



## CHILDREN CROSSING BORDERS AND LITERACIES EDUCATION FOR THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

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### 1. Introduction

Due to globalization, internationalization and the enormous flow of information and population, societies have become increasingly fluid, multilingual and multicultural. This has significantly affected the economic life and education systems of every society. As a result, national education system reviews, academic performance and the fostering of language proficiency have been rethought in the world.

Japan is no exception; the influx of many children from overseas into Japanese schools has raised new social and educational issues because these children are moving beyond national, regional and linguistic borders. Therefore, I call these children 'Children crossing borders'. They are learning Japanese as a second language, a foreign language, or a Japanese heritage language. Such phenomena regarding children crossing borders have become common in every society.

The phenomena are complexly connected with social and historical contexts both in Japan and internationally. For instance, over two million foreign residents have settled in Japan. Some are 'old comers' who settled in Japan since the end of World War II, and others are 'new comers' who have come to Japan since the 1990s and have been working in this country. The number of new comers has increased year by year. It is strongly connected with Japan's industrial structure, which needs a larger labour force, as well as the international flow of labour forces. On the other hand, the number of travellers, university students, families of international marriage and factory trainees has been rapidly increasing in Japan. One example of 'global ethnoscares' (Appadurai, 1996) can be seen in Japan. Many people come into Japan, and many people go out of the country. The 'Children crossing borders' which I focus on in this paper are 'children in movement' in the transnational context of globalization as it impacts Japan.

This paper discusses language education for children including those 'children in movement', from three points of view: (1) what sort of language proficiency is necessary, (2) how this language education is to be designed, and (3) what the goals are of such language education. This is because the view of language proficiency determines the methodology and aims of language education. Finally, from these points of view, I discuss what language education is needed for a person in the 21st century. It is a new literacy education based on a new paradigm which incorporates views and methodology that foster the language proficiency needed for a multilingual and multicultural society.

### 2. Who are 'Children crossing borders'?

In the context of transnational population movement, 'children in movement' have been correspondingly increasing in Japan. The children I refer to are imagined children, but I have drawn them based on my extensive research data and observations of them over a long period of time.

Case A: A 10 year old boy who was born in Japan. His father is Japanese, his mother Filipino. He talks to his father in Japanese while he talks to his mother in Tagalog. However, as his Japanese father tends to be absent from home because of his business, he usually stays with his mother at home. He attends school and studies subjects using

Japanese language as a second language. Although he seems to be able to talk with other friends and teachers in Japanese, he cannot read or write Japanese as well as other Japanese children. His proficiency in Tagalog is also at the same level. He is a 'Japanese child', who has Japanese nationality, living in multilingual environments.

Case B: A 13 year old girl who was born in Japan. Both of her parents are Japanese. Before she entered primary school in Japan, her family moved to the United States of America. She attended primary school in New York, and also attended a Saturday school run by the Japanese community there. She learned English quickly. However, she was not as good at using Japanese language as she was with English. Initially, her parents were very proud of their daughter's English proficiency at school in the United States of America, but when they came back to Japan and she began to attend secondary school in Japan, she could not keep up with her classes where Japanese language was the dominant language used. In other words, she struggled in all classes apart from English. Her academic achievements became relatively low and she lost her motivation to study.

Case C: A 15 year old boy who was born in Sao Paulo, Brazil. He is the third generation of a Japanese Brazilian family who moved to Brazil at the beginning of the twentieth century. His father and mother, who were also born in Brazil, entered Japan in the early 1990s to work in Japan as *dekasegi*. The boy's family are Japanese descendants, but when he arrived in Japan at the age of 8 with his parents, he could not speak or understand Japanese language at all. He attended a primary school but he did not adapt himself to the school well because there was no formal or informal Japanese language support. So, he returned to Brazil alone when he was 10 years old. He stayed with his relatives and attended school there, but he found himself unable to catch up with studying due to his weak Portuguese. Finally, he decided to return to his father and mother in Japan. He re-entered school in Japan, but he still has not acquired enough Japanese language proficiency to communicate with others or understand subjects at school. He spends hours doing nothing at home, and recently has tended not to attend school.

Currently, such children are often seen in Japan. These children are likely to become so-called 'double limited children' in both languages. Foreign resident children do not have an obligation to attend Japanese schools because they are not Japanese nationals. As a result, some do not attend Japanese schools. On the other hand, the Japanese government conducts an annual survey of foreign resident students attending Japanese public schools, who need special assistance in learning Japanese language, and releases the number of those students in Japan. However, once such students have Japanese nationality, they are excluded from the survey even if they cannot understand Japanese language at all. Because the survey is designed to count only foreign students, it does not reflect the real number of students needing language assistance.

This phenomenon highlights the fact that in Japanese society there are many children who have various backgrounds in terms of languages and proficiencies, and that all the children in Japan do not form one homogeneous group. In particular, children crossing borders who are living in multiple language environments, and whose language education is often interrupted, are an illustration of this. Consequently, taking this into consideration, the national education system in Japan should be re-examined and the language education for all those children should be re-designed. The National education system in any modern nation-state has an aim to foster individuals who contribute to nation building. However, the phenomenon of children crossing borders strongly questions this fundamental aim of national education systems worldwide.

In the next section, I will discuss what sort of language proficiency is necessary, how this language education is to be designed, and what the goals of such language education are.

### **3. What proficiency is to be fostered?**

What language proficiency is necessary for these children in such a multilingual and multicultural society?

In general, the language user's ability is thought to be composed of two components: language knowledge, which is divided into organizational knowledge and pragmatic knowledge; and metacognitive strategies, which refers to topical knowledge and affective schema. In other words, language is used and given meaning in the socio-cultural context of a given society. With regard to this point, the theory of Systemic Functional Linguistics (Halliday, 1994) explains that how to use language is affected by three factors: topics (about which we talk or write), interpersonal relationships (in which we talk or write to someone), and mode (in which we are talking or writing according to purposes or situations). Therefore, specific contexts and situations, interpersonal relationships and socio-cultural meanings reflect on the state of texts and how texts are produced.

Consequently, language proficiency means the ability to interpret or produce texts which shape meaning in given contexts and situations. This implies that the more complex the context in the multilingual and multicultural society, the more complex 'how to mean' (Halliday, 1994) becomes. Further, the mode of meaning also changes to become more complex as it is also influenced by non-verbal symbols such as visual images, sounds, physical performances, architectures, spaces and so on. Therefore, the language proficiency that language learners need to acquire in such multilingual and multicultural societies is the ability to interact with others, who have different socio-cultural backgrounds and perceptions, and to find themselves and develop the ability to articulate their thoughts and create new views or perceptions.

This discussion on the language proficiency required to interpret and produce 'how to mean' among such varied and multimodal meanings leads us to contemplate what literacies are needed for multilingual and multicultural societies, such as intercultural speakers (Kramsch, 1998), intercultural competence (Lo Bianco et al. 1999), multiliteracies (Cope et al. eds. 2000) and plurilingual competence/ pluricultural competence in the Common European Framework (Council of Europe, 2001).

For children, in particular those who use their first language at home and use a second language or learn a third language as a foreign language at school, it is important to foster such plural literacies, including their first language literacy. Those plural literacies which are based on their first language, knowledge of experiences with the first language affect the second or third language acquisition. Cummins' interdependent hypothesis that the first language proficiency aids development of second language proficiency is a theory that supports this view on language learning (Cummins, 1984). The second (or third) language proficiency, which learners acquire based on the first language or through the second language or third language education are complex and develop differently. This is because the characteristics of the second (or third) language proficiency are in constant flux and therefore cannot be evaluated by any single paper test (dynamism). Further, there is also differing ability occurring according to the context and situation (non-homogeneity) and interactively changing according to the contexts on which language is used or through the relationship between language users (interactiveness). As language proficiency is composed of not only language knowledge but also metacognitive strategies as stated above, it should not be assessed only by the number of vocabulary which learners have learned or grammatical correctness in texts produced by learners. It is necessary to observe the whole process of learner's language use in various contexts, situations and language interactions

with others. In other words, such a new view of language proficiency requires a paradigm shift in assessment as well.

#### **4. How is the language education to be designed?**

Language is used and given meaning in the socio-cultural context of society, as mentioned above. However, how are such language use and meaning in a given socio-cultural context taught in the classroom?

This educational issue should be examined in the multilingual and multicultural surroundings of the society which is moving and changing constantly. For instance, obviously it is not effective to teach sentence patterns without a context or a situation in which such language expressions are used; similarly, language and culture cannot be taught separately in language education. In fact, it is necessary for us to question if it is possible to teach 'culture' in language education, and what 'culture' in language learning means.

In general, language teachers tend to think that language and culture are static and homogeneous, and therefore they can be taught. However, the culture and language which teachers conceptualize are 'imagined culture' and 'imagined language' which they create for their language classes. Language teachers tend to teach such 'imagined culture' and 'imagined language' because they think learners should learn the way to avoid misunderstandings and conflicts with other language users. Rather than that, it is necessary for learners living in a multilingual and multicultural society to learn a way to solve such misunderstandings and conflicts with others who have different views and perceptions, and a way to find a suitable place for each other by using the target language.

To revise language education with such perspectives, I propose three key points as follows: customization, contextualization and consistencization (3C). It is a language teacher's task to design language learning process from the 3C points of view.

- 1) Customization: Each student has different perceptions and concerns as well as language proficiency in a target language, even in their first language. It is pointed out that students learn a language best when they are treated as individuals with their own need and interests (Scarino, et al. 1988). It is important for each student to participate in language activities and express their own thoughts in the target language. Therefore, space for each student should be provided in the process of language learning.
- 2) Contextualization: One uses a language to communicate with others, or to convey the meaningful information to others. So, it is important to let students use language in such authentic and meaningful contexts. Students can more effectively learn a language when they use a language in such a meaningful context, rather than when they use a language repeatedly as in pattern practice. Contextualization is comprised of three components: the first relates to a specific language use in a specific context, the second consists of flow of content or topics in communication, and the third refers a sequence of learning scenes in different times and places. The concept of contextualization is developed from the content-based approach of language education.
- 3) Consistencization: This is a term which I developed and it means that a language which students use should be consistent with their thoughts and feelings. It is important for students to use a language to express their own thoughts. This is a basic principle for self-expression in learning a language, and students can more effectively learn the target language when they express their own need and interests by using it.

These 3Cs are found in the 'JSL Curriculum for School Education' (JSL Curriculum) which the Japanese Ministry of Education completed in 2007. This curriculum is designed for students who are learning Japanese as a second language at school. For instance, the JSL Curriculum at primary school level comprises two types of curriculum: a topic-based curriculum and a subject-oriented curriculum. The topic-based curriculum proposes the basic

structure of lessons, 'experience, pursuit, transmission', as learning process. The first stage 'experience' involves activating a schema related to the topic, exchanging information using Japanese through arousing interest. The second stage 'pursuit' is about investigating the topics, and generating new perceptions and ways of thinking through observation, making comparisons, associations, and conjectures. The last stage 'transmission' means expressing and informing others of what they have learned and subsequently think. In this way, the JSL Curriculum puts emphasis on learning a language through language activities. This concept draws on the 'Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach: CALLA' (Chamot & O'Malley, 1994) which recommends language activities with language functions such as seeking information, informing, comparing, ordering, classifying, analyzing, inferring, justifying, persuading, solving problems, synthesizing and evaluating. Students learn a language by using a language in such learning activities, including language functions for academic topics and purposes.

### **5. What are the goals of language education?**

The goals of language education are often discussed in terms of how effectively language learners can acquire speaking or writing skills in a target language. However, the kind of language proficiency which is required in a multilingual and multicultural society requires not only the skills to write a letter or participate in daily conversation, but also the abilities to negotiate with others who have different values and views from one's own, to solve problems, to create relationships with others, to read critically, to think logically, to collect data, analyze and reconstruct them, to express their own opinions and thoughts, and to articulate different things by using the target language.

To foster such skills and abilities, a content-based approach should be included in language activities in the classroom, as illustrated in an example from the JSL Curriculum. At the same time, the concept of 'interculturality' should be included in the approach because language is used and given meaning in the socio-cultural context of a society, as previously mentioned, and because language education should always remain with 'contact zone' issues.

'Interculturality' refers to the 'intercultural competence' that should be fostered through language education. Discussions on 'intercultural competence' in language education have recently intensified in Australia (Lo Bianco. et al. 1999, Parademtre. et al. 2000, Scarino. 2007). In the discussions, it has been suggested that 'intercultural competence' can neither develop automatically nor be developed by teaching language aspects like written grammar. Rather, that interculturality is fostered through communication, complete with communication failure, more so than by smooth communication, because communication is a complex behaviour that originates in relationships with others. Furthermore, this claim leads us to discussions on 'the third place'. Language learners are expected to understand a sense of the dynamic and voluntary nature of the culture through language learning, and learn how to articulate different 'cultures' and construct 'the third place', where he/she reflects on his/her own 'culture', respects the 'cultures' of others, and relates comfortably to others by comparing these 'cultures'.

As Kramsch (1998) indicates in her 'multiple levels of perception' model, the process of changing perceptions by learners through language learning is important. In the process, learners understand more deeply their own perceptions and those of others through 'dialogues' which include inferring, comparing, interpreting, discussing and negotiating. Such intercultural language learning constitutes a dynamic process that enables learners to subjectively and consciously seek suitable ways of interacting with other 'cultures' and thereby construct their own unique identities.

Obviously the discussions above suggest not only what the goals of language education should aim for, but also what the goals education should be. Education should aim for the

benefit of all the students in society in spite of their language background, birthplace, or route that brought them to the society. Therefore, language education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century should make the following shifts in perspective:

1. From language education that emphasizes how effectively language knowledge and skills are taught, to language education that foster abilities beyond language knowledge and skills.
2. From language education where students learn language passively, to language education where students think and create subjectively through language learning.
3. From language education where learning is regarded as an individual activity, to language education where learning is regarded as a process of interaction with others in the society.
4. From language education in which the aim is minimal-conflict communication, to language education which aims for communication that enables learners to overcome conflicts and construct social relationships with others.
5. From language education that is based on static views regarding language, society and culture (monolingual and monocultural education), to language education that acknowledges and responds to the fluid nature of these concepts (multilingual and multicultural education).
6. From language education where students enhance their knowledge and skills, to language education where students reflect their own perceptions and deepen them through meaningful interaction with others.

It is our shared task to create new literacy education based on the above to foster the kind of language proficiency needed for a multilingual and multicultural society.

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