How do Bicultural English Language Learners Perceive Their Identity and Issues of Globalization in a Japanese University?

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learner identity, cultural capital, imagined communities, English as a foreign language, globalization, learner motivation

ABSTRACT

This research aims to explore how issues of learner identity and globalization affect the academic and professional motivations of bicultural or multicultural university students studying English at Japanese universities. An analysis of student interview responses will examine the socio-cultural issues that prompted these students to choose to study English in Japan at the tertiary level with the goal of understanding how globalization, the pursuit of cultural capital, and the concept of imagined communities have contributed to this decision. This article will consider what factors motivated students to pursue English language studies as well as the contrast between university language programmes' emphasis on English as a crucial professional tool for success and the relative lack of English language usage in daily Japanese life. Examining the intersection of identity and language learning in an expanding circle country such as Japan, where high demand for English education is relatively recent, can help educators and administrators to better students' experiences in increasingly globalizing Japanese universities. Furthermore, insights gained from these students' experiences with English education in Japan can contribute to a more precise understanding of the effectiveness of globalization as a component of university English programmes.

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1. SYNOPSIS

The focus of this study is the socio-cultural factors that influence a student's decision to pursue English language education in Japan. The study considers students' rationales and motivations using the concepts of learner identity, cultural capital, and imagined communities. The research examines the realities and goals for the future of students at a private Japanese university. The basis of the study is to assess the aspirations and impressions of students in relation to a private Japanese university in an English as a foreign language (EFL) context. The research has implications for teachers and administrators in that it attempts to define and analyse the complicated issues surrounding learner identity in an increasingly globalized world.

The research was conducted over a six-month period in Japan from April of 2015 at a private Japanese university. There were seven students. Semi-structured interviews were done with all participants.

As English education has become more and more prevalent globally, discourse surrounding private Japanese universities has evolved as well. Much scholarship in second language acquisition (SLA) theory has focused on the importance of the 'critical period hypothesis' (CPH) as it relates to learners, and more is being written about socio-cultural issues that are embedded in SLA. This research employs notions highlighted in Peirce (1995) that "SLA theorists have not developed a comprehensive theory of social identity that integrates the language learner and the language learning context". Though this gap in knowledge is now being addressed with more frequency, the studies that have looked at how issues of identity, social positioning, and access to the target language community can influence success in second language acquisition (Norton, 1997, 2000, 2001; Peirce, 1995; Ricento, 2005; Wenger, 1998) have primarily dealt with adult language learners. This article will investigate identity issues for young adult language learners by examining the social construction that affects second language learners in a private Japanese university with the goal of initiating a conversation about the role of socio-cultural features in students' decisions to choose English education at a tertiary school level.

While SLA scholarship regarding CPH will also be covered in the literature review and may potentially be valuable in ascertaining success of second language (L2) acquisition, the main intent of this study is to address the concepts of learner identity, language as 'social investment' (Bourdieu 1977; Peirce 1995), and the pursuit of 'imagined communities' (Anderson 1983; Norton & Kamal 2003) as they relate to SLA. Social investment refers to

the cultural capital that language learners gain when becoming speakers of another language and the social status and influence this symbolic capital represents. Our study finds that language learners might feel pressure to enrol in these university English programmes. They may see these programmes as a way to gain cultural capital and a higher position in society; they might also see rewards in gaining awareness of cultures beyond their own in an expanding global society. Like discourse in SLA regarding language learners, stakeholders' perceptions, beliefs, views, and apprehensions should be discussed in association with English programmes for university students. Issues regarding age and SLA are looked at in this study through a socio-cultural lens to clarify reasons why stakeholders pursue and invest in private Japanese university English programmes. By taking into account socio-cultural factors regarding English in the Japanese context, it is our intention to present and analyse data that may help in better understanding these factors influencing stakeholders in regard to studying English in Japan.

The study was done in Japan; notions of the 'inner', 'outer', and 'expanding circles' of English are frequently referred to. Put simply, Kachru (1986) distinguishes between inner countries (*e.g.*, the UK and the US), in which English is the first language, outer circle countries with colonial pasts (*e.g.*, India, Pakistan, and Singapore), and expanding circle countries where English is quickly gaining importance (*e.g.*, South Korea and Japan). Kachru notes of the expanding importance of English:

"[c]ompetence in English and the use of the language signify a transmutation: an added potential for material and social gain and advantages. One sees this attitude in what the symbol stands for; English is considered a symbol of modernization, and an extra arm for success and mobility in culturally and linguistically complex and pluralistic societies."

In this research, these notions present in expanding circle countries will be addressed and analysed. Kachru's construct for English usage, though purely geographical, is convenient when speaking about a country like Japan, where English is not a second language but a foreign language, and the push for English fluency among the population is relatively recent.

2. RATIONALE

The rationale for this study is to assess how the English language is viewed by stakeholders (*i.e.*, students). Firstly, a description of the context at Japanese universities

will be set out. Secondly, research questions will be put forward that focus on the goal of determining stakeholders' views of studying English. The study concentrates on the discourses surrounding students' exposure to L2 immersion and socio-cultural issues that are involved in L2 development.

Issues of identity, social positioning, and imagined communities in a Japanese university could potentially lead to an increased understanding of learner choices regarding these types of programmes. As English becomes ever more part of life in Asia, it might be beneficial to seriously evaluate the reasons and perceived benefits of studying English at Japanese universities. Studies like this may be informative in understanding students' motivations and concerns regarding English language study.

3. RESEARCH AIMS

Though early exposure to English in the study can be seen in the context of developmental psychology, the overarching aim of this research will be to argue the socio-cultural basis for English education, taking into account issues of identity that influence student choices in attending a Japanese university. The research attempts to present stakeholders' views on a Japanese university in Japan so that judgments about what motivates stakeholders to engage in these programmes may be applied to other language learners in similar contexts.

In assessing the motivations for stakeholders to engage in a private university English programme, the following presents a literature review that focuses on relevant scholarship regarding exposure to an L2 as well as dealing with the socio-cultural issues present in the field of language learning. The article opens with a discussion of the 'critical period hypothesis' and deals with how researchers have both supported and disputed its importance in relation to 'earlier is better' in SLA. Next, policy regarding English programmes will be addressed and how these policies are influenced not only by the idea that university programmes are important to mastery of the L2, but also how English is positioned and marketed in the 'expanding circle' (Kachru, 1986). Finally, issues associated with identity, cultural capital, imagined communities, and notions of language and power will be offered so that these concepts can be applied in relation to our study of English programmes in Japan.

4. IDENTITY, SOCIO-CULTURAL INFLUENCES, AND UNIVERSITY ENGLISH COURSES

Identity will be discussed in relation to how stakeholders in these programmes position themselves. These issues of identity are important to students' choices and motivations. Issues of identity that influence choices for engaging in English programmes are not straightforward; individual identities are varied and often evolve over time. Pavlenko and Blackledge (2004) note that "since individuals often shift and adjust ways in which they identify and position themselves in distinct contexts, identities are best understood when approached in their entirety, rather than through consideration of a single aspect or subject position". Thus, there is some complication as these identities shift and are employed in different contexts.

This capacity for multiple and shifting identities holds significant implications for learners and teachers of English due to the close relationship between language and identity. "There is no way to make sense of individuals outside of language. A person has to have a sense of her own identity, or subject position, in order to act" (Martinsson & Reimers, 2007). Bicultural students' identities will be addressed as a vehicle for students' intentions for enrolling in programmes.

4. 1 CULTURAL CAPITAL

Peirce (1995), through Bourdieu's (1977) notion of 'cultural capital', highlighted language as a form of capital—employing an economic metaphor. Cultural capital can be seen as a socio-cultural factor that is at stake when learners make investments in their language learning. In the assumption of cultural capital and investment, Peirce (1995) claimed:

"forms of cultural capital have a higher exchange value than others. [I]f learners invest in a second language they do so with the understanding that they will acquire a wider range of symbolic and material resources, which will [in] return increase the value of their cultural capital. Learners will expect or hope to have a good return on that investment."

Issues such as these might be central in influencing students' consideration in choosing costly English programmes. In Japan, the return on cultural capital may come in the form of access to education or social networks, as well as imagined communities.

Students invest in English for multiple reasons. Reasons for this investment might go far beyond their immediate contexts. An investment in English as a target language can also be seen in relation to the global dominance of English. Pennycook (2001) noted "its spread has not been the coincidental by-product of changing global relations but rather the deliberate policy of English speaking countries protecting and promoting their economic and political interests. [E]nglish is in the world and plays an important role in the reproduction of global inequalities". Thus, stakeholders involved in university programmes can be seen as positioning themselves in a more advantageous situation by engagement in the hierarchical structure of global English. Also, there are what some may see as frightening consequences to being on the wrong side of the English divide. In a sense, stakeholders pursuing university programmes are positioning themselves on the right side of the English divide.

Issues of cultural capital, like monetary capital, have a strong power component; it might be said that language learners may benefit from cultural assimilation to the dominant first language (L1) culture, but this could also be addressed in relation to EFL contexts. While in L1 contexts there may be implications for language success in how much the language learner is willing to assimilate into the culture of the dominant L1 community, in EFL contexts, additional concerns of assimilation into social class and social constructs complicate this process.

This is especially true in an 'expanding circle' country where access to an L2 must be paid for, sometimes at great cost. English and literacy become a way for some language learners to excel and achieve educational goals, while these skills are absorbed in cultural significance. However, in the Japanese context, the cultural currency of English has less to do with the L1 community and instead might be viewed as a vehicle for upward mobility in an EFL environment.

4. 2 IMAGINED COMMUNITIES

Kanno and Norton (2003) suggest that the notion of 'imagined communities' "refers to groups of people, not immediately tangible and accessible, with whom we connect through the power of the imagination" (p. 214). The notion of imagined communities might also be a strong component in parental choices regarding English education in the Japanese context. Imagined communities in relation to English are developed by the stakeholders but also get replicated and are validated by teachers and institutions (Norton & Kamal, 2003). In Japan, where English is viewed as being associated with higher education, business, and leisure, it is important for institutions to validate learners'

imagined communities and expectations.

A discussion of imagined communities aids in the understanding of how language learners view themselves in relation to the wider English-speaking world. Norton and Kamal (2003) notes:

> "when language learners begin a program of instruction, they may be invested in communities that extend beyond the four walls of the classroom [and] a learner's imagined community invites an imagined identity, and a learner's investment in the target language must be understood within this context."

Thus, language is transformative in the fact that it allows learners to access broader imagined communities both inside and outside of their immediate context. The imagined community of English speakers involves, but goes beyond, a British or American brand of English, and involves communities of English-speaking Japanese living in Japan and how those Japanese English speakers are seen and positioned in society.

The identity stakeholders wish to construct might depend very much on these 'imagined communities' in which they inhabit and also hope to achieve access to. "An identity, then, involves not merely a single pathway but is rather of nexus of multi-membership. The work of identity is ongoing, and identity is not an essential core" (King, 2008). Therefore, learners have a choice of identities in which they are able to access and associate with language learning.

However, the concept of imagined communities, like identity constructs, can be seen to shift in relation to stakeholder inclinations. Block (2006) spoke of Gidden's (1991) work and the idea of 'ontological security', which sees identity as changing in accordance with individual needs.

> "This ongoing search for ontological security takes place at the crossroads of the past, present, and future, as their day-to-day interactions with their environments, individuals are constantly reconciling their current sense of self and their accumulated past, with a view of dealing with what awaits them in the future." (Block, 2006)

In different situations and because of the different needs and experiences of the learners and identity, learner identity is, in a sense, in flux and constantly being

contributed to by life experiences. Identity in relation to SLA can be seen as a means for the learner to position herself or himself, and to anticipate ways that successful language learning can contribute to professional and personal achievement.

4. 3 LANGUAGE AND POWER

Issues of cultural capital have a strong power component. Language often functions as a means to empower and exclude. Pennycook (1994), discussing the English language, argues that "its widespread use threatens other languages: it has become the language of power and prestige in many countries, thus acting as a crucial gatekeeper to social and economic progress". This aspect of English as a gatekeeper can also be applied to contexts that exclusively involve university English students.

Finally, language acquisition against the backdrop of global commercial marketing might also be taken into account in a discussion of reasons of stakeholders' rationale for early exposure. Niño-Murcia (2003) notes that there is "the perception of the English language as the strongest linguistic currency in today's society, or more pointedly, […] as something that needs to be attained in order to participate as a consumer in the global market, has transformed the study of English from an instructional activity, a tool for learning, into an object of consumption". In a context when English is utilised in advertisements and many movies, toys, and comic books coming from abroad, it might be argued that language learners are exposed early on to the discourse of English as a mode of consumerism.

The idea that 'earlier is better' often influences choices made by families and policy makers and has had a great effect on the pursuit of English programmes, especially in the Japanese context. The issues surrounding these programmes have strong ties to the identities of the stakeholders and their imagined communities and cultural capital. Policy makers often grapple with public perception that it is necessary for citizens to be proficient in English and discuss how to make their constituents feel they are being addressed. Policies regarding L2 education almost always involve children; governmental pushes for adults to acquire foreign language proficiency are rare. 'Earlier is better' in foreign language education remains an important issue to many.

This article will explore the socio-cultural issues dealing with identity that are present in a discussion of English programmes. Issues of identity that have less to do with benefits of such programmes and more to do with how stakeholders' involvement, views, and social positioning are related to the programme, the English-speaking L1 community,

their neighbours, and their peers in Tokyo, as well as the expanding English-speaking community in a global context.

5. QUALITATIVE METHODOLOGY

In order to achieve an understanding of participants' views and feelings associated with English, a qualitative approach was taken to gathering and analysing the data. A qualitative approach can be especially useful in dealing with data that involves university English students. Rhee *et al.* (2005) noted, "qualitative research which is researcher-involved [is] subjective and gives a rich description of early educational phenomenon". Mason (1997) gives a broad working definition of qualitative research that describes three main points that should be considered. The main tenets in Mason's definition of qualitative research include:

(a) Qualitative research is philosophical in nature and should be concerned with "how the social world is interpreted, understood, experienced or produced."

(b) Qualitative research is "based on methods of data generation which are flexible and sensitive to the social context in which they are produced."

(c) The research "aims to produce rounded understandings on the basis of rich, contextual and detailed data."

Mason's framework is useful in approaching a qualitative methodology at a very basic starting point. The aim was to get a sense of how participants' experiences inform and produce their views and influence their choices in the social realm; these three tenets adequately describe the holistic approach of this research. Rhee *et al.* (2005) notes, "qualitative research, which is research-involved [is] subjective and gives a rich description of educational phenomenon." As our research questions focus on the feelings and perceptions of stakeholders in a Japanese university and work within a context that involves students, we have chosen to use an exclusively qualitative approach to the study.

6. RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND PHILOSOPHICAL UNDERPINNINGS

The issues of identity, social positioning, and 'imagined communities' will be looked at in relation to the research questions. The research question most central to the study is:

(a) How do bicultural English language learners perceive their identity and issues of globalization in a Japanese university?

This main research question brought up more specific questions as well, such as:

(b) Why are university students in Japan enrolling in English language-related courses?

(c) Who has access to English education in this context?

(d) How do stakeholders view English?

(e) How do stakeholders position themselves in their immediate context in relation to English?

These questions are primarily approached through the lens of concepts related to socio-cultural issues of identity that might be taken into account when stakeholders choose to engage in English programmes. So as not to neglect matters in the qualitative study, and because the research focuses more on the feelings of the participants than on hard quantitative facts, a phenomenological approach to the research will be taken. Hermeneutics in particular will be employed as a philosophical approach to the study. Heywood and Stronach (2005) writes "[h]ermeneutics tends to reject that there is a truth 'out there' with 'facts' corresponding. Instead it emphasises understanding as situated event in terms of individuals and their situations – an inevitably prejudiced viewpoint". The aim is to decode the data, even though individuals' viewpoints are prejudiced in relation to their own context and situations. It is through these subjective viewpoints that the research may offer a clearer picture of stakeholders' motivations regarding English programmes.

Methodology engaged in this study will attempt to piece together participants' views of English programmes at university in the Japanese context. Data was collected in the form of interviews. Seven university students were given semi-structured interviews to assess their feelings regarding the programme and their general views on English education in Japan. Initially, a questionnaire was involved in the research design, but it was not used as an instrument after piloting.

Reasoning for research instrumentation involved meant to bring understanding of the

socio-cultural aspects that contribute to concerns present in English education. Wetherell (2002) suggests sometimes complicated social issues that involve identity and social construction in research, "[o]n the one hand, people 'make themselves' […] every social identity can be seen as a 'project', an active attempt to unify diverse and contradictory themes. On the other hand, people also seem to be 'made' or 'produce'". In dealing with the data, special interest was paid to the production of participants' socially constructed identities that are involved in the decisions for pursuing learning English at a university.

7. DATA COLLECTION

Rikkyo University is a private Japanese university with two campuses, one in Ikebukuro, Tokyo and another in Niiza, Saitama. The research for this study was conducted at the Ikebukuro campus. Individuals participating in the study were students affiliated with the Department of Intercultural Communication.

The Department of Intercultural Communication employs faculty of various national and ethnic backgrounds, including five native English-speaking faculty. In this department, students study various topics, such as linguistics, interpretation, translation, gender studies, culture, intercultural communication, media, and international relations, in English and Japanese. Students also have access to numerous native English instructors and small discussion classes through the English Language Center. Most classes contain around 20 students and last 90 minutes.

Rikkyo is a university with a relatively diverse student body. In addition to traditional Japanese students, numerous bicultural students also attend. Bicultural students are understood here as either international students who have left their home countries to obtain a degree at a Japanese university, or local students who have grown up in Japan with one or more non-Japanese parent. These students are particularly common in the Department of Intercultural Communication, with students' ages ranging from 18 to 23 years old.

The interviews were completed over a six-month period at the Ikebukuro campus. A research design was completed, which included planned interviews and consent forms from students. Purposive sampling was employed as per Cohen *et al*. (2000), who explains, "researchers handpick the cases to be included in the sample on the basis of their judgment and their typicality."

7. 1 RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS

The researcher recorded data and completed interviews. The following methods comply with Mason's (1997) premise that methods are 'sensitive' and 'flexible' in relation to the context of the study. They also comply with Moustakas' (1990) description of getting "direct conscious description of experience and the underlying dynamics or structures that account for the experience." Qualitative methodology and getting a sense of the participants' feeling regarding the research questions are vital to the way in which the data are looked at in the study. It is for this reason that semi-structured interviews were chosen as part of the research design.

7. 2 SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

Semi-structured interviews were conducted in English with students on a one-to-one basis to ensure a comfort level to the participants and ensure their answers were not influenced by others as might occur in a focus group. Fylan (2005) claims, "by using semi-structured interviews […] we can address aspects that are important to individual participants, and by doing so we can gain a better understanding of the research question". Therefore, semi-structured interviews were done to help broaden the way in which the research questions were addressed. Though the participants were given interviews in their L2, it should be noted that all students were fluent in English.

In the interviews, a post-modern approach was taken, in which a partnership between the researcher and participants is sought. Fontana (2001) notes that the difference between traditional and postmodern interviewing "is that the so called detached researcher and interviewer are recast as active agents in the interview practice and attempts are made to disprivilege their agency". Because the research focuses on views of the participants, attempts were made at not privileging the views of either the interviewer or interviewee. This view was informed by Denzin (1995), who sees the interview process as the subject of student.

Interviews were done employing the conventions of Berg (2004), who noted "the interview must rely on the establishment and maintenance of good rapport". Because the researcher had taught in the context and knew the participants on a personal level, a rapport was established that allowed the participants to speak in an open way. Because of the nature of the research questions, a semi-structured approach to the interview was taken. As Matthew and Sutton (2004) notes, "[the] qualitative interview is that which tends towards the unstructured and the unstandardized". For this reason, an attempt was made

to allow the interviewee to speak freely so meaning could be constructed through the interview process, though questions were also directed at gaining insight into issues associated with the main research questions. Each interview was audio recorded and parts of the interview were transcribed.

7. 3 ETHICS

As with any study, ethics are of concern. An awareness of ethical issues might be especially important when dealing with students. The contact between the researchers and the participants in this study will be limited to interviews between one student and one researcher familiar to that student. This may limit the stress that might have occurred in dealing with an unknown adult researcher. Also, full consent was obtained from the participants through consent forms. All participants received assurance of anonymity and reserved right to discontinue their participation at any time. All participants have been given pseudonyms in our records and transcripts. Also, special attention was paid to ensure the participants' regular routine was not disrupted by data collection.

7. 4 SELECTION OF STUDENT INTERVIEWEES

Seven university students participated in the semi-structured interviews. These students were chosen based on their bicultural backgrounds. Four students were international students who came to Japan from other Asian countries to study English at the university level, and three students were Japanese citizens with one ethnically Japanese and one ethnically non-Japanese parent. While these students came from varied backgrounds, their views offer a unique perspective on English education in Japan and the role of English in Japanese and global society.

8. ANALYSIS OF STUDENT RESPONSES TO INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Students were asked a total of 11 questions (see Appendix 1) divided into three categories: English language education experience, learner identity, and globalization. Their responses contributed to answering the main research question: How do bicultural English language learners perceive their identity and issues of globalization in a Japanese university? This article will consider the students' views on these main three themes. For the following sections, bicultural students will be divided into two groups: Japanese bicultural students and international bicultural students.

8. 1 ENGLISH LANGUAGE EDUCATION BACKGROUND

Students' responses about their experience learning and using English prior to studying English at a Japanese university primarily focused on two aspects: language environment at home and language classes at school. Students' interview responses suggest that a major benefit for both Japanese bicultural and international bicultural English language learners is their perception of English, shaped by home and school experiences, as an interesting and practical tool for communication.

Japanese bicultural learners with one non-Japanese parent had numerous opportunities and encouragement to use their English in a practical way at home. While some students had no choice but to use English with non-Japanese speaking family members, others had two Japanese speaking parents and no particular need to use English for daily communication. However, all students had the opportunity for additional language use, family encouragement, and speaking practice outside the classroom thanks to supportive home environments.

The international bicultural students also benefited from home environments that emphasised the importance of language learning. Most of these students spoke three or four languages fluently, thanks to a combination of family emphasis on multilingualism and their school language environment. Some grew up in households where parents set a home language which was neither the primary language of the home country nor English, while other students were sent to additional language classes.

The Japanese bicultural students identified perceived differences between themselves and their Japanese classmates in English classes at Japanese secondary schools. One bicultural student explained that although many of her secondary school classmates thought of English as a stressful subject at school and often focused on avoiding mistakes, she saw English more positively because of her experiences using it at home and outside the classroom.

The international bicultural students felt that their background in secondary schools outside Japan gave them an advantage over their Japanese peers in Japanese university English courses. One significant difference in their secondary school education in other Asian countries was that the majority of these students studied several or all subjects in English rather than the local language of their home country. These students felt they benefitted because their school language environments required them to use English as a

tool to acquire additional knowledge and skills.

One international student felt that English fluency was much more actively pursued in her home country where, she said, it was not uncommon for one parent to move to an English-speaking country with his or her children for several years for the main purpose of English study while the remaining parent continued working in the home country. Interestingly, most of the interviewed bicultural international students' parents encouraged them to attend university in English-speaking countries such as Australia or the US, although they ultimately respected their children's decisions to study in Japan.

8. 2 LEARNER IDENTITY

Students' awareness of learner identity was shaped by two main issues: locating themselves within Japanese society and recognising to what degree that fundamental position could shift and change.

The bicultural Japanese students' interview responses indicated that they felt accepted by mainstream Japanese society, but that they were constantly asked to reaffirm their Japanese identity. These students had largely grown accustomed to erasing their temporary outsider status through demonstration of native Japanese language proficiency and cultural knowledge; they felt they were treated the same as their other Japanese peers after their identity and heritage was explained. Although frequently mistaken for foreigners due to their appearance, these students did not feel any particular connection with international students or other non-Japanese living in Japan. Several students commented that some of their closest relationships at university were with other students who shared the common experience of growing up bi-culturally in Japan.

The bicultural international students' interview responses showed that they felt comfortable with their Japanese classmates and were very enthusiastic about experiencing daily life at a Japanese university. While students reported generally feeling accepted by their classmates, they could sometimes suddenly feel excluded. For example, one student remarked that when discussing her views on international relations or other political topics, she sometimes suddenly felt set apart and treated differently by her classmates when her opinions did not align with theirs. These students' most important relationships at university tended to be fellow foreign students with whom they shared common experiences and goals in Japan.

All of the interviewed students had a strong sense of shifting identities according to

different cultural contexts. This sense of flexibility was most pronounced with the Japanese bicultural students, who were accustomed to frequently explaining their Japanese identity. While studying at a Japanese university, these students continued to explore and redefine a more complex sense of identity. One such student stated that his improved English ability contributed to his own sense of non-Japanese, international identity.

The bicultural international students also demonstrated active knowledge of the concept of shifting identities. One international student said that in today's globalized society it is possible to create a new personal background by living in other countries and having new experiences. She believed that her fundamental identity had changed when she moved to Japan for university studies, and that her identity would continue to change if she lived in additional countries in the future.

8. 3 GLOBALIZATION

Students' interviews revealed their views on globalization, its relevance to Japanese society, and globalization as part of Japanese university education. Students consistently brought attention to two main beliefs: Japanese universities emphasised English language education as the core tenet of global studies, and, in their opinion, English language and global awareness were not particularly common in day-to-day life in Japan.

Many of the international students thought that Japanese universities were making a considerable effort to emphasise global programmes and English language study, but they felt more action was needed. Several students expressed frustration at their perception that English language acquisition appeared, to them, to be the primary emphasis of global programmes at Japanese universities. These students believed that more emphasis on intercultural communication skills, acquisition of additional foreign languages, and increased awareness of foreign cultures was necessary. Several of the international students noted that they did not really need English in daily life in Japan, although they had been required to learn it in their home countries for university admission at Japanese universities. Overall, the international students felt current efforts by university programmes emphasising English language study were a small step toward globalization, and they enthusiastically supported future progress.

The bicultural Japanese students also recognised that globalization was frequently emphasised by university programmes and that global skills were depicted as important to securing future employment. These students' years of experience living in Japan

resulted in the same conclusion as that of the bicultural international students: that English was not really a necessary part of life in Japan. One student remarked that while English might be necessary for conducting international business in Japan, only a small number of bilingual Japanese-English employees or interpreters were actually needed. Another said that English might be important for obtaining a job, but that Japanese companies were mainly interested in TOEIC test scores rather than in practical speaking ability.

The majority of the interviewed students recognised the ubiquitous nature of terms such as globalization as well as the Japanese higher education system's current push toward English study and global programmes. Numerous students observed that English language study was emphasised at the university level to the exclusion of the study of other foreign languages and cultures. According to their interview responses, students primarily saw the current push for international awareness by Japanese universities as either a starting place for a much longer journey toward increased internationalism or an incomplete conceptualization of globalization centred around English language acquisition.

8. 4 WHY ARE UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN JAPAN ATTENDING ENGLISH LANGUAGE-RELATED COURSES?

The interviewed students emphasised the importance of English for finding employment in Japan. These students offered the seemingly contradictory views that English was perceived in Japanese society as a necessary step in launching a successful professional career, but that relatively few people in current Japanese society spoke English well. The most often repeated answer for why students might study English at university was to enhance their career prospects, and many students said that English was not so much a choice as a necessity. This belief supports Pennycook's (1994) assertion that English "has become the language of power and prestige in many countries, thus acting as a crucial gatekeeper to social and economic progress".

Yet many of the interviewed students believed that despite common buzzwords such as globalization or internationalism, English was still not actually required to live or work in Japanese society. Specifically, one student said that Japan had fallen behind other countries in terms of English ability and that practical English ability was less valued by Japanese schools and companies than test scores. Nonetheless, the perception remained among interviewed students that the importance of English study was strongly emphasised in the Japanese education and employment systems.

The interview responses revealed that university students in Japan felt strong social pressure to study English and obtain a certain degree of English ability, often defined through a TOEIC test score, as a form of cultural capital which empowered them professionally. Students enrolled in English classes in university with the intent to use this cultural capital there to earn a respectable professional job in the future. While students noted observing only limited characteristics of internationalism or multiculturalism in their daily lives in Japan, they consistently asserted that English was a crucial key to success in Japanese society and particularly in business. Many students' responses clearly outlined these two seemingly conflicting ideas of English as a crucial tool for success and English as practically unnecessary in Japanese society, underscoring the role of English in Japanese society as cultural capital and a status marker rather than simply a practical skill set.

8. 5 WHO HAS ACCESS TO ENGLISH EDUCATION IN THIS CONTEXT?

This research suggests that bicultural Japanese students and international students have a strong advantage in university admissions at Japanese university English programmes regarding English ability and English examination results. From the students' comments, it became evident that they did not find the English section of the university entrance exam challenging or an obstacle to entry.

Many of the interviewed students did not do any special study to prepare for university English classes. The Japanese bicultural students interviewed had generally found their English classes at Japanese secondary schools unchallenging, and their other language experiences as sufficient to pass the exams without any special effort.

The bicultural international students were also required to take an English language exam, which they consistently reported as not requiring any special study. One international student said that she was very surprised that she had to demonstrate English proficiency to enter a Japanese university programme, and that her main concern was improving her Japanese language ability.

8. 6 HOW DO STAKEHOLDERS VIEW ENGLISH?

In an expanding circle country like Japan, English language skill may be commonly understood as a "symbol of modernization, and an extra arm for success and mobility" (Kachru, 1986). Students' interview responses confirmed this interpretation of English language acquisition in an expanding circle country. Students described two primary benefits of English in Japanese society: professional mobility and social mobility.

Japanese bicultural students generally took a stronger view of English as a crucial qualification for job advancement in Japanese society, while the international students described Japanese ability as the more immediate priority. However, both groups of students had consistently received the message from Japanese society at large that English skills would increase employment opportunities. Many of the interviewed students also saw English as a networking tool that allowed greater social mobility. The bicultural international students emphasised the importance of relationships with fellow international students maintained primarily through English language correspondence; bicultural Japanese students also mentioned the value of English as a tool for making international friends and broadening their own perspectives, as well as connecting to the international aspects of their own heritage.

8. 7 HOW DO STAKEHOLDERS POSITION THEMSELVES IN THEIR IMMEDIATE CONTEXT IN RELATION TO ENGLISH?

The interviewed students seemed to believe that their high English proficiency level gave them an advantage when seeking academic or professional opportunities. Their observations correspond with Pennycook's (1994) description. These students were keenly aware of the emphasis on English language learning in Japanese society today, and most chose to continue pursuing higher English skills at the tertiary level to continue to benefit from the perceived advantages.

However, some students were more interested in pursuing additional foreign language study and expressed frustration over their sense that Japanese universities and Japanese society have generally emphasised English language acquisition over other aspects of globalization. These students' observations suggest that English acquisition holds greater weight as a form of cultural capital than other elements of internationalism in this context. The interviewed students chose to position themselves as bicultural speakers of English in Japanese society, but in some cases would have preferred more diverse opportunities to further develop their multicultural skills and awareness, which may be an area to further develop in university planning.

9. CONCLUSIONS

This article set out to examine a central question: how do bicultural English language learners perceive their identity and issues of globalization in a Japanese university? Through analysing international and bicultural Japanese student responses to 11 questions divided into three relevant themes in the context of English as a source of

imagined community (Kanno & Norton, 2003), a gatekeeper (Pennycook, 1994), and as cultural capital (Norton, 1997, 2000, 2001), several conclusions can be drawn.

Students' interview responses indicate they had clearly received a message that English was a mandatory skill for professional success in Japan; that to study English meant to join a community of English-speaking internationally minded affluent members of Japanese society. This pursuit of belonging to an elite and global community reflects Kanno and Norton's (2003) description of "'imagined communities' as groups of people, not immediately tangible and accessible, with whom we connect through the power of the imagination" (p. 214). In this context, English acts as a "gatekeeper to social and economic progress" (Pennycook, 1994); and thus, the current emphasis on globalization and English portrays success in a Japanese business context as exclusive to this imagined community of English-speaking professionals.

Some of the students interviewed in this study might have chosen to pursue a more diverse set of skills or qualifications rather than improving already relatively advanced English abilities; however, these students continued to focus on English after recognising its value as a form of cultural capital and power. These students' choices and actions support Peirce's assertion that "learners invest in a second language... with the understanding that they will acquire a wider range of symbolic and material resources, which will [in] return increase the value of their cultural capital" (1995). In some cases, this was the student's individual and carefully considered choice, while in others the educational institution's emphasis on English study played a considerable role.

All of the students interviewed agreed that Japanese universities were taking active steps toward encouraging English language study as a component of globalization. However, several students qualified this assessment by noting that the strong emphasis on English education was an oversimplification of the skills and awareness needed to achieve true success in international business and society. While the students interviewed had all found English to be useful for communicating with people who did not share their common native language, many felt more emphasis was needed on other aspects of globalization, such as additional language study and intercultural awareness.

For many of the students interviewed, English fluency contributed to a sense of belonging within a larger community and embracing a shifting identity. Bicultural Japanese students had the chance to meet each other in university English classes, sometimes finding mutual understanding for the first time, and develop a stronger

connection to their bicultural identity. International students were able to broaden their perspectives while building and redefining their own identities as they developed personal and professional relationships with individuals from diverse national backgrounds living and working in Japan.

English study also contributed to students' increased sense of cultural flexibility and shifting identity. This increased fluidity of identity supports the assertion of Pavlenko and Blackledge (2004) that "since individuals often shift and adjust ways in which they identify and position themselves in distinct contexts, identities are best understood when approached in their entirety, rather than through consideration of a single aspect or subject position". The bicultural Japanese students interviewed described an ability to move between Japanese and non-Japanese groups relatively easily after developing a working knowledge of the English language, benefiting from the combination of English language skill and Japanese upbringing. International students could not always move as easily between Japanese social expectations and their own cultural upbringing, but they noted positive changes and developments of their own fundamental identity as they experienced life outside their home country thanks to exchanges held in English and Japanese.

Overall, these interviews provided insight into the motivations and experiences of both Japanese and international bicultural students studying at English programmes at Japanese universities. These students actively pursued advanced English language skills as a key to success in both professional and social realms of an internationally minded elite in Japanese society. Through developing English proficiency, they also gained the ability to consciously shift and change their own identities and perspectives in the face of a globalizing world.

9. 1 SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

This research centred on interview responses of bicultural English language learners at a Japanese university; bringing additional perspectives to the issue would broaden understanding of the issues described here. Firstly, broadening the research to include university global programme administrators would likely clarify many of the points raised by students. From the perspective of administrations, is the development of English language abilities considered the primary goal, or will future steps be taken to increase student access to other language skills and cultural awareness needed to pursue a more nuanced global identity? What factors influence this prioritisation and other related decisions at the university administration level?

Secondly, a follow-up study could be added examining whether students currently enrolled in English courses and global programmes at Japanese universities find their acquisition of English as cultural capital to be worthwhile after successfully graduating from university and securing employment in Japan. Does their English ability place them in an imagined community of global citizens as they work at Japanese companies? Furthermore, does English ability continue to shape their identity outside the context of university?

As Japanese universities continue to create and develop programmes aimed at nurturing English-speaking globally minded professionals, the question of how these programmes can best be refined to help students, companies, and Japanese society at large are worth considering further. This research is one small step in understanding how stakeholders view these programmes, how their English language education experience shapes their views of globalization, and how social pressure influences the educational and professional paths of students.

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APPENDIX 1

Interview Questions

English Language Education

    (f) What was your English-learning experience like before university?

    (g) Why are you studying English at a Japanese university now?

    (h) How do you expect English skills to help you in the future?

    (i) How did you prepare for entering this university's English program?

Learner Identity

    (j) How has your experience growing up in an international family or outside Japan affected your interest in studying English?

    (k) In the university class, do you feel different from typical Japanese students without international backgrounds?

    (l) Outside the class, how important are your relationships with other students with international or immigrant backgrounds?

Globalization

    (m) What do you think about the role of English in Japan and the world?

    (n) What does globalization mean to you?

    (o) How has your English ability affected your personal or professional relationships? (with Japanese, with foreigners)

    (p) What do you think about Japanese universities' current emphasis on globalization and international programs?