

Exploring Language + Identity: Nature of Code-switching among Japanese Students

言語とアイデンティティ：
英語学習者のコードスイッチングについて

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Abstract

本文は、帰国子女と国内生のコードスイッチングの違いについて考察した。言語選択というものは、偶発的なものではなく、学習者が場面によって最も相応しいものを積極的に選び取っているということが言える。よって、二言語を駆使する者は、英語・日本語を介してアクセス出来る知識やアイデンティティなるものがあり、必要に応じて二言語間を複雑に行ったり来たりすることが分かった。

例えば、言語選択の一因として、帰国子女の周囲に対する配慮がある。自分の英語能力を抑制するべく英語を話さないのではなく、英語を話さない、もしくは得意としない者がグループにいる場合、会話する際、敢えて英語を使用するのを避ける傾向に有る。

二言語によって、構築されるアイデンティティも複雑に変化し、場合によっては、英語を介してのアイデンティティと日本語のアイデンティティが相反することもあることが分かった。

言語的な側面から見ても、日本語と英語が完璧に合致することはない。そのため、帰国子女は、自分が伝えたいニュアンスを最も忠実に表現出来る語彙をその都度選択し、駆使するため、会話中、度々コードスイッチン

グを行う。この現象を自分の表現力・言語能力の乏しさと自己評価する者もいれば、文化的相違を指摘する者もいた。

日本で外国語を使用することは、「日本人論」に基づく日本人のアイデンティティと相違するため、帰国子女は日本人さを追求するあまり、英語がおろそかになっていくという。その結果、日本語・英語共中途半端になる危険性があり、帰国子女らの自信喪失と繋がっているようである。特に話す能力というものは、読み書き能力などの内在的なものではなく、対外的なものであるため、英語能力の判断材料にされやすい。この結果、学生は話す能力を最も重視する傾向にあった。

Introduction

With increasing globalization, more individuals are placed overseas, taking their family with them. This in turn implies that more children are enjoying, or in unfortunate cases struggling to acquire a foreign, especially English, language. The length of sojourn varies from a couple to several years. This paper explores the notions of language use and its connection to ethnic identity among Japanese children who have returned to Japan after a prolonged stay abroad.

The returnees, or *Kikokushijo* in Japanese, come back to Japan with varied experiences depending on such factors as the length of stay and the treatment they had received abroad. In recent years, many Japanese universities have come to accept returnees into their programs, accommodating their lacks while nurturing their strengths. Our research site is one of such universities that is renowned for its program for returnees and foreigners residing in Japan.

Given the uniqueness of the research site, we wished to explore and analyse the ways returnees as well as non-returnees manipulate their language and identity given a particular context. Specifically, we hypothesized that bilingual students use L1 and L2 distinctively in order to ascribe certain social significance to language use, and this in turn implied that there were situations when they deliberately

refrained from using L2 even if the student felt more comfortable using L2 than L1. That is, in order to achieve the desired social goal, language choice is effectively and eclectically engineered despite their level of L2 proficiency (Norton, 2000). Having analyzed the data, we discovered various reasons for this language manipulation, reflecting both Japanese and Euro-American cultures.

Theoretical Framework

It has been documented extensively how language use ties in with identity (Casanave, 2002; Ivanic, 1998; Morita 2004, Norton, 2000; Norton & Toohey 2002; Ochs, 1993; Wenger, 1998). However, exactly at what instances the language use shifts in an English language classroom in Japan among Kikokushijo (returnees) has been less documented. This study examines the different dynamics among Kikokushijo and non-Kikokushijo *in situ* and in action. Specifically, the moments when code-switching from Japanese to English and vice versa occur are explored, followed by self-analysis of these moments by the students themselves. These code-switches are a complex and multifaceted phenomenon whereby the language choice and use are the result of bilingual students making active choices as to what aspects of their language knowledge they wish to exploit.

For Kikokushijo (returnee) students in Japan, the conflicts of adjusting back into Japanese social-cultural life as school-aged students are substantial, and ultimately have lingering effects on their identities and language use (both in Japanese and English) well into their university years. The main issue is manifested in their identities as bicultural and bilingual individuals, which in the heterogeneous Japanese social system, they find that they are rejected from the traditional, dependent Japanese society (see Doi, 2001 for discussion on *amae*).

Since assimilation is not the desired outcome for returnees (as they

often make sweeping generalizations of the negative stereotypes of non-free-thinking Japanese), this leads them to opt aspects of each culture compatible with their needs as biculturals. This blend is represented in their language use, as certain aspects are better realized in a particular language (Kanno, 2002).

The conflicts experienced by returnees are based in the perceptions of both the receivers of the returnees (Japanese teachers and students) and the returnees themselves. Longitudinal case studies with school-aged returnees showed incredible frustration with these conflicts, and a need for empathy from their receivers to ease the adjustment process (Kanno, 2002; Miyoshi, 2001). How this process unfolds is what shaped these students' identities.

At university, identity may be a controversial focus area for EFL returnee students, but if discussed it can give them a chance to better understand their language production through consideration of their socio-cultural 'positionality'. This positionality is determined by context-specific language use. Therefore, we claim that language use is a socially determined practice (Norton, 2000).

The EFL setting ultimately involves a conflict between *foreignness* and *Japaneseness* (Hashimoto, 2000). It has been suggested that to be able to speak English, Japanese believe it is necessary to discard their innate shyness and be more outgoing, i.e., 'individualistic' and 'aggressive' (Mouer & Sugimoto, 1986, p.399). This promotes the idea that in an EFL setting, native-like fluency in spoken English is resisted for the fear of losing cultural identity (see Picken, 1986).

Methodology

This study began with a questionnaire distributed to two classes of Japanese sophomore students majoring in English language. Among 40 students, all but three are returnees. The questionnaire consisted of seven open-ended questions following in-class group discussions that

were encouraged to be conducted in English. Students reported how adhering to L2 alone was not achieved and explained the reasons for the language switch. The answers were then read by the researchers, who then asked for clarifications wherever the answers were too brief or unclear. The questionnaires were then returned to the students who added further comments in response to the questions asked. The questionnaire was then collected for the second time and read by the researchers. Among the 40 responses, eight respondents who gave intriguing answers were invited back for a face-to-face interview with the researchers. Each interview session was taped using a SONY Digital Handycam DCR-VX700 video recorder. The data were then transcribed for analysis. Transcribed data were then forwarded to each participant for content check.

The length of sessions varied from student to student, ranging from thirty minutes to two hours. Students were given a Letter of Information explaining the purpose of research and were asked if they wished to use pseudonyms or their real names. All but two expressed their desire for anonymity, therefore all names in the following excerpts are pseudonyms except for the two aforementioned students. Any other identifiable proper names are indicated as XXX in the transcripts. Inaudible responses are marked as ***. Numbers in brackets indicate a pause counted in seconds.

Analysis and Findings

The transcribed data as well as the questionnaires were read over, discussed and thematized by the researchers, marking all interesting or common threads. Some of the emergent themes were as follows:

- consideration for others in terms of refraining from using L2
- returnees as those struggling between two cultural worlds
- L1/L2 correspondence

- confidence in L1 and L2
- perception of self in terms of L2 oral proficiency
- motivation and confidence in using L2 based on the perceived proficiency gap between self and others

Each will be discussed further below.

Consideration for others

While students are proficient L2 users, they nevertheless often refrain from using L2. Their restraint stems not from their desire to dismiss or reject L2 and C2 (second culture) but rather their courtesy and consideration towards others. In the following excerpt Yumi explains how her language choice fluctuates depending on the situation in order to avoid ostracizing non-L2 speakers as well as to avoid the stigma of being aloof.

1. Yumi: so I think I don't do this now but when I first um my freshman year at XXX
2. Jim: Uh-huh
3. Y: Um. The first time since I knew that this was an English department
4. J: Mn.
5. Y: so I didn't mind mixing up English and Japanese
6. J: Mn.
7. Y: but some people really hated it?
8. J: Yeah.
9. Y: so I had some trouble with that
10. J: Mn. Okay.

Yumi recalls how some people simply assumed that she is just showing off" whenever she used English. She further explains how

she refrains from using L2 unless L2 use is initiated and actively pursued by others.

11. Jim: Well this is the thing that makes me wonder. Before you were saying you would prefer to really use a lot of English
12. Yumi: Uh-huh
13. J: when you first arrived
14. Y: Uh-huh
15. J: but now you feel differently about that
16. Y: Yeah.
17. J: that with a lot of the kids you prefer to use Japanese
18. Y: Uh-huh
19. J: Do you feel like you are losing some I don't know an ability to use English as freely as you used to?
20. Y: Um, I'm not sure about that because I'm trying not to use English, kind of? Because of um people telling me not to (laugh)
21. J: Right. Right, right.
22. Y: Kind of um, it depends on situation?
23. J: Mn...
24. Y: as well but um it's just like when people speak Japanese I don't want to say back to that person in English
25. J: Mn...
26. Y: It- it's really like, uh, I feel really weird?
27. J: Yeah.
28. Y: Yeah.
29. J: So but if somebody as long as somebody is willing to participate in the conversation in English
30. Y: Uh-huh
31. J: even if their English isn't very good
32. Y: Uh-huh
33. J: you will use English.
34. Y: Oh yeah, sure.

35. J: Alright, ok...

Yumi's willingness to go along with the language choice her interlocutor makes reflects her considerateness for others and her unwillingness to create any unnecessary conflict and tension between her and her interlocutor.

Returns caught in two cultural worlds

In the simplest possible terms, identity can be defined as “a person's understanding of who they are” (Kanno, 2000, p.2). We take this definition one step further and define identity as an understanding of self in a given context. As bilinguals, some of the students in this study express a separation or two identities: their L1 Japanese identity, and L2 English identity. Bilingual identity is complicated, in that they are simultaneously negotiating between a development of two different identities, which can contradict each other (Kanno, 2000).

In her interview, Ai made several suggestions that she sees two separate identities for herself, one for each language. Early in the interview she offered this:

1. I think my personality changes from when I speak in English and Japanese, and I think it happens for many people...

The following excerpt shows how she later explained further:

2. Mitsuyo: Now a few minutes ago, Jim just said that, um... can you be your true self in Japanese... does that imply that speaking in English, do you think that you're someone else, or is that still you?
3. Ai: Mm... it's still me... but, I think that... I can express my opinions more freely in English...

4. M: Oh! In English... so, you're more true in English than when you're speaking in Japanese, then... you're REALLY your true self when you're speaking English... is that correct interpretation, or...?
5. Ai: I think it's the culture of the countries that these languages are spoken in, 'cos Japanese are not supposed to like, go out there, and...
6. Jim: say as much
7. Ai: exactly... so you're not supposed to express your feelings, really, directly... but in English, that's a good thing, so I can be comfortable expressing my opinions in an English class more than in like a Japanese elective class... I think... (laughing)

Ai managed to avoid considerations of a 'true self' and emphasized the dependency on the situation in which she is communicating. This flexibility was seen as advantageous on her part. However for Miho, the flexibility is more conflicting. In the following excerpt, Miho expresses a conflict caused by an inability to express what she wants in Japanese – due to a different sense of humor.

1. Miho: Um, when I'm speaking in English I get more, like, there's more sarcasm in what I'm saying...
2. Mitsuyo: That's interesting... and when you're speaking Japanese you're more genuine, or...
3. Miho: Yes I think so.
4. M: Or, you're more honest?
5. Miho: Not honest, but... mm... (7) you have more like, black humor... with it?
6. M: In English
7. Miho: In English...
8. M: The language is inherently, I guess, like that...
9. Miho: And, like, you have more ups and downs when you're

- talking...
10. M: That's true... that contributes to the sarcasm, you think?
 11. Miho: It, might... I don't know... (laughing)
 12. M: Do you think you come across as more sarcastic in English...
 13. Miho: Uh-huh
 14. M: than in Japanese... so do you play more with English than you do with Japanese?
 15. Miho: Yes...
 16. Jim: Ok
 17. Miho: because when you say the same thing in Japanese it sounds so serious... and like, Japanese people will take it more seriously
...
 18. M: So you can joke around in English...
 19. Miho: Yes, right...

Later Miho expresses a tendency towards her L2 identity:

1. Jim: I've noticed that you laugh a lot in English... and that if I'm making a joke in class, you're one of the first people to laugh... Do you think your humor is more English culture than Japanese culture?
2. Miho: Yes, people tell me that I have- that I laugh, at like...
3. J: Weird things...
4. Miho: (laughing) Yes! And, like... well, American people have like big reactions, you know... they react like, really... humongous? And people tell me that I do that, so...

Identity issues affect students' word choices, humor, even their appearance. In the following excerpt, Naomi explains that she can tell the difference between those people who have a more dominant L1 or L2 identity. She then takes pride in the fact that she identifies herself as not like all the others. In the following transcript, the acronym FCC

stands for Faculty of Comparative Culture.

1. Mitsuyo: Can you tell whether that person's more comfortable in English or not from their appearance, for example? Besides facial expression like, for example, the way they dress?
2. Naomi: Um... (4) I guess I can... (laughing)
3. M: Yeah? What gives it away? How do you tell?
4. N: (laughter) I don't know maybe especially because I'm in XXX but because we have the FCC, um... I can kind of guess who's returnee and who's not.
5. M: What gives away... like what kind of clue do you detect- do you... I'm interested. [N: Um... (smiling)] What kind of factors what kind of things...
6. N: Um... people... who's been in Japan for a long time is more fashionable (laughter) I don't know...
7. M: Ah! (all laughing)
8. Jim: Well what about the fashion, what about the fashion. (laughter)
9. N: Fashion. Really Japanese, as in...
10. J: So there is a distinct Japanese fashion...
11. N: Yes.
12. M: Could you describe that for us?
13. J: Yeah... (laughter)
14. N: (smiling) Ok... everybody looks the same. (all laughing) It's like they dye their hair, they...
15. M: Is that why you don't dye your hair?
16. N: Actually, yes. I don't know- and – I don't know- I'm – I don't know I'm proud of being Japanese and I like my hair being black, and...
17. J: But you don't look like them.
18. N: What do you mean?
19. M: Like ***-*chan* for example.

20. J: Yeah (all laughing)
21. N: I don't know- I really... or maybe this is only my characteristics, but um, I don't like being the same with other people? I don't know um... especially in Japan where people don't express the- using like, verbally? Um... don't know- just from the fashion, they all look the same and they don't speak up, um... sometimes I feel really sorry for them? Because inside they're- um (hands rolling, laughing) they have, like worth- um, very interesting talent or like, um... hobbies that's- I don't know- amazing? Or, but, because they don't speak up and they look the same and just- they're losing their chance...

Identity is a rather strong source of pride in Japan, as defined by *Nihonjinron* or, theories on the Japanese, designed to emphasize the uniqueness of the postwar people of Japan in relation to the rest of the world (Sato, 2004). For these returnee students, there is some resistance to a single identity. This is therefore a strong contradiction to *Nihonjinron*. In the following excerpt, Naomi offers a solution.

1. J: I get the idea that what you're proud of as yourself as a Japanese... is in the international context...
2. N: Mn, maybe...
3. J: that you are from Japan and you have this- so... I'm wondering, like, in Japan... are you proud to be that... different person? Like do people see you as Japanese, or do they look at you and say... you're different! (laughter)
4. N: Um... I... I've been said different... (smiling) a lot.
5. J: How do you feel about that?
6. N: Um... I'm... I'm happy with it.
7. J: Ok
8. N: (laughter) Um... don't know...
9. J: You haven't had bad experiences with that sort of thing...

10. N: Mm... mm... no, but... mm... but people really often say that I'm different...
11. M: Do you identify yourself as part American?
12. N: Uh... no.
13. M: No. You're 100% Japanese...
14. N: Um... (3) don't know, Japanese but... um... world citizen? (small laugh)
15. M: So you don't necessarily connect yourself with the US, per se...
16. N: No
17. M: but on a bigger scale...
18. N: Unh (nodding/ smiling) I think so...
19. J: Yeah... it was interesting, because so many people, on the question about you know, why do you use the language that you use, you didn't mention anything about- I use it because this is who I am- it had everything to do with the interaction you had with the other person, so, you seem very flexible, and perfectly happy to use English or Japanese or mix or any of those things are ok for you. Is that true?
20. N: Unh! Yeah...
21. J: Ok (laughter)
22. N: I don't know, um... yeah, from- I think the context is more important than the language, because language is just a tool, if I say it that way, so, um... I want to- and I like people, so, I want to (giggle) have a good conversation with them. So whatever's happy for them, I tend to use it, so...

While the celebration of Japanese identity can be perceived positively, we realize how at times one identity is deliberately hidden for self-protection from stigmas. For example, Yumi says she is discouraged to disclose her past, the fact that she has lived abroad for a prolonged period of time, in order to avoid negative stereotypes for returnees:

1. Y: Um. I just don't like the fact that people think of returnees as um people who
2. didn't study?
3. J: Ah
4. Y: Yeah. I just don't like the fact that they say that. They are like, "Oh you are so lucky that you lived abroad." Like, "You always have parties, right?" Like, um.
5. J: (laugh)
6. Y: "It depends on the person" (laugh)
7. J: Yeah.
8. Y: Yeah.
9. J: So it's stereotypes that are
10. Y: Yeah.
11. J: So you don't bring up the fact that you are a returnee? If you don't have to.
12. Y: (2) I wouldn't.
13. J: No.
14. Y: No.

While Yumi acknowledges the richness of and her appreciation for her overseas experiences, she is reluctant to share that with others in fear of wrongful, and hurtful, negative stereotypes people hold against returnees. Yumi claimed that one of the reasons why she chose the university she is currently at is precisely because the school admits many returnees like herself. This way, they can empathize with each others' experiences of having to struggle between two cultural worlds.

One student, Sayako, in the study shows a particularly interesting defense of her absolute Japanese identity. Despite being biologically half Japanese, and having lived outside Japan for several years, Sayako writes:

I feel more comfortable to speak Japanese and I identify myself as

Japanese.

Sayako's social context plays a determinant role in constructing her identity and language preference. She consistently uses the pronoun 'we' instead of 'I' in the following excerpt:

We are all Japanese... We usually talk in Japanese between us and we aren't confident in speaking English compared to Japanese.

Sayako's adamant claim to be only Japanese reflects how she positions herself socially. This is in contrast to for example Miho and Yumi, who identify themselves with two cultures but in very distinct ways.

Miho, despite her fluency in both L1 and L2, is divided by languages and agrees that there are different personas belonging to different language use. Yumi concurs that her persona changes depending on the language she uses. She writes:

My tone of voice changes. Also, I think that I tend to be aggressive when using English. In English, I tend to speak strongly, like a debater.

My tone of voice becomes lower (I think).

Similarly, Naomi notes that differences in identity have been pointed out to her. She writes:

I don't feel any change, but my friends and family say that I sound nicer in Japanese, as in, I tend to use more swear words/bad words in English. Also, I speak faster in English so people think that I am more rude/ inappropriate...(?)

Conscious or unconscious, this clear psycho-physical distinctness that

accompanies language choice was a common trait found among all participants in this study.

Correspondence between L1 and L2

Besides affective reasons for language switching, there are sheer linguistic, lexical aspects in switching from L1 to L2 and vice versa. According to a theoretical second language acquisition goal known as *Willingness To Communicate* (MacIntyre, Clément, Dörnyei & Noels, 1998), it is noted that there are cases of transfer breakdown between L1 and L2. For many of the students in this study, word knowledge seemed to present a major issue in that they described moments of switching between languages in order to find the most appropriate nuance to convey their desired meaning. In some cases it was considered a lack of ability with the language, and for others it was noted as a case of cultural difference. In the previous section, Miho noted both of these points in relation to word knowledge, also suggesting that there is a lack of correspondence between the L1 and L2.

In the following excerpt, Miho explains how depending on the person she is communicating with, some words in English just do not work, and so she uses Japanese words to replace them.

1. J: I think... the thing that stands out for me is the point about... when you're using English and when you're using Japanese it all depends on the person that you're talking to?
2. Miho: Yes...
3. J: Not the topic, or situation...
4. Miho: Mn-hm...
5. J: Yeah? (laughter)
6. Miho: It depends on what person...
M: You mentioned there were certain words you preferred using Japanese...

7. Miho: Right, uh-huh...
8. M: What was that example she gave there? (referring to Miho's feedback sheet)
9. Miho: I'm so *chuto hanpa*, or that's *arienai*...
10. M: ah... that's *arienai*... Why do you think you particularly chose ... *chuto hanpa*, you decided to insert Japanese words *chuto hanpa* in there...
11. Miho: Well, first I didn't know how to explain it in English, and then for *arienai* or *arienai* is 'impossible' in English, but it doesn't have the same meaning... like...
12. J: Nuance...
13. Miho: nuance... yes... (laughing)
14. M: How different are they? Could you explain the difference to us, could you try?
15. Miho: Uh... If you say 'that's impossible'...
16. M: Uh-huh
17. Miho: then, it makes it sound like... it's really impossible, but if you say like, that's *arienai*, even though it is possible, well you just say... *arienai* as like...
18. M: Ah... that's interesting
19. Miho: to express, yes...
20. J: So not so black and white...
21. Miho: Mn-hm, right...

Based on this explanation, it seems that Miho's ability is far greater than she perceives. Unfortunately, she is under the impression that not being able to express clearly what she wants completely in one language is some sort of deficiency on her part, not considering the idea that it is a deficiency in the language itself. On the other hand, Toru recognizes the incongruence between L1 and L2:

Word choice is very important because the concept of things and the

way people think differs depending on the language they use/hear. Literal translation is not the way to speak fluently or to tell what you want to convey.

This incongruence unknowingly forces bilinguals to use L1 and L2 selectively. For example, Miho explains:

I used a mixture of English and Japanese. I use whichever language comes up to my mind for the word. I never noticed I did that when talking.

Ai comments:

We are speaking Japanese without thinking too much about language choice. At the beginning when we were focused on the task, we spoke English. But later, when we were less focused than before, Japanese popped out naturally.

Ai also brought up a common situation, which was that a lack of English vocabulary caused the language mix. She writes:

We used Japanese words when we didn't know how to express something in English.

Ayako and Naomi had similar ideas. Ayako writes:

I was using different language in different situations. A lack of English vocabulary led to speaking in Japanese.

Naomi writes:

We tend to use Japanese when we are not confident because I

assume that we have more knowledge and variety of vocabulary in Japanese (mother tongue) – when the topic that we were talking about switched from academic to private, the language we used switched from English to Japanese.

This may imply that too much focus is being placed on academic L2 and not enough colloquial L2 vocabulary (Kanno & Applebaum, 1995). This pedagogical lack may be attributing to their comfort and confidence level in terms of Foreign Language Acquisition.

Confidence

This section will discuss briefly what is meant by L2 confidence and the impact of *Nihonjinron* on returnee students in Japan. Then it will take a look at the lack of confidence affecting some students' perceptions of their language skills.

L2 confidence and Nihonjinron

L2 confidence is directly related to the theory of *Willingness To Communicate*. In Japan there has been a noted effort by the Ministry of Education to move away from knowledge-based acquisition of English and more towards communicative English in an attempt to improve confidence and encourage Japanese students to communicate more in English (Yashima, 2002; Yoshida, 2003). This is where we would expect returnee students to steep in confidence as they excel beyond their classmates who have not had the same overseas experiences.

A major conflicting issue with all of this in Japan is that there is no clear purpose for students to use English. Besides, the use of a foreign language in Japan goes against the pivotal ideology of Japanese identity known as *Nihonjinron*, which emphasizes homogeneity (see Sato, 2004). For returnee students, this means they need to focus on

their ability in Japanese, which may have been hindered by their immersion in an English-speaking environment for an extended period of time. As these students attempt to build their Japanese, they feel their English slipping, leading to a lack of confidence in both languages.

Lack of confidence

Having the language to convey meaning without misunderstanding or great effort is the key to establishing confidence in one's ability to communicate. For L2 speakers or writers, the struggle to find appropriate language can lead to a lack of confidence, which, if not overcome, can be the end to improved language ability. For the returnee students in this study, bilingualism presents a different type of struggle with confidence. Both Miho and Ayako expressed *incompleteness* in both languages, creating a lack of confidence in language use in general. In the following excerpt, Ayako expresses a kind of disadvantage to being bilingual.

1. Ayako: even when I speak Japanese, when I don't come up with there are times that... (4) I don't come out in Japanese but come out in English?
2. Jim: Hmm... So sometimes the words just come out in English...
3. A: It doesn't come out but comes, like into to my mind
4. Mitsuyo: Mn-hm, sure
5. J: Right, ok, ok
6. M: How do you feel about that, do you feel that your language is incomplete, or do you think that the fact that you're bilingual that you have more advantage than monolingual Japanese people, what are your thoughts?
7. A: Um, I think my language is... incomplete.
8. M: Oh. Really? In each language? Japanese and English?
9. A: Yeah

10. M: Do you feel badly about that?
11. A: Un-huh
12. M: So you're not proud of being bilingual then
13. A: (laughter)
14. M: Do you have some sort of inferiority complex thinking that both my Japanese and English are... incomplete? Or, um, you never feel good about yourself being bilingual?
15. A: Well, um, as for me, I'm very... *bimyo na tokoro* (laughter) ... because I've only been there like 5 years, and although- although other 15 years I live in Japan but... my Japanese... are... not as good as... Japanese, like...
16. M: Japanese people
17. A: people

Perception of self in terms of L2 oral proficiency: Finding motivation

It was common for students to compare themselves to other speakers in the class (as a visible skill) to decide whether or not they were 'good' speakers of English. Because Ayako spent just five years overseas, she feels this is the reason she is not as good as other speakers, who must have spent more time abroad. This lack of confidence in English has been exacerbated by her lack of confidence in Japanese, with which she feels doomed to be stuck as a returnee.

For one particular student, Hiro, the fact that he didn't spend much time overseas is a point of defense for his lack of confidence. He explains that because he spent just one year overseas, he does not expect to have fluency in English. In the following excerpt, in an optimistic turn, he finds motivation in his deficiencies.

1. M: pronunciation is so- it's there, so it's more noticeable. Do you think that affects people's confidence level for example?

2. H: Confidence level?
3. M: Mn-hm.
4. H: I think so, because when I'm speaking I know that my pronunciation is not perfect, and when I'm talking to someone who can speak English much better, I just feel more... that I – am – worse, uh, speaker...
5. J: So you lose confidence...
6. H: Yeah
7. J: in those situations.
8. H: Well – I think it's sometimes good, 'cos I just feel I have to study more – and practice more. But if it – if the... situation – or if I'm always being in that situation, I just maybe lose the confidence.

For Miho, her confidence in English was aided by a positive experience in her eight years in the US, as well as the inevitable comparison to other students in which she finds herself one of the more fluent speakers. However much like Ayako, Miho's confidence is hampered by a sense of incompleteness, caused by her tendency to mix L1 and L2. She explains in her feedback sheet:

I am determined to stop mixing English and Japanese in one sentence. It sounds very non-academic and ignorant. Being bilingual means you are able to speak both languages fluently and have vocabulary for each language. Mixing them up means I don't know how to say a certain word so I just use whichever language I know the word in.

An interesting point about this that Miho brought up in her interview was that it is not always just the case that she does not know the word, but rather, it does not express what she wants it to in one language or the other.

As we can see, students in this study hold a complex self-image which is the result of their incongruent and at times conflicting C1 and C2 exposure. For example, Yumi is caught between her pride and gratitude for being a returnee while suffering from misconceptions about returnees. Toru, a non-returnee, also expressed his ambivalence towards his status as an English major at a prestigious university:

1. M: Do you ever get that kind of reaction? People must say, “Oh, your English must be good”
2. T: Mn.
3. M: or “You are smart” or (laugh) ***
4. J: *** (laugh)
5. M: You do?
6. T: Ah. (3) When I said I was in XXX University
7. M: Mn.
8. T: People often told me that, “You are very smart”
9. M: Uh-huh

In fact, Toru expressed his excitement when he first learned that he was placed in a class which mostly consists of returnees. For Toru, English was his favorite subject and he was always top of the class in English, and his placement in one of the top English classes affirmed his talent for the language. However, he claimed that his confidence quickly dwindled when he began his studies with his fellow classmates. One of the things Toru wants to improve on is his oral and aural skills, despite the fact that he has no difficulties communicating orally:

1. J: Is your English ability ready now or do you have to do more?
2. T: Not yet.
3. J: Not yet.
4. M: You make it sound like your English is not good enough yet. Uh, what about it do you think is not good enough? What. What

aspect of English...

5. J: Your English is excellent.
6. M: Uh-huh. Yet you say you are not happy with your English.
7. T: Speaking
8. M: Speaking.
9. T: and listening
10. M: listening. But you obviously are understanding what we are saying. You want to improve your listening despite the fact that you understand?
11. J: I don't know how much better you can make it (laugh). Your listening is better than mine, I think (laugh)
12. T: Speaking skills

Toru feels that in particular his conversation skills are insufficient. This point is particularly important, as oral skills are the most visible, apparent skills which can be a tool in assessing the level of L2 proficiency. In contrast, writing and reading skills can be described as *silent* skills which are less apparent.

Furthermore, Toru feels that his shyness prohibits him from participating fully in English conversation. He claims that he finds himself unable to contribute whenever others start speaking in English:

1. M: Speaking skills. (3) And once you get that speaking skill what do you want to do with that? Why do you need. Why do you want to improve speaking skills?
2. T: Basically I like to interact with people.
3. M: Mn.
4. T: Yeah. I want to try it with people from other countries.
5. M: Uh huh.
6. T: People having different backgrounds.
7. M: Um. Your English level already allows you to do that, don't you think? You are conversing with us right now already in

English

8. J: *** (laugh)
9. T: Um. No. I don't think it's enough.
10. M: You don't think it's enough. Your English as is does not allow you to express your opinion fully. (5)
11. J: Did we talk about the obstacles?
12. M: Not yet.
13. J: Okay. What are the biggest obstacles for you that prevent you from having that level of English that you want?
14. T: Obstacles (5) Um (6) I am basically shy.
15. M: Mn.
16. T: Although I want to, like, talk to people in English
17. M: Mn.
18. T: or I want to interact with people?
19. M: Mn.
20. T: but somehow I can't. (3) For example in class, once someone starts speaking in English, then I can't. I can do too but it is still difficult for me to start a conversation? In English...

This does not however imply that he is unappreciative for the challenging environment he is immersed in. He acknowledges how peer pressure encourages him to use L2 more. Students are therefore having to embrace the tension as well as camaraderie among themselves in enhancing their Second Language Acquisition. That is, their confidence and motivation in learning L2 are enmeshed in a complex web of social interactions.

Conclusion

While English language knowledge is in general something admired, desired, and respected in Japan, returnees are often caught in an ambivalent position of having to celebrate their proficiency as well as

having to compromise the use of their language skills at the same time in order to assure social acceptance and harmony. This in turn provokes complex interaction patterns giving rise to eclectic and strategic language use on the part of returnees.

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