

A Contrastive Case Study of Four Japanese Language Teachers in Taiwan

台湾における4人の日本語教師の対照的事例研究

四位台湾日语教师个案比较研究

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Abstract

How do pedagogical beliefs tend to vary with teaching experience among Japanese instructors in Taiwan? Do the professional identities of novice and veteran teachers of Japanese as a foreign language (JFL) tend to be constructed in different ways? This case study explores those questions by comparing two veteran university JFL teachers with two teachers just starting off their careers. Although differences in student expectations, the amount of out-of-class student interaction, and professional self-construal were noted among the respondents, the data does not suggest that these factors correlated closely with the amount of teaching experience.

Keywords: JFL teacher beliefs, professional teacher identities, pedagogical ideologies, JFL teaching, linguistic identities

要旨

台湾における日本語教師の教育的信念は、教育経験とともにどのように変化するのでしょうか。初心者とベテラン教師とで、専門家としてのアイデンティティは、違う方法で構築されるのでしょうか。本研究は、この問いに関して、台湾の大学で日本語を教えるベテラン教師とキャリアを始めたばかりの教師の各2人ずつの比較です。授業以外での学生との交流、学生への期待、専門家としての自己形成においては、顕著な違いがみられましたが、指導経験との相関性までは、データは示唆していません。

キーワード：JFL教師の信念、専門家としてのアイデンティティ、教育的イデオロギー、外国語としての日本語教育、言語アイデンティティ

摘要

台湾日语教师的教育理念是否随着教学经验而改变？新手教师与经验丰富的教师，在教学上有如何的不同？本研究探讨的案例以比较在大学任职的两位资深教师与两位新教师为主。尽管在课外与学生的交流、对学生的期望、作为专业教师的自身塑造等方面有明显差异，但在学生的学习效果与教学经验的相关关系上，我们所采集的数据并未显示出明显的结果。

关键词：JFL 教师信念、专业教师自我认同、教学理念、作为外语的日语教学、语言自我认同

Post-modern notions of identity suggest that it is evolving, contextual, at times contradictory, and a frequent source of conflict and power struggles (Lacan, 2002, p. 53, 77; Norton, 2014, p. 60, 61). A wide range of research, summarized in part by Beijaard, Verloop, and Vermunt (2004) and Olsen (2008, 2011), further suggests that teacher identities tend to change over time. Today a wide number of models of teacher development exist. This study adopts a framework espoused by Laskey (2005) and also incorporates some ideas from Vaillant (2002) on how teachers at different ages tend to perceive themselves, their work, and foreign language learning in general. Specifically, this study compares how two veteran and two novice JFL teachers in Taiwan feel about their professional identities and teaching approaches. Differences in teacher beliefs about language learning and teacher roles are also

highlighted. In the process, we will highlight the role of affect in language acquisition, and the process of social/linguistic "othering" (Spivak, 1985).

This project addresses the following three research questions:

- (1) How do the teachers in this sample tend to regard their students as language learners?
- (2) What belief systems do they espouse about foreign language learning?
- (3) In what ways, if any, do the teachers this sample tend to promote study abroad?

Method

Instruments

Two instruments were used in this research. Each is briefly described.

(1) *Written Questionnaires*

A written questionnaire with an informed consent statement was the preliminary research tool. The questionnaire consisted of five demographic questions and eleven probes in a Likert response format. The probe questions were based on earlier questionnaires by Taguchi, Magid, and Papi (2009) and Kojima-Takahashi (2013). The questionnaire was first developed in English, then translated into Chinese and Japanese and back-translated to insure validity. This questionnaire is online at http://inoue-enryou.international/en/Newfields-Xu_A.pdf

(2) *Semi-Structured Interviews*

Semi-structured interviews, based on earlier research interviews developed by Beijaard, Verloop, and Vermunt (2000) and Lerseth (2013), in the informant's language of choice were conducted. Those core questions are online at http://inoue-enryou.international/en/Newfields-Xu_B.pdf

Informants

A convenience sample of eleven foreign language teachers working in Taiwan completed both research instruments during our visit to Taipei in August 2015. The original sample consisted of five teachers of English and six of Japanese. We decided to limit the focus of this paper to JFL instructors. Moreover, in this paper, we chose to examine age a possible variable in shaping teacher identity and beliefs. To obtain a contrastive sample, we selected the two oldest and the two youngest interviewees with JFL teaching experience. Demographic information about the four informants in this study is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. *A Demographic Overview of the Respondents in this Study*

Code #	Age	Gender	Nationality	Language of Int. & Length	Current Status	JFL teaching experience
1	65	F	Japanese	Japanese [15:35]	Semi-retired & teaching 1 university JFL class	c. 30 yrs. at mostly university level in Taiwan
2	63	F	Taiwanese	Japanese [c. 1 hr.]	teaching 5 JFL classes & serving as dean	c. 25 yrs. at mostly university level in Taiwan
3	c. 35	F	Taiwanese	Japanese [42:13]	teaching JFL & CSL* at a private college	3.5 yrs. at a college in Taiwan
4	c. 35	F	Taiwanese	Chinese [13:52]	teaching 8 JFL classes a week a university	c. 2 years at a private university in Taiwan

* CSL = Chinese as a second language (for overseas students)

As you can see, all of the informants were female. The possibility that male teachers might respond differently to the instruments must be acknowledged.

Procedure

The research questionnaire with an informed consent statement was handed out to a convenience sample of 11 foreign language teachers in Taiwan. Nine of the potential informants were attending a graduate level workshop in linguistics at Fu Jen Catholic University in Taipei. The remaining informants were personal acquaintances of the co-author, who was in Taiwan from September 2002 to August 2003.

After the questionnaires were completed, oral interviews were conducted. Those preferring to be interviewed in English were interviewed by Researcher A and those preferring Chinese were interviewed by Researcher B, native speakers of those respective languages. Since both researchers were fluent in Japanese, Japanese interviews were conducted by either researcher.

All interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed, then coded according to guidelines suggested by Creswell (2009, pp. 152-153). However, a technological glitch occurred in one of the interviews: part of the digital recording with Informant 2 did not work, so we had to rely on hand-written notes.

An important final research step was sending the draft version of this manuscript back to the informants. Ten days were given to them to confirm that (1) the information was accurate, and (2) their confidentiality was protected. Based on their feedback, several minor changes were made.

Results and Discussion

Let us discuss the results in terms of the three research questions:

(1) *How do the teachers in this sample tend to regard their students as language learners?*

The respondents adopted similar typologies when describing "good" and "bad" students. All informants described "good" students as intrinsically motivated and willing to do extensive homework. Whereas Informant 1 felt that many of her students were gifted language learners [00:21], Informant 3 felt that few of her students had much talent [14:00]. That informant stated that it was "unrealistic to expect much quality" (*shitsu wo motomete wa chotto*) [14:15] because the standard rank deviation at her institution was rather low (*hensachi sonna ni takakunai*) [14:03]. Indeed, many of the informants regarded standard rank entrance exam scores as a rough predictor of student ability. Informant 4 emphasized that "good" students were self-directed and capable of "studying on their own after school" (*kè hòu de zìzhǔ xuéxí wǒ xīwàng*) [02:55]. They also actively asked questions about material unclear to them. In other words, they were pro-active about their learning and did not hesitate engage the teacher - both in and out of class.

"Bad" students were described as "goof offs" by Informants 1 and 2. Informant 3 was somewhat ambivalent about their cognitive capacities. She remarked that poor students often had trouble remembering material. She also noted that classroom seating was a good indicator of how students were both literally and metaphorically positioned: "bad" students tended to be young male who sat at the back of the class. Informant 3 had very low expectations of such students. "My request is that they simply be quiet during class" (*juugyou-chuu ni otonashiku shite moratte to jama wo sasanai koto*) [31:09]. She would sometimes scold them, but was careful to avoid seeming too strict. "The administration has instructed us to treat students as customers, so we must treat them very gently," [27:30] she added. Informant 2 felt it was important to communicate with students clearly about of how much effort is needed to become proficient in a foreign language. Since she was teaching at high-ranking national university, she felt poor students generally had ability, but they were not making sufficient effort.

Typical JFL students were described as extrinsically motivated. According to Informants 1, 2, and 4 they were concerned primarily with their grades and future employment prospects. Informant 3 reported that most of her middling students simply wanted graduation credits. Language mastery seemed like a distant, unattainable goal for them.

(2) *What belief systems do the teachers this sample tend to have about foreign language learning in general?*

An interesting finding gap appeared to be how the informants themselves preferred to learn foreign languages and how they tended to teach. Informant 1 indicated that she preferred to learn naturalistically, rather than through formal instruction [8:02]. Nonetheless, her classes consisted of various types of formal instruction. Informant 1 expressed a preference for student-centered teaching, but noted that her actual teaching style varied widely from class to class. Informant 2 likened good teachers to "parents" who went beyond merely teaching textbook content. In her view, they took a personal interest in students' lives and advised them when necessary. She recalled how her own teachers actually went so far as to forbid students from developing romantic attachments while in college since it was regarded as a distraction from their studies. Although she felt such strictness would be hard to apply with today's students, she did feel good teachers set high standards and demanded commitment. Informant 3 stated that she made significant progress in Japanese through studying abroad in Japan, giving speeches in Japanese, and engaging in target language conversations. However, they were not features of her current Japanese classes. Since she is working mainly with beginners, her focus is on simple vocabulary and grammar. Informant 4 also works with beginners, but believes in the value of recitation contests and real life interactions with Japanese exchange students.

One thing we noticed about many informants was a tendency to typecast students into simplified categories based on their motivational levels. Most informants categorized their students as either "highly motivated", "middling", or "goofing off." Their way of dealing with each of these students appeared to vary considerably. Informants 1, 2, and 3 stated that if a student seemed highly motivated, they were quite willing to go out of their way and provide additional instruction and guidance for them. Informant 3 also remarked that she was "stricter" with good students (*kekko dekiru ko wa kekko kibishiku iu kamoshirenai*) [29:57].

With run-of-the-mill students, this was noticeably curtailed. The informants expected students to review and do homework, but little beyond that. Informant 3, in particular, lamented how her average students made very little progress.

When discussing "bad" students, Informant 1 noted she had to change her teaching style to make things easier for them. She also pointed out a perceived difference between native Japanese JFL teachers and Taiwanese JFL teachers. "Taiwanese teachers tend to be stricter," [23:20] she added, "...only in the last 5-6 years have I become strict. Before that, my focus was on getting students to *like* Japanese" [23:30]. Informant 2 mentioned that she tended to focus most of her energy on the more promising students. Although she would attempt to encourage middling students to focus on their studies, unmotivated students were likened to unprofitable investments. By contrast, Informant 3 felt it was important to make her classes comprehensible to the bulk of her students, focusing on "the majority at the bottom" [13:40] rather than the few at the top. Informant 4 was frankly pessimistic about her less motivated students: they were frequently absent from class and had problems keeping up with new material. "Sometimes such students fall so far behind that they can never catch up." [04:16] she lamented.

Informant 2 acknowledged that Confucian ethics have shaped her ideas about teaching, stating it was sometimes necessary to act as a de facto parent. However, she also decried how Confucian principles were eroding in Taiwan today. As a result, she felt that there has been a

shift in teacher-student relations in Taiwan. Today, she remarked, a sort of "consumer paradigm" is prevalent and students are regarded as consumers of knowledge. Consequently, she felt many teachers had become more and more "knowledge-dispensers." Informant 3 echoed those concerns, noting that many universities in Taiwan were worried about revenue flows. In her view, teachers who seemed too gruff or demanding would not fit well into the new educational paradigm. Informant 3 also remarked that, "Rather than seeing myself as a university teacher, I feel more like a middle school or high school teacher" (*Daigaku no kyouin yori mo, koukou toka chuugaku no sensei mitai*)^[14:52] because a lot of her time was devoted to classroom management issues.

(3) *In what ways, if any, do the teachers this sample tend to promote study abroad?*

Informant 1 mentioned how Taiwanese university students come from widely different economic backgrounds. Whereas those from affluent families can readily to study overseas, ones from poorer families cannot do so. This is one reason she chose not promote study abroad actively in her some of her classes. However, she felt that extended study abroad for graduates often had merit.

Informant 2 mentioned how her own Japanese ability progressed rapidly as a consequence of study abroad and encouraged her students to do so. Her university had close "sister school" relations with several Japanese universities, and many of her Japanese majors would spend a least some time in Japan.

Informant 3 added that most students do not have a clear idea (*meikaku-na bijon*) about why they want to study abroad - they just have a vague notion of going overseas ^[32:59]. Unlike Informant 1, this informant felt that students desiring to come to Japan tended to be more motivated as JFL learners than other students ^[33:30]. By contrast, Informant 1 remarked how some Taiwanese graduate students who go to Japan ostensibly for study actually end up "playing around" ^[12:23]. This is another reason she has made a decision not to promote study abroad in her classes.

Informant 4 mentioned that many of her second and third year students study abroad for an academic year at sister schools in Japan. She also added that some fourth year Japanese majors also come in Japan to complete linguistic research. Interestingly, she did not mention short-term study abroad options. She did underscore the importance of fostering extensive interactions between JFL students and native Japanese within Taiwan. Since her university has many students from Japan learning Chinese, in her classes periodic student exchanges are organized. "It is important to have direct interactions with Japanese order to become proficient in that language," ^[03:25] she added.

Discussion

Three issues emerged from the data that seem worth considering. Let us address each of these systematically.

(1) *Student Expectations*

Teachers' overall assessment of student ability appeared to be a key factor in determining how they responded to them. Informants 1, 2, and 4, who were teaching at relatively high-ranking universities, tended to regard most of their students as competent and self-directed language learners. By contrast, Informant 3, who was at a lower-ranking institution, regarded most of her students as ineffective language learners who were apt to complain if given challenging tasks.

In this regard, Spivak's (1985) notion of social and linguistic "othering" is somewhat relevant. All of the informants tended to speak in much more positive terms of students who

were interested in their JFL lessons. They also voiced varying degrees of frustration in dealing with students that they considered lazy or apathetic.

(2) *Out-of-Class Student Interactions*

All of the informants went out of their way to interact extensively with students outside of class. Informant 4, for example, held individual consultations with each first-year student. During those consultations, she asked them to reflect on their learning goals and how mastering Japanese might be helpful to their careers. That informant also employed a teaching assistant (TA) to help both in and out-of-class. Moreover, she encouraged her students to interact extensively with students from Japan.

Out-of-class interactions with "midling" students tended to be somewhat limited; it seems the informants were apt to interact more with either students at the top or bottom of the spectrum. Informants 1 and 3 mentioned providing supplemental materials for high-performing students, and extra coaching for those at the bottom. Informant 2 had heavy administrative responsibilities that somewhat limited her time available for student contact.

(3) *Professional Self-Construction*

Not surprisingly, all informants evidenced multiple overlapping identities that were not necessarily congruent. Informant 1 was active in a local church and also spent a significant amount of time learning English and writing creative fiction. Indeed, her novel about a "university for dogs" could be interpreted as a witty satire about university education in general. Informant 2 was quite busy with administrative affairs at her university and Informant 3 was perplexed about whether to make foreign language teaching a lifelong career. She confessed that, "I do not feel inspired as a teacher" (*sensei no kannou wa mattaku nai*) [26:07] and was contemplating a career change [35:42]. Part of the reason for her frustration was the systematic disempowerment that teachers faced at her university. Teachers had limited control over what was taught, what was tested, and even who passed or failed given courses. This is evidence of what Apple (2000, cited in Wilkins, Mohamed, & Smith, 2011) refers to as 'techno-bureaucratic managerialism' - an attempt to position teachers into peripheral roles for the sake of administrative efficiency. It is also closely related to the concept of 'normative performativity' (Vick & Martinez, 2011) - a tendency to regulate, constrain, and measure teacher performance in data-driven, bureaucratic ways.

The two veteran teachers already had well-developed professional identities and were now at the stage of transmitting their knowledge to the next generation. According to Vaillant (1993), we could say that they were at a stage of psychosocial development focusing on meaning-transmission. At this stage, the primary task is to pass on cherished traditions to the next generation. Persons at this point in life are often engaged in "other-embracing projects" (Nolan & Kadavi, 2003, p. 171) in which information and values they embody are communicated to younger recipients. Informant 1 spent about eight hours a week teaching Japanese and was also active in church affairs. Informant 2 was involved in making high-level university decisions that would impact future teachers.

By contrast, we could say that the two novice teachers were still acquiring knowledge and skills about their profession. In particular, Informant 4 was actively attending many study groups and faculty development workshops to enhance her skills. She seemed to enjoy these and expressed satisfaction with her career choice. Informant 3 attended required workshops, but did so with a shade of ambivalence. For diplomatic reasons, she sometimes masked her frustration and ostensibly complied with the many complex rules concerning so-called "faculty development" that were being imposed upon teachers.

Conclusion

Before concluding, we should first acknowledge this study's limitations. The following caveats are noteworthy:

- (1) The sampling for this pilot study is by no means representative of all universities in Taiwan. The pool of informants came mainly from high-ranking universities in Taiwan. Future studies should include a broader selection of informants from lower-ranking institutions.
- (2) All information is based on self-reports rather than observed behavior. Future studies should include direct classroom observations.
- (3) This study does not report how the informant's beliefs and reported behaviors might change over time. Future studies should adopt a longitudinal framework to detect possible shifts that might occur over an extended period.
- (4) Interviewer effects certainly exist. For example, the gender, nationalities, ages, and languages spoken by the interviewers may have influenced some of the responses. It would be worth comparing our results with other research on JFL teachers in Taiwan by diverse interviewers.

With those limitations in mind, this study underscored three points.

First, the impact of age on teaching behaviors did not appear to be so clear-cut. When we first conceived of this study, we thought that novice and veteran JFL teachers might vary significantly in their teaching approaches and/or professional identities. However, the data suggests such a simplistic bifurcation does not appear to be valid. For example, Informant 1 (who is 66 years old) reported that she tries to act like an "older sister" (*anego*) with her students. A similar metaphor was used by Informant 3, who is half her age. Rather than considering length of teaching experience as an important variable, we are more inclined to regard class size and perceived class level as key factors in shaping teacher behavior.

Second, responses to 'techno-bureaucratic managerialism' and 'normative performativity' among the respondents varied considerably. Whereas Informant 4 did not mention any problems complying with the extensive rules at her university, Informant 3 was more keenly aware of how her choices were limited by complex bureaucratic constraints. The two veteran teachers felt less constrained by the rules for differing reasons. Informant 1 was a semi-retired, non-Taiwanese with somewhat limited Chinese proficiency. She was likely regarded as a "foreign expert" in her field. Her age and long-track record may have given her a fair degree of autonomy. Informant 2 was sufficiently high in the administration that she could actually formulate, or at least influence, some local policies. Nonetheless, she complained about some of the mandates coming top-down from the national Ministry of Education that her school was expected to enact.

Third, it was fascinating to observe how each of the informants negotiated complex linguistic identities when shifting from language to language. Informant 1, a native speaker of Japanese, likely had a CEFR B1 Level command of Chinese. She was competent at handling day-to-day affairs, but was somewhat handicapped by being unable to engage in academic discussions in her field in Chinese. Informant 2, a native speaker of Mandarin, spoke in fluent Japanese. However, she voiced concerns that her Japanese ability might be eroding since most of her day-to-day interactions were either in Mandarin or with persons with limited Japanese proficiency. Informant 3 also voiced concerns about Japanese attrition, and seldom felt comfortable in English. Informant 4 did not mention any language attrition concerns, but it was revealing that she chose to be interviewed in Chinese.

In short, language is one of the primary interfaces through which we interact with the world. The evidence from these interviews suggests that as we switch interfaces, to some extent our world views - or at least our ability to express those world views - also appear to change.

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