Discussion Note

Emerged challenges for English education in Japan: The emotional baggage of language learners

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Although Japanese students study English for 6 years as one of mandatory subjects in secondary school, they often demonstrate little success with it when they enter higher education. Many students come to university with emotional baggage, or negative thoughts on learning English. These negative functions may be associated with the beliefs that students develop before they come to university. These learner beliefs serve to determine the future behavior of students and hinder or enhance the learning process, thus, it may be effective to investigate the beliefs that limit student motivation and the characteristics of those negative beliefs. While many researchers still depend on the Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory (BALLI) (Horwitz, 1987) questionnaire to determine explicit beliefs, alternative approaches, particularly those designed to reveal implicit beliefs and emotions, can be helpful for understanding when and how it is appropriate for teachers to intervene in the promotion of learning. A new trend in belief studies uses visual outcomes such as drawings and photographs. Such visual accounts have rarely been used as research tolls in the study of language learning and teaching in Japan. In this note, the method of eliciting learners' unconscious beliefs via drawings and interpretation of the drawings is discussed.

Keywords: emotional baggage, English education, learner beliefs

"This morning, I felt that I had a heavy lump in my stomach and have been wondering what it was. Have I forgotten something I should do? Then, I realized that on this day some years ago, I got a phone call from my mom in Japan letting me know that my grandma had passed away. I was in America then and could not go back to Japan to attend the funeral. I had a pain then in my heart. My body remembered an old scar in my heart and it gave me an uneasy feeling." (a Japanese woman)

1 Challenges

Since 2003, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology has encouraged to the nurturing of Japanese students into becoming proficient in the English language. In 2013, they emphasized the education of young people to become so-called "global personnel." This political agenda has affected not only institutions but also individuals.

English will be officially implemented as a subject in elementary schools. In Japan, elementary schools already include regular English lessons for fifth and sixth graders to enhance awareness of foreign cultures and languages. However, English has not been included as a regular subject. Language skills and functions have not been taught.

In spite of the high expectations of the government and society, the average TOEIC score of first-year university students was 424, rising only to 503 by the fourth year (Association of International Communication, 2015). This implies that many students are still far from becoming global personnel demonstrating keen facility of English. There are two reasons for the students' poor English proficiency.

The first one is a consequence of the decline in the number of children in Japan. Due to the decreasing number of students, Japan has entered an era that is characterized by the phrase "anyone-can-enter university." This means that the number of seats at universities in Japan exceeds the number of student candidates. If a student is not picky, they can get into a university in Japan without effort. This phenomenon stokes the decline of students' level of learning: some students enter university without sufficient knowledge or basic literacy competence even without trying to develop them. Such students struggle between expectation of high English proficiency and their deficient ability in English.

The second reason is associated with the learning context of Japanese learners of English. English has achieved the status of a world language (Crystal, 2003; Jenkins, 2009), and it is used as an official language or a second language in several Asian countries. In Japan as well, English has long been considered an important tool for business and communication and English education has been perceived nationwide to be an important school subject; however, English is neither the official language nor a second language. Many Japanese people do not depend on English in their daily life; they can use Japanese at work and communicate with their peers or colleagues in Japanese as long as they work and live within a Japanese-discourse community. Many students, while they study English in school, do not often use English out of school.

Thus, English learners in Japan usually do not have "social practices in a context in which individual learner L2s develop" (Norton & Toohey, 2001, p. 318). In English as Foreign Language (EFL) contexts, particularly in a monolingual country such as Japan, language learners have difficulty in accessing English-speaking communities in real life and in communicating with others who are not similar to them (Ting-Tommy, 1999). The English language is seen as something foreign and not as an integral part of learner's life. In theory, learners could access English communities in the virtual world; however, learners without motivation to learn English do not reach these communities alone. Ushioda (2013) stated thus:

> The unquestioned importance ascribed to English in global, national and educational policy terms does not simply translate into unquestioned positive motivation for learners of English, and this dissonance presents significant challenges for teachers at a local level. (p. 233)

This EFL situation and the requirement to study English have put pressure on students. Perhaps students feel a "permanent sense of crisis" (Ryan, 2009, p. 407) because of the dissonances and tension between English for tests and English for communication. Recent studies on de-motivation conducted in Japan reported that English classes often cause students to lose motivation (Hasegawa, 2004;

Ikeno, 2002; Kikuchi, 2009). It is thought that these de-motivated students bring pain and negative feeling into new classrooms.

2 Remedial pedagogy in Japanese tertiary education

As described above, the decline in students' academic proficiency has come as an invited action to teachers to pursue reeducation of students who arrive at university. This line of education is called "remedial education." Conferences for remedial education have been held since 2006. According to a study by Remedial Educational Association (2012), about 80 percent of national universities and 60 percent of private universities in Japan have implemented some sort of remedial education.

Students for whom remedial education is necessary support not only in acquiring curricular study skills but also in developing communication skills; such students are not motivated to learn and usually are benefit of learning goals. According to a study of Japanese students' and their daily lives by Benesse Education Research Center (2012), 20 percent of students said that they had no friend to discuss their personal problems with and 6 percent of students said that they did not have any friends with whom to talk or enjoy at university. Students meet other students in their first year's classes (62.3%), at clubs or social events (45.1%), during freshman orientation (38.8%), in seminars (25.1%), and in their upper classman classes (22%). This means that if students miss these opportunities, they miss their chance to make friends at university.

3 Drawing as a means to investigate learners' beliefs and emotions

A new trend in belief studies uses visual outcomes such as photographs (Nikula & Pitkänen-Huhta, 2008) and drawings (Kalaja, Alanen & Dufva, 2008). As a data source, Kalaja, Alanen, and Dufva (2008) employed a "sociocultural" approach, meaning that the social and cognitive activity in which human beings participate is mediated by semiotic and material tools. Hence, investigating what kind of mediating artefacts learners use in the learning process and how they use them is likely to be helpful. They employed drawings as a type of visual narrative "to investigate the second language learning process and to identify the mediational means" (p. 189). These authors concluded that an individual's beliefs about EFL learning are situated and multi-voiced and that one research method or modality cannot capture the multiplicity of meanings present in the views held by a learner.

One study (Institution of National Educational Policy, 2014) found that 51.2 percent of Japanese university students had not experienced group work or expressed their thoughts in English before they entered university. Such students may not be verbally expressive. Thus, for these students, it would be helpful if researchers elicited their unconscious thoughts by drawing pictures- the means that does not pressure them on speak or write.

Studies of drawings have been undertaken in the field of psychology and therapy in Japan (Okada, 2009; Tsugeue, 2014). Many theories on the interpretation of art have evolved from ideas in the works of Carl Jung. Jung's (1964) central contribution to psychological understanding is his concept of the unconscious. Although Jung emphasized the importance of symbols depicted in drawings, he did not identify any specific tools for analyzing such drawings.

Furth's (2002) published work 'The secret world of drawings' in which he presented a practical approach to interpreting drawings, includes some focal points on how to approach them to understand certain psychological and somatic events within an individual. The following represents Furth's analysis of drawings.

Data analysis 1: Furth (2002)'s interpretations of drawings

On approaching picture interpretation, Furth (2002) wrote, "the picture knows, and one needs only listen to the picture" (p. 34); this is followed by three principles: noting our initial impression of a picture, looking at focal points, and finally, synthesizing what has been observed to grasp the meanings that learners are trying to convey. A helpful guideline in picture interpretation is to try to discover why some things are drawn in a peculiar fasion (p. 39). The following are some of Furth's interpretations of particular elements of drawings:

1. Odd presentation: specific problems 2. Barriers: objects/people that block communication with others, 3. Center: the core of a problem/matters important to the individual, 4. Out of proportion: large figures (emphasis)/small figures (devaluation), 5. Shape distortion: problem areas, 6. Words: add definition/avoid misinterpretation, 7. Abstract portion: either something that is hard to understand (difficult) or a sign of avoidance (e.g. avoiding showing one's problems or conflicts), 8. Shading: reflection on fixation on or anxiety regarding what the shaded object or shape represents, 9. Colors: feelings and moods

Data analysis 2: Oyama (2000)'s analysis of figures

According to Oyama (2000), people associate round shapes with calmness and angulated shapes as with tension. Other impressions of figures that people hold are as follows: regular shapes represent happiness and eternity; slightly complex but regular lines represent surprise; simple and irregular shapes represent loneliness and creation; irregular polygons represent anger and destruction, slightly complex and regular shapes represent time, and slightly complex and irregular shapes represent anxiety and fear.

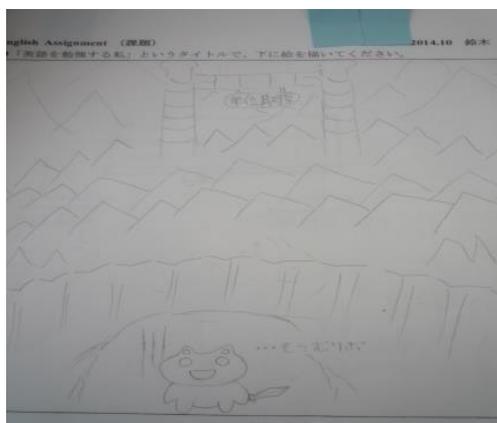*Examples of drawings: Self-portrait of someone studying English*

Figure 1.
Angulated shapes represent a tense feeling. The words "Impossible anymore" characterize the situation of the learner.

Figure 2.
Large figures represent the sizable difficulties of English.

Figure 3.
Angulated shapes represent a tense feeling. Slightly complex and irregular shapes represent anxiety and fear. An irregular shape represents loneliness.

Figure 4.
A barrier (wall) represents something blocking communication with others.

Figure 5.
A large figure represents a problem. The monkey is a metaphor for ignorance and it is at the center of the picture which means that the monkey is a problem.

4 Conclusion

University students now are a far cry from the university students of old. The number of students who have complex backgrounds, carry emotional baggage toward learning, and are not good communicators has seen an increase. To understand those students, researchers in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) or Foreign Language Acquisition (FLA) must learn from insights derived from other disciplines (Mercer, 2011) such as psychology, sociology and literature.

As shown by our examples, some Japanese students have negative thoughts and feelings regarding learning English. If they harbor such those negative thoughts, they may develop physical pain without being able to determine its cause.

Educators and researchers need to develop learning and teaching strategies for those students and develop sensitive methodologies to investigate their psychology. To grasp the beliefs and feelings of the less expressive students, open but limited data sources would be helpful, such as drawings or other forms of creative expression.

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