

Exploring JSL-Learners' "Language Socialization"

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Abstract

This paper examines the narrative competence of learners of Japanese as a second language (JSL) within Gee's (1989, 1996, 1999) framework of Discourse. In order to tell a good story, L2-learners have to be aware of the values and norms of the target culture so that they can effectively communicate the point of a story to their L1-audience (cf. Polanyi, 1979). Gee (1989, 1996, 1999) proposes the notion of a *Discourse* with a capital D, which involves more than language – it always involves a set of values which define what counts as acceptable from the insider's point of view. Drawing on Gee's framework of Discourse, this study found that the way JSL-learners interact with their L1-Japanese audience serves as an indication of their second language socialization, that is, even at the beginning level, the learners are aware of the target norms and are able to use *rich points* (Agar, 1994), or culturally-salient L1-resources, in relation to what is/not expected in the target culture. Identifying themselves as 'foreigners', or outsiders to the L1-Discourse, the learners even use their non-membership in the target Discourse as their resource. This study will demonstrate that narratives provide an authentic context of interaction in which learners can utilize their cultural awareness in a meaningful manner as they interact with an L1-audience, which in turn, further facilitates their second language socialization.

1 Introduction

Socialization is the process by which one becomes a competent member of society (Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986a, 1986b; Ochs, 1988, 2002). Children are socialized to the values and norms of their culture as they acquire the language of their speech community. This process is called "language socialization" (Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986a, 1986b), which is not limited to early childhood but is also true for second/foreign language learning in which learners are socialized into values and norms of the target culture. More specifically, language learners' socialization is a type of secondary socialization in contrast with home-based primary socialization which takes place in early childhood.

Drawing on Gee's (1989, 1996, 1999) framework of *Discourse*, this study examines the narrative competence of learners of Japanese as second language (JSL). The way the L2-learners interact with the L1-Japanese audience indicates that they have been socialized to the values and norms of the target culture, that is, even though they are at the beginning level, the learners are aware of the target norms and able to use *rich points* (Agar 1994), or culturally-loaded L1-resources, in relation to what is/not expected in the target culture. Schieffelin and Ochs (1986a, 1986b; see also Ochs, 1988) state that language socialization involves two fundamental processes, that is, sociali-

zation through the use of language and socialization to use language. This study will demonstrate that narratives can provide an authentic context of interaction in which learners can utilize their cultural awareness of what is/not expected in the target culture as they participate with the L1-Discourse community, which, in turn, further facilitates learners' second language socialization.

2 Theoretical framework

2.1 *The notion of a discourse: A discourse with a capital D*

Gee (1989, 1996, 1999) proposes the notion of a *Discourse* and discusses a secondary socialization within this framework. A Discourse with a capital D is defined as "a socially accepted association among ways of using language, other symbolic expressions, and 'artifacts', of thinking, feeling, believing, valuing, and acting that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group or 'social network', or to signal (that one is playing) a socially meaningful 'role' " (Gee, 1996, p. 131). In other words, Discourses are inherently "ideological" – they are always involved with a set of values which define what counts as acceptable from an insider's point of view. We are identified with a socially meaningful group as our ways of using language render our membership in a Discourse recognizable to others. Accordingly, becoming a member of a meaningful social group requires mastery of not only what to say and what to do but also what to value and what to believe in.

Gee distinguishes two types of Discourse, namely, primary and secondary Discourses. A primary Discourse is what people are 'apprenticed' to in early childhood during primary socialization. It is a primary Discourse which defines our "home" identity. On the other hand, a secondary Discourse is what people are apprenticed to within non-home based groups and institutions beyond the family-based primary socialization, which includes churches, schools, and offices. In other words, acquiring a secondary Discourse means being exposed to and socialized into a new set of values and beliefs which are different from our primary Discourse. In addition, while our Discourse membership is recognized within and by different Discourses, partial or incomplete mastery of a Discourse identifies ourselves as outsiders to that Discourse, which holds true for second/foreign language learning as well (cf. Rudolph, 1994; Siegal, 1994, 1996).

Proposing a similar framework, Agar (1994) refers to L1-resources which signal underlying cultural values as "rich points". According to his example, the distinction between the German second person pronouns *Du* and *Sie* is not as clear as stated in the grammar books. *Du*, the informal version, is for friends, relatives, and children. *Sie* is for everybody else. However, more cultural values are attached to the actual usage. For instance, a German female colleague about the same age with Agar addressed him with *Sie* at a professional meeting. However, when passing each other on the street outside the conference hall, she used *Du*. Agar thought that he was promoted to her friend. But back in the conference hall, the female colleague used *Sie* again. Being an American, Agar could never figure out why and asked his German male friend what was going on. Then, he was told that she was flirting with him. Agar states that when learners encounter such culturally-loaded rich points, "culture happens", i.e. the learners are able to acquire new components to which cultural values are attached as personalized experiences. In other words, rich points are what learners can draw on as they participate in the L1-Discourse community, because they help learners to see the language from the emic or insider perspective.

2.2 *Narrative as an embodiment of a discourse*

A good story has to have its point, which, however, has to be understood by the recipient of the story (Labov, 1966, 1972; Labov & Waletzky, 1967). Polanyi (1979) states that for a successful narrative, not only does the narrator communicate the point of a story, but it has to be recognized by the audience. Polanyi calls this process *negotiation* between narrator and audience, which

is reflected in the audience's responses such as laughter, giggles, exclamatory phrases, and questions. Moreover, Polanyi suggests that the point of a narrative is *culturally salient*. When making the point of a story, the narrator has to appeal to the audience's culturally-shared knowledge, while the audience has to use shared norms and beliefs in order to comprehend the point of the story. In other words, telling a good story requires cultural awareness, which is also true for second/foreign-language learning. Learners have to be aware of values and norms of the target culture in order to communicate the point of a story so that it will be understood by the L1-audience.

As mentioned above, a Discourse involves more than language – it always involves a set of values and beliefs which define what counts as acceptable from the insider's point of view. In this study, referring to Gee's framework of Discourse, I examined JSL-learners' narrative competence, or how effectively they use what they have been socialized into, i.e., their cultural awareness of what is/not expected in the target Discourse, as they negotiate the point of a story with the L1-Discourse community.

3 Data

The informants were two JSL-learners who were learning beginning-level Japanese at a Christian university in the Tokyo area. Both of them came from Sri Lanka and speak English, Tamil, and Sinhalese (their first language is English). They started to learn Japanese after their arrival in Japan in September, 2001. By the time the present research was conducted, they had stayed in Japan for a year and spent 200 hours learning Japanese.

The data were narratives told by these JSL-learners, both of which were a part of speeches given to the L1-Japanese audience. Both narratives were written down, but orally communicated to the L1-audience, that is, they were not simply reading their drafts but interacting with the audience. One narrative was told at a school speech contest and the other one was told at daily chapel service.¹ The narratives were recorded and transcribed by the researcher with the learners' consent.

4 Analysis

The first narrative is a part of the learner's speech which was given to a Japanese audience at daily chapel service. At this Christian college, during a summer break, students participate in a week-long 'summer mission'. A group of students stay in a local church and help the congregation with various activities. Learner A who joined this mission trip for the first time shares his experiences from the trip with the L1-Japanese audience. In this segment, the learner talks about going to a nearby farm with other students after Sunday service was over, because the pastor of a local church whom they stayed with took the students there in order to reward them for their week-long service. This is where the transcript starts.

[1] Summer Mission

- 01 A: *Tsugi no hi, nichiyoubi, watashi-tachi, uh, CS², o tetsudatte,*
The next day, Sunday, we, uh, helped [them]³ out at Sunday school,
- 02 *sonoato, reihai o tetsudatte, kyookai o sooji-shite, uh, sooji-shita no sugu ato,*
and after that, [we] helped [them] out at worship service, and [after the service
was over, we] cleaned the church, uh, [and] right after [we] finished cleaning,
- 03 *bokushi-sensei wa, "Hai, a, asobi ni ikimashoo" to yutta kara,*
the pastor said, "Okay, let's go and have fun,"

- 04 *watashi-tachi wa A-bokujoo toiu tokoro ni ikimashita.*
so, we went to A farm.
- 05 *A-bokujoo toiu tokoro ni, buta-san*,⁴ *hitsuji-san, ushi-san, o atte,*
At A farm, [we] met Mr. pig, Mr. sheep, [and] Mr. cattle,
- 06 Audience: [*((laughs))*]
- 07 A: *isshoni shashin totte, hontoni yokatta to omoimasu.* =⁵
and took pictures with them, which was very good.
- 08 Audience: = *((laughs))*
- 09 A: "*Nandee,*" *watashi wa ano, n, ano*
[I] thought, "Why?" I, well, n, well,
- 10 "*Bu, buta-san, buta-san, tte itte nande '-san' tsukau no?*" *tte omotteta kedo,*
"Why do [they] use 'Mr.' for [animals], saying 'Mr. pig, Mr. pig'?"
- 11 *hontoni sore, wa tanoshiina mono datta.* =
but that was really enjoyable.
- 12 Audience: = *((laughs))*
- 13 A: *Hai ((laughs)). Uh, soo, sore owatte, hontoni, uh, moo ikkai, a A-kyookai ni kite,*
Okay *((laughs))*. Uh, yes, that was over, really, uh, once again, [we] came
back to A Church,
- 14 *hiru-gohan tabete, bujide kaettekita kedo, hontoni boku no akashi wa,*
had lunch, and returned [to school] safely, but really, my testimony is,
- 15 *kono natsu, uh, kaki-den ni itte, ano hajimete kedo,*
this past summer, uh, [I] joined the summer mission, well, for the first time,
- 16 *uh, kaiwa wa, sugoku muzukashika, muzukashikatta kedo, ano, to,*
uh, conversation was really dif, difficult, well,
- 17 *ima yori motto, mm, uh, motto ano dame datta ne.*
[my conversation] was much, much worse than now, you know.
- 18 *Like, mae wa kaiwa wa motto, uh, heta datta.*
Like, before, [my] conversation was much worse.
- 19 *Dakara, uh, sore o hontoni boku, kangaenakute,*
So, uh, I didn't think about that,
- 20 *toriaezu, gambaru, gambaritai, toiu kokoro to, itte,*
anyway, [I said to myself], "[I] will work hard, [I] want to work hard," and went
[on the mission],

- 21 *hontoni kono koto o yooku, uh, hontoni, uh, kono kakiden no, yokatta to omoimasu.*
really, this thing, well, uh, really, uh, this summer mission was good.
- 22 *Dakara watashi wa, hontoni omotta koto wa, watashi, uh, gaijin kedo, ano toriaezu,*
So, what I really thought about was that I am a foreigner, but anyway,
- 23 *kore wa ya(ri)tai to iu kokoro, to yatta kara,*
[I] wanted to do this, and [I] did it,
- 24 *hontoni kono kakiden ni mada ittenai hito, wa, ikkai wa itte mite kudasai.*
I tell you, if you have not participated in this summer mission, please join it at least once.

In line 05, as he tells that he saw pigs, sheep, and cattle at the farm, the learner says *buta-san*, *hitsuji-san*, and *ushi-san*, i.e. “Mr. pig, Mr. sheep, and Mr. cattle.” This is a typical way Japanese people refer to animals in order to express their intimate feelings toward the animals, which English speakers do not do. In other words, addressing animals with “Mr.” is a *rich point* (Agar, 1994) which the learner encountered at that time. As mentioned above, Agar (1994) states that culture “happens”, that is, when an L2-learner encounters such culturally-loaded rich points, s/he is able to acquire new cultural components as personalized experiences. Learner A encountered such a rich point and is now using this newly-acquired L1-resource on the L1-Japanese audience. Hearing him saying *buta-san* “Mr. pig,” the audience laughs (06). The audience’s reaction indicates that the learner’s use of the newly-acquired rich point successfully appeals to the L1-audience.

Then, in lines 09-10, quoting himself wondering why Japanese people address animals this way, the learner comments on his own reaction when he encountered this rich point, which is followed by his own evaluation, telling the audience that although he was thrown off at first, he enjoyed it anyway (10-11). Hearing his self-reflective comments on learning the rich point in the target Discourse, the audience laughs again (12).

Thus, this narrative shows that the learner encountered the rich point in the target Discourse, acquired it as his personalized experience, and used this newly-acquired expression as his resource, which was positively received by the L1-audience. As we see in line 22, referring to himself as a *gaijin* “foreigner”, the learner brings up his non-membership in the target Discourse. However, despite the fact that he was a non-member, his narrative shows that the learner was able to use the newly-acquired L1-resource in a way that made sense to the L1-audience.

The second narrative is a part of speech given by the other JSL-learner, whom I will call Learner B. The excerpt is the beginning part of his speech, in which the learner looks back on his first year in Japan.

[2] My First Year in Japan

- 01 B : *Minasan, komanwa.*
Good evening, everyone.
- 02 Audience: *Komanwa.*
Good evening.
- 03 B : *Chikagoro daibu hada-zamuku [narimashita.*
Recently, it has been fairly chilly (lit. chilly on your skin).
- 04 Audience: [((laughs and claps))]

so, I said, “*Umee*” (= vulgar “delicious”).

- 22 *Sono toki wa S-sensei wa sore kiite, uh, K[-kun] ni “omae wa yabee”*
Then, Ms. S heard this, uh, and [she] told [me] to tell K, “*Omae wa yabee*” (= vulgar “You are bad”),
- 23 Audience: [((laughs))]
- 24 B: *[to iu yooni, =*
- 25 Audience: = ((laughs and claps: 7 seconds))
- 26 B: *Kono yooni, uh, minna, warui ko, a, warui kotoba[, naraimashita.*
Like this, uh, [I] learned bad words [from] everyone.
- 27 Audience: [((laughs))]
- 28 B: *Tabun gaijin warui kotoba, tsukau toki, tabun omoshiroi, omoshirokatta kara,*
Perhaps, [they] enjoyed [hearing] a foreigner using bad words,
- 29 *minna warui kotoba oshietekuremashita. =*
so everyone taught [me] bad words. =
- 30 Audience: = ((laughs))

The learner starts his narrative with the typical Japanese greetings; in Japanese culture, it is typical to mention the recent weather at the beginning of a speech. However, when he says that it has been chilly recently, the learner uses the phrase *hada-zamui* “chilly” (03), which literally means that it is chilly enough for us to feel the chilliness through our skin. This phrase is commonly used by L1-Japanese speakers, but it is not normally taught in classroom, especially at the beginning level. Thus, hearing the learner start his speech with this typical L1 “chilly”, the audience laughs and claps (04). According to Ziv (1988), people laugh at ideas and behaviors which are contrary to their expectations. The L1-Japanese audience did not expect the learner to come up with the typical L1-greetings. In other words, the learner takes advantage of his non-membership in the L1-Japanese Discourse, that is, non-member’s use of greetings which are typically used by L1-speakers is perceived as humorous by the L1-Discourse community.

Second, in line 18, as the learner uses the word *umee*, the vulgar “delicious”, the audience laughs (19). As the transcript shows, they start laughing as soon as they hear this vulgar “delicious”, which means that this vulgar word successfully invites the audience’s laughter. However, Learner B does not stop there. He moves on to tell his experience of actually using this vulgar “delicious” to L1-speakers. In line 22, the learner talks about how *S-sensei*, a female professor, reacted as she heard him using this vulgar word. Hearing him using *umee*, Professor S taught the learner another vulgar word *yabee* (“bad” in this case), telling him that K, the Japanese student who taught him the vulgar “delicious”, was a “bad” guy. Again, this vulgar “bad” invites the audience’s laughter (23). The learner cannot finish his sentence (24), because the audience does not stop laughing and clapping, which last for seven seconds.

The learner concludes this segment, saying that all the Japanese people taught him bad words (26). This comment reflecting on learning bad words is an indication of the learner’s being aware of the target norms, i.e. he knows what is perceived as bad in the target Discourse. While telling why he thinks everyone taught him bad words, as Learner A does, Learner B also brings up his non-Japanese Discourse membership, referring to himself as a *gaijin* “foreigner” (28). He thought

that L1-speakers enjoyed a foreigner using bad words. The implication is that he will be excused for using bad words because of his non-membership in the target Discourse.

In sum, although their L1-proficiency was still limited, both learners were aware of the target norms and narrated their experiences of learning the newly-acquired rich points in relation to what is perceived to be good/bad in the target culture. Their using the rich points in a way that made sense to the L1-audience indicates that the learners acquired not only the words and phrases but also the cultural values attached to these expressions. Moreover, referring to themselves as foreigners, both of them identified themselves as outsiders to the L1-Japanese Discourse community. However, narrating how they learned the rich points as non-members, they used their non-membership as their resource, which was perceived as humorous by the L1-Discourse community.

5 Conclusion

In this paper, drawing on Gee's (1989, 1996, 1999) framework of Discourse, I have presented the evidence of the JSL-learners' second language socialization which is shown in their narrative performances where they interacted with the L1-Japanese audience. The learners' Japanese proficiency was still limited but they were aware of what was expected in the target culture and narrated their experiences of acquiring the new words and phrases in relation to the target norms. Identifying themselves as "foreigners", or outsiders to the L1-Discourse community, the learners even used their non-membership as a resource, i.e. the non-members' use of typical L1-resources including vulgar expressions was perceived as humorous by L1-Discourse community.

As mentioned above, language socialization concerns two fundamental processes, socialization through the use of language and socialization to use language (Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986a, 1986b; Ochs, 1988, 2002). As we have seen, the narratives provided an authentic context of interaction which enabled the learners to use rich points, or culturally-salient L1-resources, in a meaningful manner as they interacted with the L1-audience. Learning another language entails not only learning the language itself but also developing cultural awareness specific to that language (cf. Kasper, 1997; Kramsch, 1993; Poole, 1992; Schmidt, 1990, 1993). In other words, narratives are not only a means of authentic input but also a means of authentic learner-production which helps learners to utilize their cultural awareness of what is/not expected in the target Discourse and thus further facilitates their language socialization. The present research has demonstrated that narratives can be such a site of second language socialization, which motivates L2-learners to see the language from the emic perspective and continue to take part in the L1-Discourse community. However, this process, or how second language socialization proceeds through this type of authentic interaction, needs to be further explored in future studies.

Notes

¹ This Christian school has daily chapel service, in which faculty and students meet around noon every day and spend half an hour listening to a sermon.

² "CS" stands for "church school." This word is used in Japanese churches to refer to Sunday school.

³ A (full) square bracket indicates that a word inside the bracket does not appear in the original Japanese text.

⁴ A half bracket indicates the point where overlapping talk begins.

⁵ The equal symbol (=) indicates latching, i.e. no interval between the end of a prior utterance and the beginning of the next utterance.

⁶ "IRC" stands for "International Relationship Committee", which is an association of overseas students at this university.

⁷ *Shabushabu* is a Japanese pot dish. Thin-sliced beef and other ingredients are cooked in broth.

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