

The transition from L2 learner to L2 teacher: A longitudinal study of a Japanese teacher of English in Japan

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While newly employed teachers may begin their career with certain ideas and beliefs, these are influenced by different stimuli, encounters and constraints which lead to the ongoing recalibration of their L2 identity. This longitudinal case study explores the L2 journey of a Japanese teacher of English through narrative inquiry using a dynamic approach. Drawing on interview data, the study documents the participant's transition from L2 learner and pre-service teacher to L2 teacher, focusing on the interconnectedness of the L2 learning and teaching environment and extended socio-educational environment, and the effect of educational, geographical, professional, social, and temporal factors. The study provides a holistic view of the complex interplay between the continuing L2 learner identity and emerging L2 teacher identity, as experienced from the perspective of the novice teacher. The complexity of establishing a professional L2 teacher identity in Japan is highlighted, including discovering one's own teaching style, finding ways of adapting teaching to national educational directives, meeting the challenges of motivating students, feeling a sense of responsibility for examination preparation, encountering cross-cultural and power issues in team teaching, contemplating future career options, and coming to terms with employment practices. Based on the findings, the study concludes by offering some suggestions for taking not only the challenges faced by the L2 learner, but also the L2 teacher into account, and ways of encouraging meaningful dialogue between researchers, teacher educators and teachers.

Keywords: teacher education, teacher identity, English language teaching, team teaching, narrative inquiry, complex dynamic system, case study

1 Introduction

The formal second language (L2) learning process is multi-directional and features two main participants: the learner and the teacher. While many studies have focused on the L2 learner and the complexities of the learning process, an understanding of the equally complex L2 teacher identity and teaching process is also essential.

After 10 or more years of being L2 learners, education graduates have to make the transition to becoming L2 teachers. A teacher's first year in a school

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can often be difficult, no matter what subject matter is being taught. Classroom management, curriculum and course requirements (or lack thereof), and interaction with colleagues, students and parents are often cited as the three main challenges, and are probably worldwide issues (Melnick & Meister, 2008). Above all, new teachers put a lot of energy into preparing classes, hoping that they will be easy to understand and interesting, and that their students will achieve their goals and dreams. At the same time, teachers are also undergoing a process of school-based enculturation.

Each culture has a distinct pedagogic orientation in language teacher education. The deeply rooted grammar translation method is acknowledged as an effective means of teaching English grammar skills and reading, the two main skills required to pass university entrance exams in Japan, and thus cannot be ignored (Sakui, 2004). It is therefore not surprising that communicative language teaching (hereafter CLT) has not taken a strong hold in Japanese English education in spite of CLT being heavily promoted by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (hereafter MEXT) (Jimbo et al., 2014).

At some stage in the pre-service training, often during the teaching practicum (also known as teacher training rounds or teaching placements) in the fourth year of study in Japan, students must begin to blend their L2 learner identities with L2 teacher identities. This transformative process is a core component of the learning-to-teach process (Kanno & Stuart, 2011, p. 237).

Identity is a complex and evolving construct. L2 identity refers to how a person understands his or her relationship with their environment, encompassing the temporal, spatial and social structure of that relationship (Norton, 2000). L2 identity is negotiated through interactions and shared experiences (Johnson, 2003; Kanno, 2003), and furthermore is "...influenced by practices common to institutions such as homes, schools and workplaces, as well as available resources, whether they are symbolic or material" (Norton, 2013, p. 10). L2 identity is thus defined in this study as the relationship individuals have with various aspects of learning and teaching the additional language, its culture and people, what L2 learners bring to the relationship, and how they construct and are shaped by this relationship (Norton, 2013).

In this study, the transition and development of the L2 identity of a novice teacher are explored via narrative inquiry as a complex dynamic system, investigating the emerging multiple teacher and learner identities of the young graduate and their complex interplay. Narrative inquiry is a way of understanding and inquiring into the complex aspects of an individual's experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 20; Creswell, 2003, p. 15), capturing the developmental and temporal dimension of L2 experiences. Consequently, a multi-dimensional perspective of L2 identity development is offered through the story of a young teacher.

Complex systems do not emerge independent of the past, and "...their past is also co-responsible for their present behavior" (Cilliers, 1998, p. 4). Retrodictive qualitative modelling, an approach which enables the researcher to trace back "... the reasons why the system has ended up with a particular outcome option" (Dörnyei, 2014, p. 85), was used as a means of exploring this aspect of the participant's L2 identity development. The period of investigation was spread over the first two years of teaching, and this study is furthermore framed by insights gained from a case study conducted while the participant was an undergraduate student (see Benthien, 2015), extending the longitudinal nature of the study.

2 Identity and L2 experiences

2.1 Formation of L2 identity

L2 identity is a composite of past experiences, present and future conditions, and the ever-shifting interpretations that individuals make of these experiences and conditions. Thus, the individual self is closely tied to both internal forces and prior learning experiences, where language learning has taken place within a community of practice (Miyahara, 2014, p. 208). Past experiences of teachers may include formal and informal learning experiences in the L1 country, as well as abroad, remaining as dormant or active components of an individual's identity. For example, a lengthy sojourn in a different country may impact present and future L2 teaching styles and beliefs.

On the other hand, the present and future also have the power to propel individuals. Based on the notion of possible selves (Markus & Nurius, 1986; Markus & Ruvolo, 1989), the L2 motivational self system (Dörnyei, 2005, 2009) has been widely applied in L2 motivation research worldwide. The system comprises three elements: ideal L2 self, ought-to L2 self and the learning situation. The ideal L2 self requires a self which is different from the present self, can be vividly imagined, has attainable but challenging goals, and has effective strategies. The ideal L2 self also needs to be 'switched on' regularly, and be counterbalanced by fears of an undesirable self. The ought-to L2 self responds to external duties and expectations.

While the L2 motivational self system has been the focus of learner-based research, its application to L2 teachers is less common. The link between teacher identity and motivation has been examined by Kubanyiova (2009) as the Possible Language Teacher Self, and highlights the existence of both the ideal L2 teacher self and ought-to L2 teacher self. Ideal L2 teacher selves are defined by images of how the teachers want to appear in front of others, for example, as leaders or facilitators, and what motivates them in terms of their future teacher selves, whereas the ought-to L2 teacher selves are trying to live up to expectations set by surrounding agents, including student goals and school-based or national directives (Kubanyiova, 2009). Gregersen and MacIntyre (2015, p. 281) conclude that to teach is not only to *learn* twice, but *be* twice, and that the learners turned teachers "...function as two interdependent selves". Teachers in Beijing, China were observed to be operating in their own, separate systems "... governed by different attractors and yet they also belonged to a common system" (Kimura, 2014, p. 324).

Motivational transformation periods for L2 learners include the time spent in a host environment (Shoab & Dörnyei, 2005). While research on various aspects of study abroad abound, and some studies (see Segalowitz & Freed, 2004) investigate the dynamic relationship between oral, cognitive and contextual variables in both a study abroad and home university setting, there seem to be a lack of studies that address the transition to the workplace.

2.2 L2 Teacher knowledge, development and identity

Research focusing on teacher learning and teacher cognition has been increasingly investigated within the wider field of L2 teacher education since the 1990s (Kanno & Stuart, 2011, p. 237). Culture, education and experiences shape teacher identity and how teachers teach and learn, while school, teacher, parent and

student expectations also grow out of socio-cultural beliefs and the socio-educational environment. Thus, teacher knowledge is socially constructed and contextually bound within specific school and cultural environments (Wenger, Dinsmore & Villagómez, 2012). Nevertheless, the short-term nature of the majority of studies only allows limited understanding of the changes and development of teacher identity. Longitudinal studies can give insights into the stages a novice teacher goes through, from the initial survival stage and learning to beyond, as teachers learn to overcome initial challenges, and begin to identify themselves as teachers, yet are much less common (Kanno & Stuart, 2011).

Longitudinal research designs are essential for capturing temporal and spatial change; yet a general lack of longitudinal research in SLA remains (Ortega & Ibarra-Shea, 2005). While research focusing on teacher identity development has been carried out (see Kanno & Stuart, 2011; Liu & Fisher, 2006; Nagatomo, 2012, 2016; Tsui, 2007; Wada, 2016; Wenger et al., 2012) there do not seem to be any longitudinal studies focusing on novice Japanese teachers of English at the secondary school level and the development of their L2 identity over time.

2.3 Researching identity as a complex dynamic system

Complex dynamic system theory (CDST) has been put forward as a suitable framework to investigate second language acquisition and L2 motivation in the last decade (Dörnyei, MacIntyre, & Henry, 2015). Factors relating to language teaching and learning are not simply present within the confines of the classroom but within multiple interrelated nested systems, of which the classroom is just one. These systems are spatially and temporally dynamic, with both an emerging and evolving nature (Larsen-Freeman, 2016), and are thus in a state of flux.

Even though novice L2 teachers may have various ideas and beliefs about language teaching and learning based on their own learning experiences at the outset of their careers, these are continually changing and developing as they encounter different stimuli or restrictions. As the teachers become more experienced and comfortable in the workplace, they learn to deal with and apply strategies to stabilize these external factors within their individual system into an attractor state (Hiver, 2015, p. 223), a relatively stable state into which systems move over time. The attractor state may be pleasant or unpleasant in nature (Gregersen & MacIntyre, 2015).

The extent of the interconnectedness within systems is potentially infinite, thus a study cannot follow and report on all possible interactions, and requires the selection of a focal level. However, Lemke and Sabelli (2008, p. 115) suggest that any educational interventions comprise a number of interrelated interventions across levels. Consequently, if directives from a higher or equally placed level affect the focal level, the constraints and degrees of freedom that remain after they are enacted must be considered, as must the characteristics of the lower levels (Lemke & Sabelli, 2008, p. 116).

2.4 English education in Japan

Language learning research should be positioned within its individual socio-cultural and socio-educational environment. In this study, Japanese cultural values and educational context provide the backdrop for exploring an

individual's early years as an English teacher. The interdependent nature of the self in Japanese culture (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Maynard, 1997) highlights the sense of interconnectedness and interdependency individuals have with the surrounding socio-cultural environment. Furthermore, the dual nature of English education in Japan, one being the idealized documented version as seen in education directives and the other their actual classroom implementation, influences teaching at all levels (Sakui, 2004). Specific employment and teaching practices including team teaching (see Brown, 2016), also add a cross-cultural variable to the formal teaching of English in Japan.

In spite of MEXT directives for curricular reform from 2000 (MEXT, 2002, 2007, 2008, 2011), the general and communicative English proficiency of Japanese high school students continues to fall short of MEXT expectations (Aoki, 2017; Steele & Zhang, 2016). A possible reason for this is given by Burrows (2008), who concludes that any new teaching methodology must evolve from within a culture, in other words, a hybrid methodology adapted to existing socio-cultural conditions. Teaching resources must also reflect the shift toward placing an emphasis on communicative competence, but textbooks often do not offer adequate opportunities to improve these skills (Ogura, 2008), and the activities lack communicative authenticity when they are included (McGroarty & Taguchi, 2005). Recent developments in order to "...induce a paradigm shift in language education at the pre-service and in-service level" (Jimbo et al., 2014, p. 35) include the creation of the Japanese Portfolio for Student Teachers of Languages (J-POSTL) based on the European model (EPOSTL). The Test of English for Academic Purposes (TEAP), a four-skill test developed in Japan to assess the English level of Japanese students also offers an alternative to traditional university exams (Osaki, 2013). Lastly, it is interesting to note that MEXT directives for foreign language policy also include the idea of strengthening an individuals' sense of Japanese identity alongside English language skills.

Japan needs to produce a globally competitive workforce that is able to effectively communicate in English (Handford & Matous, 2011). As a result, there is increasing recognition of the importance of English proficiency for Japanese students and employees (Lesley, 2016). It is possible that changes will be forced at the educational level through socio-economic pressures in addition to educational policy. MEXT released the latest reform plan for English education from elementary school to high school in 2013 (MEXT, 2013a). The *English Education Reform Plan Corresponding to Globalization* is to be fully implemented by 2020, the year of the Tokyo Olympics. The main focus of the plan is the nurturing of communication skills. In order to achieve this, teachers at junior and senior high school are asked to teach classes in English, and to encourage understanding and discussion of a wide range of topics in English. The use of English in classes has been explored in a recent study by Saito (2017), and findings indicate that the use of English in class varied among teachers. Reasons that affected the use of English included teachers' own experiences as students, English teaching methods covered in university courses, and external influences, for example, the university entry examinations. Teachers also felt that an abrupt transition to all-English classes would be confusing to students. Even though MEXT reforms prescribe the sole use of English in classes, the pedagogic effectiveness and necessity of exclusively using the L2 in foreign language classes has been questioned. The principled use of the L1 by both students and teachers has been shown to increase both comprehension and

learning of the L2 (Cook, 2001; Shimizu, 2006), and Butzkamm (1998) refers to the use of the L1 as the key to understanding the L2. While selected L1 use in class can have benefits, JTEs who use English in class, and are seen to enjoy doing so, also act as role models (Murphey, 1995).

The 2020 plan also recommends an increase of external staff, including additional assistant language teachers (ALTs) and members of the community proficient in English. Even though the presence of two or more teachers or assistants in the classroom is a common practice in the teaching of various subjects across the curriculum in many countries, especially at the elementary school level, in Japan, team teaching is mainly employed in English language classes. The focus of these team teaching classes is usually some kind of communicative activity (Brumby & Wada, 1992, pp. viii-ix). Non-Japanese speakers of English from both inner and outer circle countries (Kachru, 1985), and who may or may not have professional teaching qualifications (Hasegawa, 2008), are paired with Japanese teachers of English (JTEs) or homeroom teachers (HRTs) from elementary schools through to senior high schools. These paid assistants are referred to as ALTs whereas unpaid members of the community are known as community teaching aides (CTAs).

According to the MEXT ALT handbook (2013b), the presence of non-Japanese staff is a means of facilitating cross-cultural communication and authentic English input and interaction. At the same time, the ALT is also seen as a means of aiding the professional development of JTEs and HRTs. The complex interplay of the ALTs, JTEs and L2 learners in and out of the L2 classroom has been explored in a number of studies (Brown, 2016; Fujimoto-Adamson, 2006; Igawa, 2009; Ohtani, 2010).

Pedagogic, logistical, intercultural, and interpersonal issues have been identified, including misunderstanding and confusion regarding the assigned roles and responsibilities of the JTE, ALT, and HRT, time management issues, for example, lack of time for lesson consultation and preparation, and inadequate understanding and empathy regarding cross-cultural differences (Brown, 2016; Carless & Walker, 2006). Johannes (2012) concludes that student expectations in terms of what ALTs and JTEs should teach also contribute to team-teaching issues. However, it is not a simple one-way issue. While JTEs often feel the ALTs' lack of teaching expertise and motivation is an obstacle to successful team teaching, there are also cases where the ALTs mention similar shortcomings in the JTEs (Igawa, 2009). At the same time, good practices in team teaching have also been discussed (see Carless, 2006), and team teaching classes are seen as contributing to student L2 motivation and cross-cultural understanding by both ALTs and JTEs (Igawa, 2009, p. 162). Even though some studies explore problems in team teaching from both the JTE and ALT perspectives (see Hasegawa, 2008; Igawa, 2009; Johannes, 2012), additional insights can aid our understanding of this complex interpersonal relationship in the Japanese L2 classroom environment.

3 Aim and research questions

The aim of this study is to track the transition from the L2 student identity to the L2 teacher identity, and to explore the continuing transformation process and

the influences which shape myriad aspects of L2 identity. The study was designed around two central questions:

- 1) How do the participant's L2 teacher identity and L2 learner identity evolve?
- 2) What challenges and difficulties has the participant experienced in his first two years of teaching?

Narrative inquiry positioned within a dynamic system framework is a suitable means of answering these questions. During the transition from learner to novice teacher, and from novice teacher to professional teacher, the participant is likely to encounter constant, emergent or non-linear stimuli and restrictions, some predictable in nature, affecting his emerging L2 identity. This study adds to the body of knowledge through the exploration of the dynamic emergence of an individual's L2 identity, and contributes to our understanding of English teacher development in Japan.

4 Methods

4.1 Participant

The study focuses on Ken¹, a young Japanese teacher of English, in his second year of teaching English in Japan. As an undergraduate English education major student, Ken spent 10 months in the UK in his first year of university. Qualitative and quantitative data collected during the pre-employment undergraduate period identified Ken as being a highly motivated learner of English, who was able to maintain L2 motivation throughout the four years of undergraduate study (Benthien, 2015). While he enjoyed the study abroad period and felt it was beneficial, Ken also valued the language education he received in Japan upon his return from the UK. This stance may have been influenced by his unwavering career goal to be a teacher, as he realized that he needed to balance the social and academic dimensions of L2 education. Upon graduation, his English skills were equivalent to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) B2 level. In his first year, Ken worked part-time at a senior high school in Northern Japan. During this time, he team taught classes with ALTs. This was followed by full-time employment at a senior high school in Western Japan. The latter school does not employ any ALTs.

4.2 Procedure

The data were collected during a 90-minute interview, conducted in February 2016. The interview consisted of two main open-ended exploratory items to investigate the experiences of the participant in his first two years of teaching at the two separate schools mentioned in Section 4.1 above. The open-ended questions were related to teaching experiences at each school, and the participant was encouraged to expand and reflect on his responses. This approach was able to generate thick data regarding facts, behavior or attitude (Gass & Mackey, 2008, p. 148), through which the corresponding evolution of the participant's L2 identity could be investigated. Furthermore, retrodictive qualitative modelling made it possible to backtrack origins of changes in

systems (Dörnyei, 2014, p. 85). While outcomes cannot be predicted, they can be recognized, and this three-step approach for exploring complex dynamic systems consists of first identifying outcome patterns or prototypes, followed by interviews with each particular type, and lastly identifying the system's components, interpreting main patterns or signature dynamics, and understanding its mechanism (Dörnyei, 2014, pp. 86-89). The approach was modified for the current study, whereby signature dynamics and outcomes that seemed to contribute to the participant's current teacher persona were explored throughout the interview.

The interview was carried out mainly in English and digitally recorded. The participant was able to confirm and respond in English or Japanese at any time, consequently instances of code-switching were present. Once transcribed, the interview content was coded into themes, and components and patterns were identified and interpreted respectively to gain an understanding of how the participant's identity at the time of the interview had been formed. Mistakes in grammar or language were left intact.

While this study focused on the transformation of the participant's L2 identity after graduation, the results of a case study pertaining to Ken's chronological L2 development from early L2 learning experiences, study abroad and undergraduate experiences and pre-service education (Benthien, 2015) also added to the present study through existing knowledge of the participant as a student.

5 Results and discussion

Our sense of self and identity connect various aspects of the language learning experience. They assist, shape, and direct encounters as both L2 teacher and L2 learner (Williams, Mercer & Ryan, 2015, p. 45). In the past, Ken's L2 identity was made up primarily of the L2 learner identity, while his L2 teacher identity was developing in the background. Graduation from university and subsequent employment as an English teacher reversed these positions. As such, Ken's first priority was to become accustomed to the working environment; each school being a unique system operating within its own boundaries, while also part of a greater whole. During the interview, Ken reflected on his first and second year of teaching, giving insights to the development path of a young teacher through his responses to various encounters in his teaching environment.

5.1 Transformation and evolution of L2 identity

Pre-service teachers become in-service teachers on the day they step into their own classroom. It was clear that Ken enjoyed his first year of teaching at a public senior high school located close to his hometown. As a part-time replacement position, he only taught seven classes a week; one of these was a team-teaching class. Consequently, Ken had plenty of free time as he was not required to be involved with extra responsibilities, for example, supervision of club activities. On the other hand, Ken voiced the opinion that he only became a 'real' teacher once he commenced a full-time teaching position in his second year as a teacher. He is now teaching 18 classes a week, is actively involved in club activities and meetings, and is sharing homeroom responsibilities with a

more experienced teacher. Even though he admits that teaching full time is hard work, it has led to greater confidence, enjoyment and job satisfaction. Thus, to Ken, a professional teaching identity is not simply composed of teaching duties and skills, but also includes administrative responsibilities, for example, attendance at meetings and classroom teacher responsibilities as well as involvement in extra-curricular activities which are an important part of Japanese school culture. Consequently, a sense of belonging to the teaching profession, or a strong teacher identity, did not emerge clearly until Ken obtained a full-time position.

Some changes could also be observed between the study abroad L2 learner identity and the Japan-based L2 learner identity. Even though he has an outgoing personality, and was happy to talk to the locals while in the UK, Ken commented that it was difficult to interact with foreigners living in or visiting Japan. Ken recalled one situation on a bus, where he was simply lost for words when asked some questions by tourists. Ken was not able to explain this reticence, apart from repeating that "I am in Japan".

One possible reason for this difference is that the majority of visitors to Japan are from non-English speaking countries, resulting in an instinctive resistance and anxiety to interact with unknown non-Japanese. This highlights a difficulty in changing a mindset to one where English is an international language rather than a language belonging solely to inner circle countries, as discussed in Matsuda (2009). This stance is supported by the fact that Ken communicated without any inhibitions with friends of an English-speaking background while in his hometown. Even though impromptu encounters are possible opportunities to communicate in English and create new relationships, Ken is finding it challenging to take advantage of them.

Teachers often draw on inner resources formed by prior experiences. As Ken had been a participant in a study abroad program during his undergraduate degree, where communicative teaching methods were emphasized, it was possible that this experience had had an impact on his evolving individual teaching style. Yet the interview revealed that this was not the case. The period in the UK was a motivational episode for Ken as a learner, and he was more concerned about improving his own English skills than paying attention to how he was taught. In other words, even though past experiences have been shown to influence future actions, the identity of the self at the time, in this case student or teacher must also be considered. Ken's comments further indicate that even though he did have a strong future ideal L2 self projected by his objective of becoming a teacher during his undergraduate years, the conscious connectedness of experiences as current L2 learner and future L2 teacher was weak. Within a complex system, time alters factors, and it is Ken's L2 teacher identity which now understands the value of the UK experience. During the interview, Ken expressed an interest in returning to the UK to observe some classes, believing that he may be able to adopt some of the teaching methods, both for teaching motivated students with good English skills as well as those who are not showing an interest in English.

The development of a professional L2 teaching identity is fostered by acceptance within the profession. Part-time teaching and contract teaching conditions appeared to have affected Ken's resolution to continue teaching by the end of his second year. He said that in one way, he felt free to seek other career opportunities precisely because of his employment condition as a contract

teacher, but on the other hand this sense of freedom was also brought about by the fact that he felt he was not quite a part of the teaching profession, or accepted fully into the teaching community. Thus, even though he was a full-time teacher at this stage, a sense of legitimate peripheral participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 55) did not seem to be a part of Ken's L2 teacher identity.

At the time of the interview, Ken was contemplating a post-graduate degree or career change in the near future. The initial study abroad experience in the UK shaped his choice in terms of university locations, due to a sense of familiarity and personal connections, as he is still in touch with people he met on the program via Facebook. As Ken put it "...if I had been to the USA, I would go to the USA ... I am afraid of other countries; the UK city is my second hometown". In this way, the ideal L2 teacher self was replaced by images of an ideal L2 self in different professions as Ken reconsidered his career options. When I spoke with Ken in November 2016, he had received a permanent job offer from his current school, and is now planning on remaining a teacher for the foreseeable future.

5.2 Challenges and difficulties faced

L2 teaching, in particular at secondary schools in Japan, does not occur in a vacuum. While the L2 teacher and class may form an independent system, it is closely connected to larger systems which in turn direct events within the smaller systems. At the same time, past experiences as an L2 learner and language learning beliefs may affect how individual teachers approach their own classes and develop their own teaching styles.

Recent MEXT directives for English language education focus on improving the communication skills of students at elementary and secondary schools. Barriers to actually implementing stronger communicative English teaching methods into the curriculum have been discussed in a number of studies (see Dimoski, 2006; Kikuchi & Brown, 2009; Nishino, 2011; MEXT, 2008).

Past the simple survival stage of teaching, Ken is now forming his own teaching style, and considering ways of responding to student needs, parental and school expectations, MEXT directives and his own beliefs. As illustrated in Excerpt 1, this has resulted in a search for means to blend communicative teaching methodology and practice of items commonly found on university entrance exams.

Excerpt 1

It is so hard much harder to obey MEXT style. I know it is important to speak and communicate with others in English inside and out of class but you know, entrance exams do not concentrate on communication and entrance exams are our goals, so you know it directs learning. I am trying to make students speak English in my class, but it concentrates on Q and A of exercises in limited cases/areas.

Excerpt 1 highlights the challenge of balancing two opposing attractors operating within a system. While a communicative approach to L2 teaching, a part of MEXT directives since the late 1980s, is also *in sync* with Ken's own views on language teaching, the opposing attractor of focusing on examination content (for university entry) also exerts pressure. Although it is easy for outsiders to view the emphasis on teaching to exams in a negative manner, the

teachers actually view this teaching practice as one of their responsibilities to the students, school and parents. Furthermore, studying for exams is considered character-building and motivating for learners in Japan, and the exams are the culmination of a 12-year educational process (Rohlen & LeTendre, 1998a, pp. 8–9). However, while reading-based tasks continue to dominate many exams, sections requiring productive language skills also exist (Kikuchi, 2006). Furthermore, increased usage of the TEAP or similar four-skill language exams by universities may also direct language learning at the secondary school level in the future. Teachers in fact may place “... undue blame on the presence of the examination for what they are doing; blame which seems to be based on their perceptions, which might not accurately reflect the actual contents of the examinations” (Watanabe, 2008, p.149). Thus, teachers may adapt their teaching style on inaccurate assumptions.

The ongoing close connection between the L2 learner identity and the L2 teacher identity was captured in a number of Ken’s comments as shown in Excerpt 2 and Excerpt 3.

Excerpt 2

I like speaking English; I want to have a, make it (*classes*) more student-centered, want them to speak English more, so I can speak more.

Excerpt 3

I teach English, I speak English but there are few chances to communicate for me and the students. They hesitate to speak: Yes, No, OK, but that’s all.

Excerpt 2 and Excerpt 3 clearly indicate the presence of multiple L2 identities as learner and teacher. Acknowledging the need to continue learning and maintain existing language skills, Ken saw both classroom-based speaking practice and class preparation, in particular preparation related to reading passages, as a good way to brush up on and consolidate existing language skills. Similar comments highlighting the learner and teacher interaction within individuals were made by participants in a study by Gregersen and MacIntyre (2015).

However, the improvement of L2 skills was revealed to be a more difficult task. Ken’s busy schedule did not permit him to set aside time for focused English study. In particular, Ken expressed concern at the inability to improve his spoken English skills since becoming a teacher. In other words, Ken’s existing L2 learner identity was frustrated at being restricted by the responsibilities of the newer L2 teacher identity. During these periods it seems Ken was playing the role of L2 teacher, but still identified himself as an L2 learner. Similar results were observed by Kanno and Stuart (2011) for novice teachers.

Team teaching is a well-researched issue in English education in Japan, and thus a predictable attractor phenomenon. In his first school, Ken taught with a North American ALT and a British ALT. Ken’s comments related to teaching with the two ALTs capture not only the challenges of this particular component of the Japanese English education system but also the dynamic individualized nature of this issue. In other words, while a predictable phenomenon, it is difficult to generalize outcomes.

Ken's working relationship with the ALTs differed dramatically; this showcases the importance of employing effective interpersonal skills with cross-cultural understanding and communication skills and strategies. For example, while the North American ALT with four years of teaching experience as an assistant teacher and Japanese language skills was the main teacher in the team-teaching classes, lessons plans were discussed prior to the class as Ken explains in Excerpt 4.

Excerpt 4

... I planned with the ALT, she always asked me if the lesson plan is OK, can you check, she explained a lot about her class, so each time I had a class I knew what was going on in my class.

Ken also commented that the ALT was 'mother like'. Thus underscored is the odd situation where the JTE is both younger and less experienced than the ALT. Possible problems in this reverse power relationship were averted by the ALT's sensitivity and interpersonal skills.

The British ALT Ken worked with was in many ways an opposite of the first ALT. While experienced, he could not speak Japanese. Teaching at multiple schools, the ALT used similar materials across schools, resulting in a mismatch of student abilities, class content, and levels. Furthermore, Ken felt that the ALT was not able to motivate the students, indicating the presence of pedagogical issues. In addition, the ALT sometimes scared the students by waving classroom items around while teaching. Even though the teachers were concerned about this particular behavior, they did not feel comfortable to ask him to stop. Direct confrontation is avoided in Japanese culture, and negative feedback is often given in private (Meyer, 2014). Yet in this case, the issue remained unsolved.

Above all, the second ALT wanted to be in charge "...he is a kind of kind, but he is so cool, not in a good way ...like a boss", and Ken felt he was being put in the 'assistant' role. In this way, power balance issues, which were eased through the sensitivity shown by the first ALT, were aggravated by the actions of the second ALT. Consequently, while team teaching is a predictable attractor phenomenon, outcomes are affected by the dynamic nature of interactions at the individual level.

The team-teaching experiences resulted in Ken's mixed belief about the effectiveness of employing ALTs in senior high schools. Even though he was well aware of the possible benefits of the ALT presence in schools, Ken feels that JTEs need to be able to teach communicative-based classes on their own, and become confident in teaching classes mainly in English as per MEXT guidelines as part of their professional L2 identity. Many teachers and researchers believe that rather than increasing the number of paid ALTs and unpaid CTAs, the training/retraining of JTEs is more important. Nevertheless, MEXT is planning to boost the number of ALTs and promote the utilization of community members, as well as improve teaching skills of JTEs (MEXT, 2013a).

6 Conclusion

A number of implications arise from the results of this study. First, visualizing longitudinal narrative inquiry as a dynamic system poses challenges, as it is

difficult to establish clear boundaries for the interconnected systems. Thus, while the strength of this type of study is its holistic nature, trying to combine all the strands is potentially problematic. Secondly, when participants are reflecting on past experiences, the accuracy of recall and perceptions versus past and present reality, and the implications for development of the self must be considered. Lastly, adding classroom observations, a written diary component, and parent and student interviews would offer a clearer link between teacher identity and responsibilities, classroom practices, and paint a more holistic picture of the English education context experienced by L2 teachers in Japan.

The retrodictive qualitative modelling approach used in this study was able to capture some signature dynamics that led to the young teacher's current L2 identity. The fact that Ken did not feel he was a 'real teacher' unless employed permanently and full time implies that teacher identity is shaped by employment conditions and practices. In addition, echoing conclusions drawn by Kanno and Stuart (2011), it seems to be the development of the L2 teacher identity, of which teaching knowledge and skills is a part, which shapes the professional teacher and explains teaching practices. Moreover, the L2 teacher identity is further mediated by socio-educational and socio-cultural expectations which add a culture-specific aspect to language teaching. This suggests that undergraduate education courses should not only focus on teaching skills or 'how to teach' but also on supporting emerging teacher identity within existing socio-cultural conditions.

Highlighted in this study was also the continuing gap between MEXT directives and actual teaching practices at senior high school in particular. It is up to the respective main actors in the field of English education to take responsibility to reduce the gap between what should be taught, is taught and how it is ultimately assessed, and to coordinate required changes. If the current status quo persists, L2 teachers must continue to overcome the distractors within their 'systems' and find ways to make the set textbook and their classes more communicative, while also preparing students for examinations. At the same time, teacher education courses could also include suggestions of how to resolve this issue.

Even though team teaching has been a part of Japanese English education for over 30 years, it is obvious that issues remain. In spite of existing workshops to improve team teaching in Japanese schools, further workshops or education courses to maximize the benefits of this system peculiar to Japan and some of its neighboring countries seems to be required. Existing research and publications also offer insights into cross-cultural encounters in education, and may be an effective means of gaining an understanding of pedagogical ideas and practices prevalent in each other's cultures. *Teaching and Learning in Japan* (Rohlen & LeTendre, 1998b), for example, offers insights into Japanese learning and teaching in many contexts, while research on cultural dimensions by Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov (2010) or communication styles (Meyer, 2014) is also of value. Addressing issues related to logistics, for example, setting aside regular time slots in which the JTE and ALT can plan classes is also essential. Lastly, exploring team teaching from L2 teacher identity perspectives may provide further insights which could be used in professional development and teacher training courses.

As this study has shown, L2 teachers operate their individual systems while being affected by predictable, often constraining attractor states. If studies do

not take these into account, the value of results and suggestions offered by research is likely to be minimized or ignored by in-service teachers. Teachers and researchers need to respect each other, acknowledge their individual strengths and weaknesses, and take a good look at the teaching and learning process (Larsen-Freeman, 2009). Research results should assist those directly involved in L2 learning and teaching (Ushioda, 2013, p. 11) and more opportunities for collaboration and dialogue sought (Nakata, 2013, p. 320).

Despite some limitations, results of the study highlight the intricate interdependent relationships between the teacher, students, individual school, MEXT directives, agents including colleagues, ALTs, parents and the Japanese socio-cultural and socio-educational environment. These in turn lead to an ongoing recalibration of initial conditions, thus changing the trajectory and nature of the teaching and learning process. At the same time, the evolving L2 identity as learner and teacher is mediated by a variety of factors, including time and future career goals. L2 identity is in a state of flux, and while this study cannot provide any simple answers to the issues raised, it is a timely reminder that further research on L2 teacher identity is required to help all concerned in L2 education to gain a more detailed understanding of the complexity of the learning and teaching process.

Endnote

¹ The participant's name is a pseudonym, and some details have been generalized or changed to protect his identity.

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