Finding a Balance between Diversity and Target Language: A Case of a Japanese Language Program in a Private University

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1. Introduction

One of the challenges that language professionals face in our increasingly diverse communities is establishing a balance between diversity and identifying a so-called target language. While Standard Japanese can be used as a common language to interact with most Japanese speakers who may not be accustomed to non-native speech (ACTFL 2012), the strict enforcement of Standard Japanese may disregard the validity of multilingual speakers, including non-Tokyo dialect speakers. An increasing number of researchers suggest that it is critical for language professionals to rethink or even resist the practices that reinforce the ideologies of standard language that may be entirely disregarding diversity (Sato and Doerr 2008, Tanaka 2013).

Yet a 2019 survey conducted by Mori, Hasegawa, Park, and Suzuki (the results of which appear in Mori, Hasegawa, Park, and Suzuki, this volume) indicated that the primary target for instruction, and policies that support the sole use of Standard Japanese are still commonly implemented. While such ideology and practice help ensure the quality of language instruction suited for imagined monolingual settings, the imposition of Standard Japanese as the primary target may also discourage variations among speakers. This is important to consider for language programs like that of Brigham Young University where more than half of the population of teaching assistants (TAs) are *hāfu* "a person with one Japanese and one non-Japanese parent" or L2 Japanese speakers who did not grow up in a Japanese community. The changing dynamics in teacher population requires that we address diversity and inclusion in the language programs' objectives to validate the unique identities of multilingual speakers on personal and professional levels.

In the following sections, I will first discuss the issues of upholding "native speakers" as the goal of language programs by presenting the findings of my own studies (Tsuchiya 2016, 2018). Then, I will delve into the complexity of setting instructional targets in light of diversity. Lastly, I will briefly share what I do to acknowledge and ensure diversity while keeping certain expectations of linguistic competence as I hire, train, and supervise TAs at BYU.

2. The Native Speaker Fallacy

The language of native speakers is often treated as the target to emulate in many language programs, partly because of the native speaker fallacy, the faulty assumption that native speakers are more effective and more qualified as language teachers than nonnative speakers (Phillipson 1992). This fallacy may be especially common when most of the teacher population is composed of native speakers, such as in Japanese-language programs in Japan and the United States. However, what constitutes the idea of "native" is rather complex. Further, not all "native speakers" may be perceived as equal. In addition to linguistic background, the perception of the legitimacy of native speakers as language teachers is influenced by other factors such as ethnic and racial background, social class, gender, and age (Creese, Blackledge, and Takhi 2014; Flores and Rosa 2019; Tsuchiya 2018; Vélez-Rendón 2010). As a result, the native speaker status of individuals with unique backgrounds, such as speakers of dialects other than the Tokyo dialect, *nikkeijin* "people of Japanese descent raised outside of Japan," and *hāfu*, has been questioned because they do not fit the "typical" category of native speakers of Japanese (Doerr 2009, Sato and Doerr 2008).

My research on manifestations of the native speaker fallacy in the Japanese and Chinese language programs at a large public U.S. university (Tsuchiya 2016) is one of the few studies that provides a glimpse of the current state of the native speaker fallacy outside the context of Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (Braine 2010). In the following, I will share relevant findings from the quantitative and qualitative data I collected from 2014 to 2016 through surveys (*n* = 594), interviews, and more than eighty hours of observation sessions that included teacher training and teaching experiences of the program's Japanese and Chinese language teachers.

The quantitative analysis of the survey data collected from language students and teachers of Japanese and Chinese showed a strong preference

for native speakers as language teachers and their idealizing characterizations of native speaker. For example, many participants associated native speaker status with that person's competency in a variety of subjects and situations (77%), reading and writing ability (73%), pronunciation without foreign accent (60%), and ability to use grammatical patterns without mistakes (55%). Moreover, some respondents also associated native speaker status with the ability to teach their native language to second language learners (30%), with reception of education in the target culture (26%), as well as with socioeconomic status (21%).

Interestingly, the survey also revealed that Japanese-language students, in comparison to Chinese-language students, showed more preference for native speakers and less preference for non-native speakers. The difference is small yet statistically significant. There are a number of possible factors that might have affected the result at a macro level such as how Japanese and Chinese people are perceived in general in the U.S. as well as the perception of the standard dialect in Japan and China. However, the following potential sources of influence particularly from the language program should be noted: (1) the seemingly stricter enforcement of the standard dialect pronunciation in the Japanese program, (2) the fact that more non-native-speaking faculty are involved in teacher training in the Chinese program, and (3) the type of teaching assignments given to native speakers of Japanese and Chinese. The attention to the standard variety pronunciation and pitch accent patterns seemed to be more emphasized in the Japanese department, perhaps because native-speaking faculty outnumbered the lone non-native in the Japanese department among those who engaged in language teacher training at the time of this study. The emphasis on pronunciation made some Japanese-language teachers, especially those who were L2 speakers of Japanese, feel insecure about their pronunciation in terms of modeling the pitch accent in Standard Japanese. On the other hand, non-native teacher training faculty in the Chinese department outnumbered native speakers, and interestingly, none of the L2 Chinese teachers reported feeling guilty about their pronunciation. For the most part, native speakers of Japanese were assigned to exclusively teach speaking and listening classes taught in Japanese. On the other hand, native speakers of Chinese were occasionally assigned to teach grammatical and cultural concepts in English. Many of these native speakers of Chinese found this task challenging and language learners saw them struggle. These differing

distributions of teaching assignments might have influenced the formation of the Japanese-language students' preference for native speakers as presenters of models to follow, and Chinese-language students' relatively lower appreciation of native speakers of Chinese as instructors.

The qualitative analysis of the survey response further revealed that language students frequently made use of factors such as name, appearance, and citizenship, along with linguistic ability, to determine the native speaker status of their teachers (Tsuchiya 2018). In interview sessions, teachers and selected students were asked whether and why they thought of themselves or their teachers as a native or non-native speaker of the target language. Teacher participants were further asked to talk about how they prepared lessons, corrected errors, graded, and interacted with students in and outside of class. Interestingly, the qualitative analysis showed that participants had a mixed response regarding those who did not fit the typical dichotomy of native and non-native speakers. For instance, a few students decided to judge their L1-speaking teachers of Japanese as non-native for lacking confidence and for being too "Americanized" or fluent in English. In contrast, based on their Asian appearance and behavior, L1 Chinese-speaking teachers of Japanese in the Japanese program were sometimes regarded as native speakers of Japanese, especially by beginning-level learners. Many language students could not decide whether two biracial *hāfu* Asian and white teachers of Japanese were native or non-native. Some decided to label them as native while others labeled them as non-native. Though both teachers grew up speaking Japanese with one of their parents, one of them identified herself as a native speaker of Japanese and tried to communicate with her students exclusively in Japanese, while the other identified himself as a non-native speaker of Japanese to align himself with students.

The qualitative analysis of teacher training showed how teacher trainers encouraged new language teachers to use the standard variety as described in the textbook and to follow the "No English" rule during speaking/listening classes. The emphasis on pronunciation made some Japanese teachers feel insecure about modeling the pitch accent pattern in Standard Japanese. One of the non-native-speaking Japanese teachers shared that while she thought the emphasis on pronunciation was good and helpful, it also made her feel guilty. She said that certain aspects of the teacher training were incredibly stressful, especially when one of her colleagues, an L1 Japanese speaker, overly criticized her pitch accent in

front of other trainees. She also shared that one of her male students had openly expressed doubts in class about her ability to teach the language.

Some language teachers spent a good amount of time striving to improve their Japanese, especially in the area of modeling the pitch accent, whereas others did not care as much. In one case, a non-Tokyo dialect speaker of Japanese struggled to model certain pitch accent patterns as described in the textbook. To remedy this problem, during her lesson planning she paid close attention to the models in media resources and transcriptions provided in the textbook. While this is usually considered a good habit of language teaching, there was an interesting incident regarding the word *chika* "underground" in one of her observed teaching sessions. Intuitively, she pronounced the word as *CHIka* (with the high pitch assigned to the capital letters), which is listed as the pitch accent pattern in a relatively recent pitch accent dictionary along with the other variation, *chiKA* (NHK 2000). However, remembering that the word was only transcribed as *chiKA* in the textbook, she tried to guide her students to pronounce the word in the "correct" way as *chiKA*.

Language is always changing, and some information presented in textbooks could be wrong or outdated such as the pitch accent pattern of the word *chika* in this case. It is important for language teachers to not blindly accept such information, but instead develop the ability to critically analyze the language by using multiple resources (e. g., dictionaries, other speakers of Japanese with varying backgrounds, etc.) as part of their lesson planning. Native speaker fallacy is a prevalent problem in language programs, and on top of it, the perception of what counts as "native speakers" makes the situation even more complex. In the next section, I will expand on this issue in relation with the linguistic targets of language education.

3. Pros and Cons of Setting Idealized Target Linguistic Models

Many language teachers and students would agree that certain target linguistic models are essential in language programs to ensure the quality of language instruction. Target models are found in the type of dialect used in the textbook and in the language program's instruction, the rubrics used to assess language proficiencies, the perception and treatment of errors in the language program (i. e., error corrections), and the classroom rules such as the "No English" rule.

Though what is perceived as target models varies depending on different factors such as speakers' background characteristics (e. g., age and gender), upbringing and experiences, and the formality of the setting,

to my knowledge, Standard Japanese, which is often associated with the language spoken in Tokyo, is set as the primary target language of modern Japanese-language programs and found in most textbooks used for those programs. This is probably because the cultural capital of the Tokyo dialect is well established and well maintained by the Japanese education system. However, endorsement of Standard Japanese as the sole instructional goal may cause local dialects to decrease their legitimacy in L2 Japanese-language instruction. Indeed, an increasing number of researchers suggest that we should rethink or even resist the roles Japanese-language educators play towards the perpetual promotion of Standard Japanese (Doerr 2009, Sato and Doerr 2008, Tanaka 2013).

Error corrections are often provided to help learners effectively communicate with native speakers who are unaccustomed to non-native speech (ACTFL 2012). Many language teachers and students would agree that having good pronunciation is an important aspect of language learning, but the practice of teaching "correct" pronunciation can be regarded as a way to counter the promotion of nonstandard language varieties as it effectively endorses the power of the standard variety (Creese et al. 2014). In fact, the task of modeling in Standard Japanese, especially in the areas of pronunciation and pitch accent patterns, poses a challenge for non-Tokyo dialect speakers and L2 Japanese speakers, as mentioned in the previous section. Indeed, the strict enforcement of adherence to the models can become a common source of foreign language anxiety among "high achiever(s) who both recognize and magnify small imperfections in target language productions" (Horwitz 1996:367).

Moreover, a strict enforcement of one variety of a language (e. g., Standard Japanese) reproduces and promotes the monolingual ideology, which appears to be prevalent in various aspects of our language programs. One such manifestation can be found in the "No English" rule in the language classroom, the intended purpose of which is to provide opportunities for learners to practice speaking in L2 by encouraging them to communicate exclusively in their L2. If done effectively, this can help boost language learners' confidence in L2 as they learn to deal with confusion without relying on their L1. However, prohibiting the use of L1 or non-Tokyo dialects in class can contribute to the recreation of the monolingual ideology and the supremacy of Standard Japanese, which seems to counterpart the trends of globalization and multilingualism. While not all possible variations are equally as acceptable as language models, a strict imposition of the "No English" rule or requirement to

communicate in Standard Japanese in and outside of class may disregard the unique linguistic identities of multilingual speakers. It discourages multilingual practices such as translanguaging or the ability of multilingual speakers to shuttle between languages, treating the diverse languages that form their repertories as an integrated system (Canagarajah 2011:401). The target-language-only policy can also cause difficulties for language teachers to provide emotional support for and build rapport with students.

Determining target linguistic models is an important aspect of foreign language education. However, there is a danger of having consequences of unintentionally endorsing the monolingual ideology and the supremacy of Standard Japanese, which may be contrary to the intended aim of foreign language education or the promotion of globalization and multilingualism.

4. Diversity and Target Language at BYU

As mentioned, more than half of the TAs in the Japanese program at BYU are L2 speakers or *hāfu* or simultaneous bilinguals who spoke Japanese and English growing up. Translanguaging (Canagarajah 2006) is second nature to them and their upbringing experience with the language is different from those who grew up speaking only Japanese. L2 speakers of Japanese are different from L1 Japanese teachers in that their interlanguage often shows some influence from their L1 (i. e., English), but they can act as successful models of learners who can use their learning experience to relate to students. Simultaneous bilinguals' Japanese also shows some influence from English in many cases, and unlike the L2 speakers of Japanese, they may lack the experience of formally learning Japanese. However, they can take advantage of their fluency in Japanese and English as language teachers, and critically bring in diverse perspectives into the language program with their unique upbringing experiences and relation with Japanese culture.

Despite having TAs with various backgrounds, TAs are currently only assigned to teach speaking/listening classes with the expectation that they will use Standard Japanese and follow the "No English" rule in class in BYU's Japanese program. While it may take some time to revise a language program's objectives to integrate diversity and inclusion to address both monolingual and multilingual situations, here are five ideas that I incorporate to set a balance between diversity and target language at BYU. Please note that these suggestions are not meant to provide a one-size-fits-all solution.

1. Assigning TAs. I hire TAs with different language varieties. When assigning TAs to classes, I rotate them to expose students to different types of competent speech styles.

2. Setting different expectations for TAs. As professionals in every field need to continue to improve, I encourage my TAs to take advantage of the prevalence of Standard Japanese and use it as a model to improve their language ability. However, I do not require non-Tokyo dialect speakers and non-native-speaking TAs to strictly model their pronunciation and pitch accent patterns in Standard Japanese. This is to prevent them from becoming too cautious about their language use and spending undue time preparing for class in an attempt to eliminate any perceived imperfections (Horwitz 1996). It is also to prevent some of the L1 Japanese TAs from becoming too critical of others.

3. Assigning teaching tasks that do not come easy. I often assign my prospective TAs to practice explaining in English difficult concepts of the Japanese language such as the difference between Japanese particles *wa* and *ga*, and the concept of *uchi* and *soto*, etc. This often helps L1 Japanese TAs understand the difficulties and complexities associated with various aspects of instruction.

4. Setting goals. I help my TAs and prospective TAs set achievable goals that are appropriate for their respective levels to improve their Japanese and pedagogical skills. As necessary, I share my own shortcomings as a language teacher (e. g., lack of experience in business settings, difficulty explaining challenging grammatical concepts, etc.) and the learning strategies I use to improve my proficiency (e. g., listening to news, using multiple resources to figure out certain linguistic phenomena, etc.).

5. Holding debriefing sessions. Finally, as part of language class, I make time to have "debriefing sessions" in which students can share their concerns in English. These sessions provide emotional support for those who may be experiencing foreign language anxiety in their speaking/listening classes. I also use this time to explain when it is appropriate to translanguage, to provide guidance on study habits, and to offer deeper analysis of the language (e. g., discussing difficult grammatical concepts, the shifting nature of language, etc.). As needed, I also hold debriefing sessions with TAs to have an open discussion on sensitive topics such as the native speaker fallacy, racism, and power harassment.

5. Closing

In this commentary, I have shared relevant findings from my research about the native speaker fallacy and discussed the complexity of setting the target linguistic models. I also provided pedagogical suggestions to set a balance between diversity and target language. It is my hope that the

perspective I have shared can be a springboard for discussing and refining language instructors' approach to diversity, inclusion, and professionalism in Japanese-language education in the coming years.

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