning-making in education. Intertextuality then, can be seen as the internalization of discourses which itself is the internalization of culture and social practice (Maybin, 2003, p.163). Any act of appropriation by us will therefore inevitably serve to consolidate our own identities.

The circumstances in which this case study was undertaken

The research where I undertook this investigation is at a private Japanese junior high school for boys where I teach 3 grades once a week English communication in English. Students there also receive a minimum 5 English lessons a week by a Japanese teacher offering them relevant tuition needed to pass their future university exams. It is a high-ranking school comparatively speaking in terms of the number of students successfully getting admissions into the top-tiered universities of Japan. All the students in the study are currently in the

3ʳᵈ grade (14 to 15 year olds) and have already studied English formally for two years, though in reality the majority of them have also experienced some form of English learning prior to that at elementary school.

I originally decided to set aside at least two lessons per class to gather the required sufficient data from my students. Unfortunately for me this had to be done in June but it was also one of the busiest times in the school calendar year. Not only are there two sets of exams but also frequent and unexpected disruptions to the lesson schedule, such as preparing for the school cultural festival. I was therefore fully aware that I needed to gather my data as quickly as possible. Acting on this knowledge and in advance, I gave all my students the opportunity to choose an English book with the instructions that they were to read it within a fortnight, as they would be expected to write a review about it in a later class. At the beginning of the next lesson, we collectively did the questionnaires (see appendix 1) first and then started man-to-man taped interviews. Each student was to have a 3/5-minute interview with me in an adjacent room, while during that same time the rest of the class were supposed to write an essay titled 'Who Am I?' Disaster struck the following week without warning as more than half of the remaining classes were cancelled at the last minute. Consequently, I was only able to do and receive half of my students' book reviews but at least it was something.

Because the subjects of this investigation are minors, for ethical reasons I naturally believe that it is of fundamental importance to maintain their full confidentiality and therefore used my utmost discretion while undertaking this project. I also made sure that all the responses to the interview/questionnaire and the written essays should not be disseminated both inside and outside the school. Furthermore, I also felt that I owed a certain professional duty to my school and duly sought the permission from my school by informing

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before starting it.

As the school has high standards to maintain and a strong
emphasis on exam results, I accordingly tried to combine my research
tasks by making them relevant with what the students either had
already studied that term, or as part of an English project they would
latter carry out. Consequently, I purposefully constructed my
questionnaire to contain the grammar patterns my students had
recently specifically studied e.g. adverbs of frequencies and the
present perfect tense. The interviews themselves have become part of
an ongoing project where the students are learning to create their own
interviews with foreigners living in Tokyo. The 'Who Am I?' essay
will be used this term when the students get a chance to introduce
themselves to foreign pen pals online. And finally, the book review
essays will become part of a book presentation exercise next term as a
section of their end-of-term exam.

The methods used for data collection and analysis

During the questionnaires, I made sure I was always present when
the students were doing them. Most of the questions were deliberately
closed to provide me with some quantitative data. I checked the
student's comprehension by getting them to orally explain the
questions in Japanese, of which I have a rudimentary knowledge in.
The reason for administering the questionnaire was to find out the
students' opinions of English and to what extent were they in contact
with English literacies outside the classroom. The recorded man-to-
man interviews were to give me the opportunity of getting additional
qualitative information that might be important. I selected the essay
title 'Who Am I?' that the students were to write, mainly giving the
students a lot of flexibility in how they decided to answer it. With the
relaxed conditions set for writing it (I was next door!), I hoped such
freedoms would maximize their own creativity and encourage

intertextuality and polyvocality.

Readings by both Scollon and Maybin in relation to reported speech worried me a little bit. Junior high students in Japan have usually only received very little formal practice in using reported speech. I was not sure how they would use this grammatical device if indeed at all. I thought the best way to encourage them to apply it in writing was if they did a book review. At my school, we are very lucky to have a well-stocked library with simplified contemporary books and comics in English. Since we are supposed to encourage them to start reading these English books in their 3rd year, I therefore thought my task would at least serve a double purpose.

Since this study is primarily focused on literacies, evidently the questionnaires and rerecorded interviews were to take a back seat from the student essays in terms of any value extracted from them and thankfully therefore did not involve too much of my time on data collection and analysis (e.g. the irrelevant need to transcribe all the interviews). Nevertheless, in order to bring some meaning to the students' essays, they therefore would have to be categorized in some systematic way. As a result, I first tried to identify any common but distinct patterns (incidents) that were present in my students' writings. From all of this I was able to categorize them into four groups ready for examination. These namely were; type-1 essays that exhibited mostly authoritarian texts, type-2 essays that were intertextual in structure and type-3 essays that were subversive in style but still contained intertextuality even if this was largely done in a sexual or masochistic way. Lastly, the type-4 essays displayed open resistance to English by the students who more often than not, did not even attempt to do the tasks. As for my questionnaire, it was constructed to contain discrete qualitative categories to help produce discrete data. To quantify this data, I first collected the raw data and assigned the various incidents into categories ready for analysis. I simply needed to total their preferences and transform the results into

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Unlike Scollon's subjects who were Hong Kong university students and most probably had greater access to English in their every day-to-day living environment, the subjects of this project growing up in Tokyo are much younger and consequently have not been exposed to English so much. Looking at the questionnaire results, Figures 1 to 3 illustrates to some extent how students are in contact with external English literacies that do not belong to part of the school's domain. At first glance, the results may appear quite promising. However, if one believes the rewards harnessed from reading, writing and speaking opportunities are equally essential for L2 learners too, then these outside influences are really only of some limited value for the students. Note especially the slightly negative data for English computer literacies in figure 3 compared with figures 1 and 2.

Figure 1 How Often Do Students Watch Movies In English?

sometimes =
88 students
68%

always = 19
students
14%

never = 23
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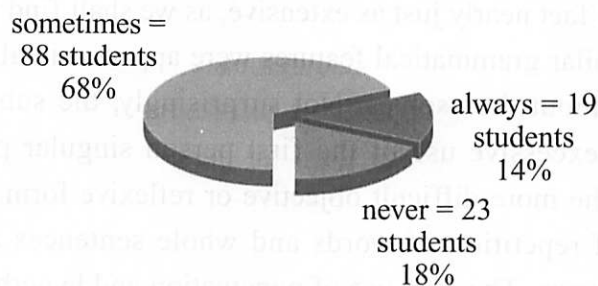
Figure 2 How Often Do Students Listen To Music In English?

sometimes =
81 students
62%

always = 26
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never = 23
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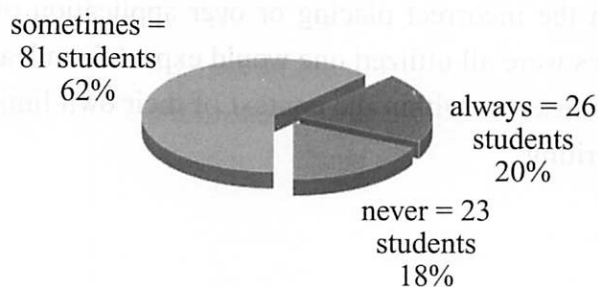
Figure 3 How Often Do Students Use The Internet In English?

always = 5
students 4%

sometimes =
46 students
36%

never = 79
students
60%
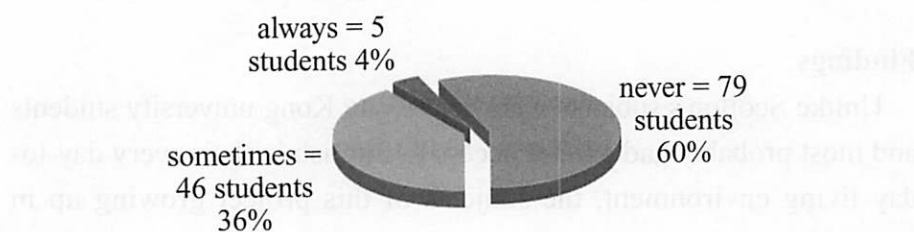
All of this may partly explain why I found the range and diversity of the voice(s) used per individual essay more restrictively applied compared with Scollon's example. We should though, also consider the differences between both sets of tasks and their possible outcomes. Scollon made his learners write a dialogic letter to 'a friend'. My essays however did not require the students to address anybody specifically, if they did not want to. Nevertheless, in terms of the ratio of students using intertextual devices, this was still found to be surprisingly quite high (see figure 4). Moreover, concerning the students' writing *collectively* as a whole, range and diversity of voice was in actual fact nearly just as extensive, as we shall find out.

A few similar grammatical features were apparent in all the essays they wrote about themselves. Not surprisingly, the subject matter encouraged excessive use of the first person singular pronoun, as opposed to the more difficult objective or reflexive form. There was also a lot of repetition of words and whole sentences applied for emphatic reasons. The over use of punctuation and hyperbole was for stress purposes too. Extended and exaggerated long lists were often inserted with the incorrect placing or over application of re-joiners. These features were all utilized one would expect from learners trying to express themselves within the context of their own limited abilities of English writing.

Figure 4 Essay Types

- Type 1 Authoritative Voiced Essays = 64 students
- Type 2 Intertextual Essays = 84 students
- Type 3 Subversive Intertextual Essays = 13 students
- Type 4 Resistant Essays = 18 students
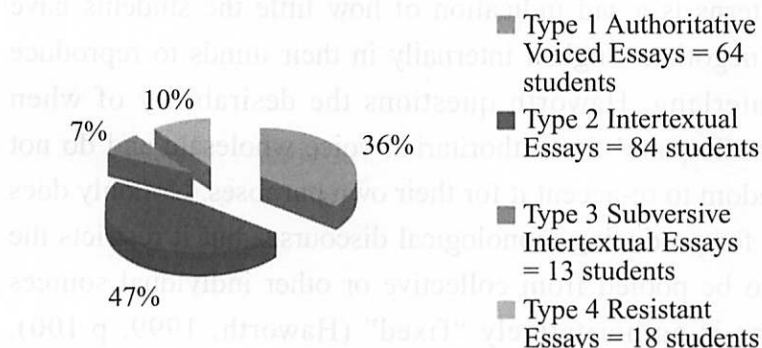
It was interesting to notice that the voice used in the type-1 authoritative essays almost parrots the school discourses found in their textbook (see appendix 2). There exists no other genre style except an introductive one and intertextuality is minimalist to say the least. Polyvocality is nearly absent. But in terms of accuracy, most of these essays had perfect or near-perfectly formed grammatical sentence structures. This unfortunately, I believe was perhaps the only real goal of the students.

My main contention of the type-1 discourses however is not because they are perfectly written sentences but to do with the way they ended up being very basic and that their overall contents were mediocre and sparse. In our example illustrating this category, the student's lexical choice of verbs such as "like", "play", "can" and "have" are very simple verbs, ones that Japanese students usually learn in the first grade. Seen in this light, these sentences demonstrate little risk-taking and almost appear to have been reproduced based on memories from a previous task. The essay is also not very dialogic in nature except for the last line where the writer thanks the reader for supposedly having read the essay. It resembles more of a monologue and fails to address the reader. Perhaps a better schematic structuring around a more defined introductive genre by the student would have been more effective in drawing in the reader.

The near copying of the school discourses in terms of grammatical sentence patterns is a sad indication of how little the students have managed to negotiate English internally in their minds to reproduce their own interlang. Haworth questions the desirability of when learners 'ventriloquate' the authoritarian voice wholesale and do not have the freedom to re-accent it for their own purposes. Not only does she blame it for producing monological discourses but it restricts the knowledge to be pooled from collective or other individual sources and therefore is authoritatively "fixed" (Haworth, 1999, p.100). Kamberelis and Scott are more generous about the potential benefits authoritative voices may offer. They see it as desirable for students to be able to bridge the school discourse with their own personal ones, drawing from all sources to create their own negotiated and internalized discourse. The students that wrote the type-2 essays however were able to avidly demonstrate this.

While the type-1 essays, all shared the traits of a similar genre; by contrast, the type-2 essays were extremely diverse and provided me with real proof of how learners (at least some of them) instinctively adapt English internally. On a macro level, these essays exhibited a multitude of different styles of genre. Even though they were not perfect and contained many incorrect usages or grammatical mistakes, I was still though able to identify a multitude of diverse discourses. These resembled poems, jokes, fantasy and love stories, scientific explanations and even the odd philosophical argument. In answering the essay's title question, each of these students tended to select one personal distinct subject matter or theme that was close to his interests and adapt it to what they thought the task had required them to do. Unlike the type-1 essays, theirs were a genuine attempt to explain to the reader, who they were in relation to both their inner and outside worlds.

Individual adaptation of English on a micro level was also widespread. One student changed Dumas' famous slogan into,

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"Money is all. All is money". Another employed American slang such as "I wanna..." freely throughout his text. The use of Japanese English and acronyms was also common. Although decried by many, in our case the Japanese English that was used could be seen as reflecting how the learners (as part of a wider Japanese society) construct their knowledge and in fact re-create their *own* culture. One student wrote, "Now, I am "Neet" ". He clearly meant, "Not In Education Employment Or Training" because of its current popular usage in the Japanese media. Some of the essays also had multimodal decorations attached to the texts often with very elaborate designs such as a Beethoven musical score, a map of the solar system or an electrical circuit. This is another example of the way the learners tried to gain control over the authorship of their essays.

Finally, the essays were often polyvocal containing more than one voice and were dialogic too. Jokes were sometimes explained with a small header attached stating, "This is a joke". Flattering praise of me was also done in the certainty that I would read this. Statements such as, "I like English" could be construed in the same way depending on the context. Similarly, one type-3 subversive essay was dialogic by stating how much he disliked English.

There is little comment to be made about the type 3 and 4 essays that I have not already mentioned above. The type-3 essays were just as intertextual as the type-2 essays except for a particular theme the students always employed, reflecting common held thoughts among young male adolescents. One could view the resistance to English displayed in the type-4 essays as being linked to what Rassool describes as a contestation of national identities through globalization (see Rassool, 2000 pp.386-398). In our case, the compulsory study of English at the school. However, through my questionnaire and interviews with my students, I sensed that they regarded English more as a desired tool to obtain rather than as a threat on their national identities. English is perhaps seen as the language of globalization

...so seen as a key central player in that process and so ...benefits from it. Expecting to be part of this process ...ason, the majority of students think that English will ...come important in their own future lives (see figure ... resistance to English is then perhaps explained ...learners have simply not yet managed to negotiate, ...consolidate their own voice in English.

...ure 5   How Important Is English For You?
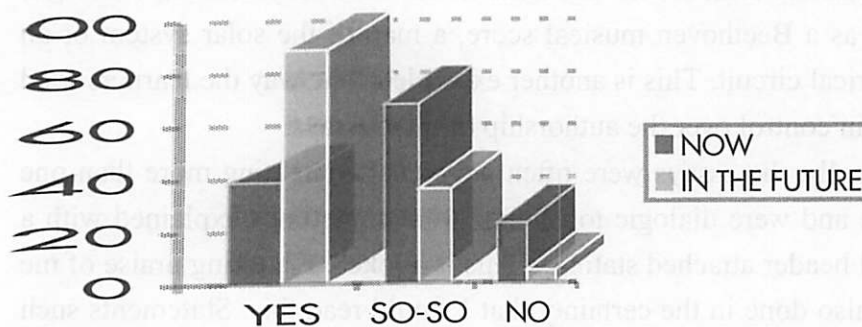
...students per book review type categories roughly ...ginal essay type categories and for that reason I did ...to create new ones. Many of the book reviews were ...xpressed their opinions and recommendations of the ...hers even expressed their opinions of the task, ...difficult. I also managed to find a distinct dividing ...reviews that contained manifest intertextuality and ...exhibited interdiscursivity. The students that used ...ique copied the words and phrases directly from the ...pt to try to explain what the book was about. Some ...ther too far by quoting large chunks of sentences ...over inter-dispersed with their own words. But the ...students were actually able to manipulate the books' ...ations and use them as a template for their own

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reviews. Comprehending this deeper, Maybin argues that all reported speech in reality represents a 'stage' between the original exchange and internalization (Maybin, 2003, p.163). Maybe the difference between manifest intertextuality and interdiscursivity therefore in this part of the study shows how much the English extracted from those books was able to be internalized by the students. But whether it was necessary to internalize a book's genre in order to give an adequate review is certainly questionable. However, it is yet another demonstration of the learners' innate abilities to appropriate English into their own way.

Evaluation

In evaluating this case study, we have seen ample evidence of the inbuilt automatic mechanisms people have for appropriating a language by adapting it. Kress claims that we do not act as passive agents in the process. The reconstruction of language by users, he believes, is because of the demands of the social environment (Kress cited in Street, 2003, p.82). In our case, the social environment is a Japanese context existing within a greater context of globalization. However, I regard the teaching of English in Japanese schools as largely being an unchallenged authoritative discourse artificially imposed onto the unwitting learner. Large numbers of students per class, the pressures of entrance exams, teacher-centered classes and grammar-translation/audio-lingual methods of teaching English are some of the reasons which only serve to help bolster this state of affairs. Contestation and negotiation is not nurtured in any form and individual adaptation is subsequently either blocked or discouraged in Japanese schools.

Thankfully, due to intense international competitive pressures, the Japanese Government has finally woken up to the problems in their EFL classrooms. MEXT already outlined its commitment to improve the standards of English in Japan. Although some aspects of the

MEXT proposals are certainly welcomed (e.g. smaller class sizes), unfortunately the wholesale shift towards a Communicative Language Teaching/Task Based Learning curriculum might not prove to be the panacea the Japanese government has currently pinned its hopes on. For example, the CLT/TBL information gap activities that are currently used in Japanese public schools seem at times little more than fat-burning exercises, as students rush around the classroom exchanging pieces of knowledge rather than offering them any real opportunities of adopting the essential learning strategies to negotiate in English. And the bartering of information usually centers on what Wallace cynically describes as the 3Ds -dinner parties, dieting and dating (Wallace, 2003, p.96). I have seen university students carrying out shopping exercises in perfect English but unable to offer a clear opinion about a subject outside the context of the classroom. Not surprising when you consider that one of the CLT/TBL activities students always seem to do in Japan from kindergarten to university is shopping. That is simply far too many years for any student to practice shopping!

It is certainly not the fault of the learner though; the fault lies with us- the educators, the curriculum designers and the learning institutions too. In any case and as Mercer argues, the role of educational establishments (including us teachers) should be to provide our students with access to the wider discourses of society, and not just those of the school (Mercer, 2004, pp.148-9). Of course, we must be careful not to over-privilege the literacies of the learner (Wallace, 2003, p.91). The type-2 essays as we can plainly see have their faults too. But surely we cannot expect our learners to gain access to new discourses through osmosis. Better first to develop our students own individual reasoning capabilities. Teach them the learning strategies essential for critical thinking. Then we can introduce the learner to as varied but significant range of discourses as is possible. With our assistance, we can give our students the

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opportunity to deconstruct, criticize, debate, negotiate, and dialogically recreate these discourses to allow them for once to have a chance of real ownership over their own English in Japan. After all, it is part of our nature as human beings to do all these things when we internalize any knowledge.

Of course this case study is only scratching the surface. There still exists further research studies that could be carried out. The subjects of this school are indeed very intelligent and special young boys. The school is well known for its independence and freethinking-learning environment too. Sadly the same cannot be said for the public-run schools where what is taught/learnt is much more bureaucratically controlled from the centralized government. It would be therefore interesting to do a similar project on the writings of public junior high school children. But perhaps due to my pessimism of Japanese state education in relation to English teaching, I suspect that one would find a greater ratio of type-1 authoritative essays & type-4 resistant essays than those identified in this project.

Concluding words on literacies

Essentially, it is how we choose to define literacy that will determine the learning experience of our students through the methodologies, which we as teachers must select and the pedagogies employed in our classrooms. In my situation, perhaps a hybrid approach to literacy is the most pragmatic and practical way for teaching English in Japan. Wallace's support for students practicing critical discourse analysis is very persuasive here. Critical discourse analysis in English should not only be taught to Japanese university English language students but offered even at the junior high school levels as well. Admittedly though, this type of learning is impractical for the youngest of L2 learners as they are at that stage being exposed to not only a new language but are also dealing with a new writing

system too. And though Wallace is dismissive of communicative language learning and task base learning, even so these at least could be assured of a supplementary role too, if and when they were required. I for one though, am not fully convinced by her rationale and certainly do not regard these methodologies as futile activities for all. Therefore, maybe I find myself agreeing more with Olson's argument that essentially requires students to first develop their own individual reasoning capabilities in relation to English. Only afterwards then, can they embark on being made aware of and having access to the multitude of alternative or newer emerging literacies.

The world of the Internet today of course is easily identifiably as the main gateway provider of literacies in English, though it is not the only one and we as educators must beware not to overindulge in it to the exclusion of others. Still, whatever discourses are chosen, we should offer our students the assistance to 'criticize and recreate' their own type of English literacies which would enable them to ultimately counter-challenge the present dominant control of Standard English in the world of EFL. This, I believe, may in turn lead to the more desirable situation of facilitating genuine student ownership of English, as opposed to rendering EFL learners permanent outsiders of some exclusive club. We should note, finally, as a result of this, that since identities are inextricably linked to languages due to the power relations and values embedded in them, so any successful appropriation of language will inevitably lead to a transformation in our students' identities too (see Rampton cited in Lillis and McKinney, 2003, pp.175-184). By allowing them the chance to construct their second language through the negotiation of meaning, must surely be seen as a welcomed opportunity in creating a better multicultural global village of tomorrow rather than allowing for the reinforcement of dogmatic identities on deprived learners.

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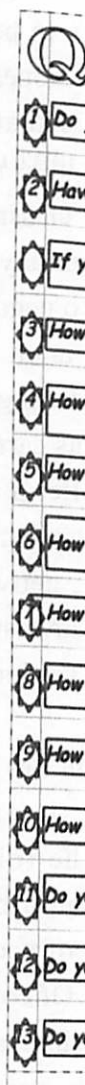
Appendix 1

QUESTIONS ???

1. Do you like English? — yes | so-so | no
2. Have you ever been to any other countries? — yes | no
   If yes please write which ones.
3. How many hours do you study English in a week (about)?
4. How many years have you studied English?
5. How often do you watch movies in English? — always | sometimes | never
6. How often do you read books in English? — always | sometimes | never
7. How often do you listen to music in English? — always | sometimes | never
8. How often do you use the internet in English? — always | sometimes | never
9. How important is English for your life just now? — yes | so-so | no
10. How important will English be in your future? — yes | so-so | no
11. Do you like your English text books? — yes | so-so | no
12. Do you like your Japanese English Text book? — yes | so-so | no
13. Do you go to juku, eikaiwa or nothing?

Appendix 2

Nakajima authoritative voice

1. M3-1-25 Nakajima
2. My name is Nakajima Jun
3. I play track and field three times a week.
4. I have a little bother who is in the first year of junior high school.
5. My favourite subject is English and math.
6. Because I'm very happy when I can solve questions.
7. I like rock music.
8. I like Queen the best.
9. I like foreign movie, too.
10. Watching the Star Wars is one of my pleasure.
11. Thank you.

Acknowledgements

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