

*Role of First Culture Knowledge in Foreign Language: Socialization in Japanese English Classroom Discourses*

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**Abstract**

This study examines, from the perspective of language socialization, how EFL learners' first culture knowledge plays a role in Japanese EFL classrooms. Research on language socialization has focused on the integrated acquisition of first culture knowledge and first language (Schieffelin and Ochs, 1986). However, as the theory of second language socialization (Duff, 2007) suggests, acquisition of additional language and the associated cultural knowledge, can also be the target of language socialization. The present study sheds light on a third possibility: one where the first culture interacts with a foreign language in the classroom. The data for this research were recorded in a Japanese public junior high school and a private junior high school. Additionally, data from Anderson (1995) is used for contexting. As a result of the analysis, it was found that first culture knowledge supported and encouraged learners' foreign language acquisition and use. In addition, learners' first culture competence was reinforced through foreign language learning. Finally, I suggest a new framework to explain this process, foreign language socialization.

**Keywords:** Language socialization, Culture knowledge, Classroom Discourse, English education

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## **Introduction**

This article examines the role of students' first culture knowledge in the context of foreign language socialization, and how it helps them study and acquire the foreign language. In addition, the present study shows how a target language can conversely contribute to the reinforcement of their first-culture knowledge in a classroom. According to Schieffelin & Ochs (1986), the paradigm of language socialization is defined as having two aspects: "socialization through the use of language" and "socialization to use language" (p.163). During both types of socialization, first-culture knowledge is generally the target material transmitted through socialization and language use, in the course of enacting culturally relevant events. Following this, a more recent theory of "second language socialization" (e.g. Duff, 2007, 2010, 2012) has emphasized how second language learners are socialized into the cultural context of a second language through learning the second or foreign language. As a point of difference from the original definition of language socialization, in second language socialization, participants including both adults and children have already had experience with the culture and discourse of their native language. It is this aspect of language socialization that the present study will focus on: specifically how participants' original cultural knowledge, particularly the use of routines in the classroom, complements and contributes to the foreign language learning process.

The data used in this article are mainly from the author's database. One set is from a junior high English classroom managed by a Japanese teacher of English. The other is from another junior high school English classroom taught mainly by an Australian teacher of English together with two Japanese teachers. In addition to these, to contextualize these extracted data in a wider context, I shall refer to data excerpted from Anderson's ethnographic study (1995) of an elementary school classroom in Japan.

The analysis of the data, I will argue, throws light on the dynamic relationship between the role of culture knowledge, language acquisition and socialization in discursive practice<sup>1</sup>. In the discussion section, I propose "foreign language socialization" as a new approach in language socialization studies, following from the general theory of "language socialization" (e.g. Schieffelin and Ochs, 1986; Ochs and Schieffelin, 2008, 2012) and "second language socialization" (e.g. Duff, 2007, 2010, 2012) as mentioned above.

## **Language Socialization**

Language socialization is defined as the process of how participants such as children, students, novices, newcomers or others acquire cultural knowledge, including how, when, and where to act in culturally expected ways, and become matured members of community through language acquisition and language use. Through this process they acquire cultural habits, values, thoughts, rituals and so on at deeper and deeper levels. The interpretation can be particularly seen in the early studies, which focused on how children are socialized through the interaction with caregivers, or with other older members in their community (e.g. Schieffelin, 1990; Ochs, 1988). Following this early definition and orientation, language socialization study concentrates on not only child's cultural and linguistic development but also on "the ways in which

culture influences all aspects of human development as a lifelong process” (Garrett and Baquedano-López, 2002, p. 340). Here it is noted that if we recognize the language socialization process as a development across the lifespan, participants experience socialization not only as first-language learners.

In language socialization studies, culture is seen as the major factor defining what is transmitted through the process of language socialization. Participants are seen as acting according to cultural knowledge and being enculturated through language. Anthropologists such as Mead (e.g. 1930, 1954), cited in Kulick & Schieffelin (2004), did not consider language as a factor when children were growing up and acquiring knowledge. Such anthropologists are interested in how children acquire cultural knowledge and become community members, similar to researchers in language socialization. However, most of these anthropologists focus only on “enculturation”, ignoring any role that language may have in the acquisition of cultural knowledge; it “is disregarded as an aspect of social life” (Kulick & Schieffelin, 2004). In contrast, language socialization regards language as having an influence and a facilitating role in cultural events and knowledge development in children and other language learners.

Second language socialization focuses on many points similar to first-language socialization in its framework and objectives (Duff, 1995, 2007, 2010). However, participants generally differ from first-language socialization participants in that the L2 learners entering a L2 context have already experienced and had some “... repertoire of linguistic, discursive, and cultural traditions and community affiliations when encountering new ones” (Duff, 2007, p. 310). Added to this, however, participants keep being socialized in their first culture and through their first language, in parallel with the additional language and its culture, during this second phase of socialization (Duff, 2012).

There are two main approaches to language socialization for all types of language socialization studies. One is from psychology, and the other is the perspective from anthropology and sociology (Ochs & Schieffelin, 2008; Garrett, 2008). The former approach can be seen in earlier studies which focus on language acquisition. This research approach focuses on explicit socialization, which is one of the goals of language acquisition. The latter is based on anthropological and sociological perspectives. This approach sheds light on how participants acquire cultural values more generally through implicit or explicit language socialization.<sup>2</sup> This process through which participants are socialized aims for them to acquire culturally expected norms of language use and behavioral competence; in other words, what Dell Hymes would call “communicative competence” (Hymes, 1972).

### **Communicative Competence**

In the study of language socialization, in addition to acquisition of language, cultural factors and cultural knowledge related to verbal and non-verbal communication are considered. In the 1960s and 1970s, Hymes (e.g. 1968, 1972, 1974) proposed the notion of “communicative competence”. As opposed to Chomsky’s (1965) “linguistic competence” which focuses on a speaker’s grammatical development and the innate system behind it, Hymes emphasized that we acquire and use language in particular contexts which have an influence on our ways of using the language, and moreover,

we are required to act according to the context. Then, we need to know and understand “what to say to whom and how to say it appropriately in any given situation” (Saville-Troike, 2003, p.18). Linguistic activity is thus framed as a part of cultural and social knowledge in situations which have an effect on communicative language use.

## **Language and Culture**

As one part of the framework, I would like to discuss theoretical views of the relationship between language and culture. In language socialization studies, culture knowledge and cultural behavior generally tend to be targets of socialization together with language. These targets also create contexts within which socialization occurs. However, it is not necessarily the case that the second culture plays a significant role in second language learning. There is flexibility in how cultural factors contribute to various types of language acquisition in different contexts.

The connection between language and culture has been taken as one of interrelatedness, which suggests that features of each influence the other. However, as suggested by Risager (2006), culture and language can exist and function even as separated from particular linguistic and cultural contexts. As a general principle, Risager (2006) notes “...that languages spread across cultures, and cultures spread across languages. Linguistic and cultural practices change and spread through social networks along partially different routes...” (p.2). This relates to my assertion in this paper that first culture knowledge can be learnt through a foreign language, and can contribute to foreign language learning.

Blommaert (2010) similarly challenges researchers to “rethink” sociolinguistics in terms of “trans-contextual networks, flows, and movements” (p.1). In this way of thinking, the relation between language, culture and context in globalization is mobile and diverse, that is, they are not in a fixed structure together. According to Blommaert, traditional views displace language from the language context which has been seen as its corresponding context in time and space (*ibid.*).

In other words, the structure of language, culture and context is not necessarily bound together but rather the components function independently. Duff (2007) notes that the definition of additional-language socialization, “does not necessarily lead to the reproduction of existing L2 cultural and discursive practice, but may lead to other outcomes such as hybrid practices, identities, and values...” (p.311). From the language socialization perspective, it is highly possible that each component —target language of socialization, culture knowledge, and the context— is mobile and free from “the language and culture bind”. In other words, the combination of these is fluid and can only be seen in relation to individual cases. As a short summary, the relation of language and culture in foreign language socialization depends on participants’ cultural experience or knowledge over time, rather than a wider socially fixed structure of language and culture.

## Previous Studies on Japanese Language Socialization

Previous studies on Japanese language socialization have been concerned with interactional routines in Japanese as first, second and foreign language (e.g. Anderson, 1995; Clancy, 1986, 1999; Cook, 1999, 2012; Kanagy, 1999; Ohta, 1999). In the early socializing process of children, conventionalized routines play an important role and help to organize the learning context (Anderson, 2008).

Although it is not a study of Japanese language, a seminal study on the role of interactional routines in language socialization was done by Peters and Boggs (1986). Socializing contexts consisting of “time, place, participants, and desired outcomes” (Peters and Boggs, 1986, p.80) facilitate the success of language learning. In interactional routines and language learning, children can learn how to take part in activities in early practice, and later acquire social and cultural knowledge. Peters and Boggs (*ibid.*) note, 1) from the language learning and acquisition view, in the interactional sequence, children have ample opportunities to use language skills, and are connected in their language use as they learn how to adjust their speech according to situation and participants; 2) related to these rules, children acquire the ways of culturally communicating, what Peters and Boggs call “modes of speaking” (p.94).

Within the framework of Peters and Boggs (1986), some studies on language socialization in Japanese schools have been carried out. During interactional routines children and learners are expected to be good listeners in a classroom as well as at home. Cook (1999) proposed that in contrast to the idea that good participants in the western context are actively participating, Japanese children are forced to listen to others talking until they finish. She examined how students in Japanese elementary school are implicitly and explicitly socialized to be good listeners in classroom interaction. Through the interactional routine, particularly when it is focused on student turns rather than teacher talk, they are given explicit instructions to listen carefully and attend to the class.

In an ethnographic study of a Japanese elementary school over a year research, Anderson (1995) focused on routines for greeting (*Aisatsu*, in Japanese) and presentation (*Happyo*, in Japanese) from the perspective of the participants' roles in the discourse. He showed that in the Japanese classroom, participants are in a multi-party patterned interactional structure, which he referred as, “interactional umbrella”. This interactional routine is formulated as “Initiation-Presentation- Reaction-Evaluation (I-P-Rx-E)”, which differs from the western classroom interactional pattern, IRF (Initiation- Response- Feedback) as described by, for example, Sinclair and Coulthard (1975).

Interactional routines have also played a role in classroom studies of Japanese as a foreign or second language (Kanagy, 1999; Ohta, 1999). Kanagy focused on children who were socialized in second language interaction in a kindergarten in the US. This work shows how children learn initiation and response moves in the process of immersion into Japanese language. During classroom activities, she found that the role of repetition and scaffolding by the teacher are important not to question-answer interaction between teacher and student but to socialization for interactional and communicative competence in L2 learning. Ohta has applied the framework of

language socialization to foreign language discourse in a first-year university-level classroom in the US. She researched the “alignment” which is necessary for learners in interactional routines. Learners do not need only to listen to what others are saying, but have to react to teacher-fronted and learner-learner interactions in the context of Japanese-as-foreign-language acquisition. In this work, she examines how the routines based on first language socialization of childhood affect and impact their foreign language learning. These two studies were not conducted in Japan, but they do help to shed light on the relations among language, culture, and context more generally.

## **Data**

The data for the present study are from two sets of the author’s data and one from Anderson (1995). The first set of the author’s data was recorded with an IC recorder over 50 minutes, in an English classroom at a public junior high school in the fall of 2010. Students were fixed in the same class over one school year and taught by the same teacher. Almost all of the students were in the third year and final junior high (14 and 15 years old) and would be taking an entrance examination for high school a few months later.

The second data set is from the author’s observations in 2010 at a private junior high school in Osaka. This data was recorded with an IC recorder by the author over 50 minutes, toward the end of the school year. Students were in the first year (12 or 13 years old). This class was shared by three English teachers: two Japanese teachers, and one Australian teacher. The present excerpted data include one of the Japanese teachers and the Australian teacher. As contexting data, I use an excerpt from Anderson’s (1995) longitudinal study from a year of fieldwork. Anderson’s class is a social studies lesson managed by a Japanese teacher in Japanese. Students in this class were in the first grade and the second grade of elementary school (6 to 9 years old).

## **Data Analysis**

### **Japanese English teacher in a junior high school English classroom**

Extract 1 (T=Teacher; Sts= Students) shows a Japanese teacher and students’ interaction at the beginning of a class. After the school bell rings, students are starting to get back to their seats for the class as the teacher is positioned at the front of the classroom. However, students keep chatting, and appear not to have calmed down or be ready for the class opening greeting, which is a conventionalized activity used to manage the class opening. The traditional order of the opening is: students standing up or sitting up, bowing and greeting, and then sitting back down. During this event, the teacher uses English as a target language to carry out this conventional routine. This is in keeping with the idea that English class is ideally managed in the English language to the extent that participants can follow it.

Talk in Japanese is shown in italics. English translations are in square brackets.

### **Extract 1**

01. T: Stand up, please.
02. Sts: (chatting...)
03. T: *Hai*. [O.K. ] Stand.
04. S1: *Nani surun? Kyo?* [What are we going to do today?]
05. T: *Naisyo*. [I don't want to tell you yet.] O.K., Good afternoon everyone.
06. Sts: Good afternoon, Ms.Y.
07. T: Take a seat, down.
08. Sts: (chatting...)
09. T: *Dewa*, [O.K.] Clean your desk and close your textbook. All you can use is your pen.

This routine absolutely requires that students stand up. The teacher urges them to do this through the greeting (01-03). Even if students ask about what they are going to do in class while the teacher is managing this activity, what students are asking is rejected by the teacher (04-05). From this point, one can see that the greeting routine must be the priority in the class, as it works as a symbolic activity switching a normal room into a classroom. As the opening utterance of the lesson, she uses the English “O.K., Good afternoon everyone” (05), and after that turn, students are subject to the teacher’s rules. The English utterances (05, 07) emphasize the teacher’s status. Through these English phrases, students get to know what is expected at that moment, which is the activity beginning the class. In this sequence, it is shown that participants share common cultural knowledge—a greeting activity and its order at the beginning of the class—with each other and the teacher. In this situation, students are able to understand English phrases, while drawing on their previous cultural knowledge for the greeting turn-taking, and for knowing how they should act at this stage of the lesson.

Considering this type of historical and cultural knowledge of participants which is acquired through first language acquisition and socialization, the next thing to examine is how students act in a classroom which is managed by a non-Japanese teacher of English whose original cultural knowledge might be different from that of the students.

### **The class by English native speaking teacher and two Japanese English teachers**

Extract 2 (NEt=Native English speaking teacher; St=student; JT=Japanese teacher; Sts= students) is the spoken data extracted from a team-teaching lesson (one Australian teacher and two Japanese teachers). The context is the beginning of a class supervised by a native English speaking teacher, who has the main right to control this class. In Japan, it is rare that a native English speaking teacher is in the leading position, rather than in a supporting position. By placing him in this position in the English class, the aim would seem to be to make this class operate in an immersion style and urge students to use the target language. Supporting him, there are two Japanese English teachers who assist with the classroom management and help students understand what they are requested to do in the classroom. The following extract shows these roles in the context of a greeting event.

“[” shows that two phrases are spoken at almost the same time.

### **Extract 2**

*(Students are chatting while the class is beginning)*

10. NET: O::K: Everybody::: Let's be:::gin, [face forward  
11. ST: Be:::gin. (*Imitating Native English speaking teacher's voice*)
12. NET: Tu tu tu tu... everybody::: stand up!  
*(Students are standing up)*
13. JT: *Hai, hanashi yamete.* [OK. Stop talking.]
14. NET: Ah::: Good morning everybody.
15. Sts: Good morning teacher.
16. NET: O.K. sit down.

This spoken data from the beginning of class is almost the same as that in Extract 1. A native English speaking teacher (NET) is trying to begin the class with the greeting activity (standing up, bowing and greeting, and sitting down). He is trying to get the attention of the students and inform them the class is beginning. However, because they do not follow the teacher's will, and keep chatting, one Japanese teacher helps the native English teacher start class by saying to students, *Hai, hanashi yamete. "Stop talking"* (13-14). This phrase implies that the students must face the native English speaking teacher and get ready to perform the opening greeting. After this, students stop talking, and the greeting is accomplished through interaction in English (14-16); students have already been socialized into this activity before they entered junior-high school, and experienced it in an elementary school (see Extract 3). In the example of language socialization in Extract 2, Japanese (13) and English (10, 12, 14, and 16) are used. Students are naturally socialized to use the target language, but this is done through their first language as well (13). This situation shows implicit socialization through English (the target and foreign language) use, and explicit socialization with Japanese (the first language) to make students concentrate on the greeting event (first culture knowledge).

The roles of first and foreign language use and speakers' understanding of the languages in socialization seem to depend on students' historical experiences. These two junior-high classroom cases show how the original cultural knowledge has an influence on the present socialization and language learning in the classroom, even in foreign language acquisition. We will now examine an elementary-school classroom interaction to see how it serves as a basis for later foreign language learning.

### **Contexting data: Elementary school classroom discourse**

Extract 3 is from Anderson's (1995) ethnographic study in a Japanese elementary school. This is a case of first language socialization, and the interaction is from a Social Studies lesson which is managed by a Japanese teacher in Japanese language. This shows the classroom activity, "*Aisatsu*" (greeting) in the opening. The lesson starts with the teacher, in (17), saying, "Okay, let's begin." Two student monitors then take the role of performing the class-opening activity (18).



### Extract 3

17. T: *Hai, hajimemasu.* [Okay, let's begin.]  
18. Student monitors: *Shisei! Ima kara shakai no obenkyoo o hajimemasu. Rei!*  
[Sit up straight! We now begin the social studies lesson. Bow!]  
19. Sts: [Students bow.]  
20. T: *Hai.* [Okay]  
(Anderson, 1995, pp. 124-125; lines are numbered by the present author. Transcription notation has been modified to fit the present paper.)

As in Extracts 1 and 2, this interaction is started by the teacher's calling for attention; however, in this class there are also two class monitors. At the beginning of this sequence, the teacher turns over the responsibility for managing the conventional greeting event to the monitor students (17-18). The monitors assume the teacher's role of managing the activity and have temporary power to control the event, as the teacher did in Extracts 1 and 2. Except for this, the discourse is similar to the former two interactions where a teacher calls the beginning, students rectify their attitudes, then enact a greeting and sit back down. This extract shows not only an example of Japanese language socialization related to greeting behavior in early education, but the acquisition of original cultural knowledge which will be needed for students later in life, when they learn a foreign language and are socialized into a new community.

### Discussion

The present study examines how first culture knowledge and foreign language learning complement each other in classroom language socialization. Results from the examination of the author's two original excerpts and the reference excerpt from Anderson's data (1995) illustrate two points: 1) first culture knowledge, particularly of the interactional routine for the greeting is a frame which facilitates the learning and use of a target language, and 2) through the opportunity to use a foreign language, learners are socialized, or rather, re-socialized into the greeting as an aspect of first culture knowledge which is taken as an important event in the Japanese classroom. These kinds of situations, common to second language learning in schools, suggest that "foreign language socialization" could form a new paradigm within the area of language socialization studies.

### The role of first culture knowledge in foreign language socialization

First culture knowledge concerned with the greeting routine promotes learners' use and understanding of a target language through communicative action. For example, in Extracts 1 and 2, whether the class is managed by a native or non-native English speaker, learners are socialized to use the target language in the greeting context with the support of first culture knowledge. This support comes from learners' past experiences. In these two events each teacher urges students to be ready for the greeting event by using their first culture knowledge.

The important role of first culture knowledge in the class beginning is shown by the fact that teachers expect students' experience to have included this knowledge. In

Extract 1, the teacher aims to complete the greeting even if a student is asking a question about a class topic. In Extract 2, one Japanese teacher, using a Japanese phrase, helped an Australian teacher control students and carry out the greeting. From these two events, it appears that teachers use students' first language to make them concentrate on the greeting routine, but while also using English as the target code for the event.

As a new paradigm, in contrast to the earlier frameworks, foreign language socialization is proposed as a perspective which sheds light on cross-contextual development. It includes two elements which belong to different contexts.

### **Foreign language socialization for re-construction of first culture knowledge**

From the perspective of the mobile connection between language and culture, foreign language socialization shows how a target (foreign) language may be instrumental in re-socializing learners into contexts similar to the first culture. This type of language socialization reinforces participants' first culture knowledge (in the present study, knowledge of a greeting event).

Excerpt 3 from Anderson's (1995) data shows the general and basic cultural knowledge for the greeting event in a Japanese classroom. This interactional routine is implemented in first language socialization in first culture contexts. Here, the framework can be interpreted as "first culture socialization through a first language" and "first culture socialization to first language use". In Extracts 1 and 2, it takes some time to start the greeting event because of some students' behavior. In both cases, teachers keep using the target language to carry out the greeting, except in two turns. One involves a switch the Japanese phrase, "*Naisyō*" (I don't want to tell you yet.), and the other phrase, "*Hai, hanashi yamete*" (OK. Stop talking.). Even if these diversions occur, the target language is kept as the main language through the interactions. Through this target language usage and the interactional routine overall, first culture knowledge is reinforced through the target language. Thus, foreign language socialization can be understood as having the distinctive feature that it can re-build and re-foster students' first culture knowledge in a foreign language learning context.

### **Conclusion**

As a case study in foreign language socialization in Japan's English education discourses, the present study shows how students are socialized in a classroom through their first culture knowledge and target language. One predictable case is that students are socialized into classroom patterns via a target language, although the practice might be similar to what students have previously been socialized into in their first language experience. This situation is characteristic in Japan where students learn a target language through the same cultural continuum. In previous research, language socialization had been seen as a process of how participants are socialized through and into their first language with their first culture knowledge. The paradigm of foreign language socialization provides researchers not only with an approach to foreign language learning, but also with cross-linguistic and cross-cultural contexts for the study of language socialization.

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### **Notes**

1. Discursive practice is generally a close synonym to discourse practice. However in this paper, to focus on participants' development, it is defined as a practice in the process of constructing a discourse such as classroom communication.
2. Implicit language socialization is defined as language socialization mainly toward the acquisition of culture knowledge through language use. Explicit language socialization aims at the conscious acquisition of appropriate language use.

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