"Critical Pedagogy for Minority Education: Implications for Heritage Language Education in Japan"

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Abstract

This paper discusses critical pedagogy for minority education and explores its implications for heritage language education in Japan. As a conceptual framework, we employ critical theory promoted by the Frankfurt School philosophers in the 1920s and 1930s. Primarily, we perceive critical thinking as an educational perspective that critical pedagogists have brought into the field. After giving an overview of the development of critical pedagogy, we will review how second language educators have understood critical pedagogy and adopted it into their practices. Finally, we will consider some of its implications for minority and heritage language education in Japan.

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1. Herbert Marcuse's "One-dimensional Man"

Frankfurt School thinkers held the view that contemporary societies are "closed," and technological rationalism had led to modern development and advancement. In "One-dimensional Man," Herbert Marcuse (1964) maintains that technology is "a social process" in which humans are inseparably involved with each other. Technological rationalism, for Marcuse, is dominative. It refers to a form of oppression that rejects the possibility of change and thus weakens the human ability to think critically. Technology places great importance on "efficiency," and it makes any critical protest irrational. According to Marcuse, a person under capitalism is "one dimensional," in the sense that he bears no trace of the conflicts that make him multi-dimensional and capable of change.

2. Critical Pedagogy for Education

The critical thinking movement in education started in Europe in the mid-twentieth century. Factors such as government domination over the economy, social and cultural hegemony, and the labor movement led to the critical thinking movement in education.

Critical pedagogy was developed from critical theory to study the existence of social dominance in education and provide students with a voice to challenge oppression. The ultimate goal of critical pedagogists was to change society by helping the oppressed become emancipated (Uddin, 2019). Thus, critical pedagogy offers an effective way to enhance the critical thinking capability of students and provides them with a voice to speak up. Paulo Freire (1967), a Brazilian educator, saw that the significance of critical pedagogy lay in its characteristics of having learners engage actively in their learning process, thus being able to develop their own opinion and position. He sought to promote critical literacy skills among socially oppressed Brazilian farmers and reveal the ways in which minorities were marginalized in society (Ooiwa-Yoshizawa, 2012).

The term "critical pedagogy" was first introduced by Freire and an American/Canadian scholar Henry Giroux. They aimed to understand the oppression of an individual, a group,

and society. Freire initially interpreted "oppression" as what was experienced by the working class at the hands of the ruling class. However, as radical social thinking spread, along with the growth of social movements toward the end of the twentieth century, other aspects of oppression, such as gender, race, peace, and the environment, became more apparent.

Freire criticized the conventional views in education that presume learners are "empty agents" who blindly receive knowledge from the teacher. Instead, he advocated for a more learner-centered approach and acknowledged "empowerment" as an aim of education that should fundamentally be based on dialogues. Freire's fundamental idea behind his approach is to liberate learners from social and cultural hegemony, a position in line with the arguments developed by thinkers in the Frankfurt School.

According to Crookes (2012), one central feature of Freire's approach was that the elements of the language curriculum should relate to the issues students face in their lives and the situations that are or may turn out to be problematic, which could be changed and improved through acquiring literacy. In addition, since one of the goals of Freire's approach was to foster freedom in students and improve their ability to act, the students themselves played a substantial role in the development of the curriculum and even of the teaching materials.

Today, school authorities, especially those in East Asian countries, including Japan, rely heavily on various tests to evaluate teacher effectiveness and student achievement. Preparing for and passing an entrance examination for a prestigious university is so difficult for high school students that it is termed *"juken sensou"* (entrance examination war) in Japanese. High schools are often ranked based on the number of successful students who have passed the entrance examination for elite universities. As a result, many high school teachers are busy preparing their students for high-stakes tests rather than collaboratively promoting life-long learning and fostering students' freedom.

Some Japanese educators have attempted to employ the central themes of the critical

approach to curriculum development in school settings. Son (1996), for example, suggests that critical thinking in curriculum development can be re-conceptualized as a rationality that presupposes criticism, transcendence, and emancipation. He questions the traditional curriculum development approaches that value conformity and instead calls for the need to resist stable and positive thinking. He further points out that the conventional curriculum in Japan is lacking in its function as political criticism.

Resistance and disobedience in school or classroom settings have typically been overlooked in curriculum development research. Son (1996) concludes that the critical thinking approach is valuable for curriculum development as it does not capture resistance and disobedience as psychopathological symptoms but explores them as part of an individual student's emotions and personality.

Similarly, Chacón (2009) reports on EFL (English as a Foreign Language) teacher-education courses in Venezuela and describes how she transformed the curriculum of non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs) by introducing the critical language awareness (CLA) approach into the teacher-training program. She highlights the hegemonic status that English has as an international lingua franca, creating unequal relations of power between native speakers and non-native speakers of English. She argues that a critical approach to educating EFL teachers should address the teaching self in its broader sociohistorical context. From this perspective, the education of NNESTs demands "an emancipatory curriculum" (p. 215) that raises teachers' awareness of how language intersects with race, gender, and power.

In her conclusion, Chacón (2009) illustrates three categories that emerged from the findings, each of which represent the participants' perceptions of race relations and the effects that instruction produced on their subjectivities: 1) awareness of the prevalence of color blindness, 2) recognition of one's own and of others' racist attitudes, and 3) media's influence on biases, racial prejudices, and stereotypes.

3. Critical Approach to L2 Research

At the center of the discussion of critical pedagogy for L2 teaching is the perception of society as being unequal and unfair. Under such presuppositions, L2 researchers have focused on the relationship between language and social change. In his recent work, Pennycook (2021) provides an overview of Critical Applied Linguistics, which has drawn on the Frankfurt School in various ways. By "critical," he means "taking social inequality and social transformation as central to one's work" (p. 26). He also highlights the need for applied linguists to critically understand "multilingualism" in a broader social, political context:

> The recognition of multilingualism as the norm from which we should observe language learning and use is important, but without a broader social agenda around the political economy of multilingualism, a multilingual turn does not carry enough critical weight in itself. (p.17)

Likewise, Norton and Toohey (2004) note:

> Language is not simply a means of expression or communication; rather, it is a practice that constructs, and is constructed by, the ways language learners understand themselves, their social surroundings, their histories, and their possibilities for the future. (p. 1)

This is very true when we see ourselves as L2 learners: Our L2 identity is formed, reshaped, and transformed whenever we speak, write, read, and listen to L2. We constantly look back on our past and look forward to the future as L2 learners by using the language.

Norton (2000) investigated how power relations impact L2 learning by an immigrant woman in Canada. She argues that it is necessary to problematize dichotomous distinctions between the language learner and the language learning context by assuming that power does not operate only at the macro-level of powerful institutions but also at the micro-level of everyday social encounters between individuals. She further notes that

many applied linguists have taken for granted the conditions for the establishment of communication. They have failed to explore how inequitable relations of power limit the opportunities language learners have to practice the target language outside the classroom. By introducing the notion of "investment," Norton (2000) attempts to shed light on the complex features of a language learner's motivation for learning the target language and their multiple identities that are constantly negotiated and reshaped in social interactions.

Similarly, Crookes (1997) emphasizes the importance of critical pedagogy in L2 teaching and learning from a teacher's perspective. He argues that the situation surrounding second language acquisition (SLA) research could be improved if (a) SLA focused more on learning as being social rather than psychological; (b) it were more oriented to the qualitative tradition of investigation, particularly its style of reporting; and (c) it recognized the status of ESL teachers in native English countries as generally marginalized representatives of a marginalized constituency and accordingly did research incorporating issues of power. Crookes' discussion resonates with Norton's (2000) in that both scholars question the trends in traditional L2 motivation research to "quantify a learner's commitment to learning the target language" (Crookes, 1997, p. 10).

Recently, Japanese researchers in English language teaching have discussed the issues of power and suggested that English language education in Japan be adequately addressed from a critical perspective. Among them, Kubota (2004, p.37) introduces a concept of critical multicultural education, calling for "a more critical, transformative, liberatory, or social constructionist approach" to multicultural education.

4. Bringing Critical Perspectives to Minority Education

In the U.S., immigrant children have historically been educated to abandon the language they use with their family at home and shift to English to adapt to mainstream society. In recent years, however, educators have started to regard their home language, or heritage language (HL), as an advantage rather than a deficiency. They believe that HL students'

rich linguistic and cultural resources are invaluable national assets (He & Xiao, 2008; Kondo-Brown, 2001; Li & Duff, 2018).

However, even in the U.S., the curriculum designed for HL learners has not been fully developed. Without suitable options, many HL learners may be misplaced in traditional foreign language (FL) classes. It is, therefore, necessary to offer classes to them that are tailored to meet their unique needs (Kondo-Brown, 2001; Oguro & Moloney, 2012).

Crookes (2012) argues that educators in ESL contexts need to pay more attention to critical pedagogy than those in EFL contexts, as ESL learners are often marginalized or treated as inferior in mainstream society. Yet, the situations in Japan, where English is taught as a foreign language, have dramatically changed in the past few decades in terms of its linguistic and cultural diversity. With the increase in the number of immigrants, the issues of power relations now bear more significance than ever. Such a change unquestionably requires an allocation of educational supports for minority students.

The following example illustrates how critical perspectives can be put into practice in minority education in the classroom. One of the authors has been teaching a content-based English course, an elective English course for 3rd and 4th year students majoring in Spanish, Portuguese, Chinese, Korean, Indonesian, Vietnamese, and Thai, at a university in Japan. The course aims to foster students' understanding of the landscape of ethnic minorities and their communities within Japan by critically examining the current social and political positions in which those immigrants are placed. In a typical lesson, the students read an article about an ethnic community in Japan, study the vocabulary, answer comprehension questions prepared by the instructor, and do group discussions on the topic.

In one of the lessons, the topic was "Minority children and education." After reading about how Japanese elementary schools have accepted Brazilian children, the instructor showed them an interview sheet that the Chiba Board of Education created for elementary

school teachers to fill out. This sheet was designed to be used when their schools accept minority children to collect their personal information. It contains such questions regarding the child's name, gender, date of birth, nationality, country of origin, the language of use, Japanese proficiency, parent's information, including visa status, etc. (See the image below.)

＜資料3＞	外国人児童生徒　個人カード						
				平成　年　月　日　記入者（　　　　）			
フリガナ			性	生年月日	年齢	児童区分	
児童名			男	平成　年　月　日		中国帰国児童生徒	
通称名			女	（西暦　　年）	歳	外国人児童生徒	
国籍		使用言語		来日目的	永住・一時滞在		
出身国		来日　年　月　日		編入・転入　年　月　日			
日本の学年		現地での在籍校・学年			校　　学年		
日本語能力	聞く 話す	1. 全くわからない 2. 挨拶が出来る 3. 簡単な指示ができる 4. 簡単な会話ができる 5. 会話は十分出来る		読む 書く	1. 読み書きができない 2. かなが読める 3. 簡単な漢字が読める 4. ひらがなが書ける 5. 簡単な漢字が書ける		
出身国での 教育環境 就学歴等				健康 状況			
日常生活上 の問題点等							
フリガナ			続柄		職業		
保護者名			国籍		ビザの種類		
通称名			使用言語		日本語	可・不可	
住　　所		Tel					
緊急連絡先		Tel					
家族構成					（日本語のできる人に○）		
フリガナ			続柄		使用言語		
引取人名			国籍		日本語	可・不可	
住所		Tel					
備考							

Students in the English course were told first to look carefully through what is written on this sheet and discuss with their classmates in English how this card could be improved in order to understand the minority children better. They were asked to make any changes to the content by creating new questions or replacing (or deleting) existing questions so that this interview sheet would enable elementary school teachers to support minority children in better ways. Some groups created new questions about hobbies or special skills that minority students may have, arguing that identifying their strengths would lead to building a positive relationship between the teacher and the children. Others added questions about the child's "home language," "religion," "food allergies," and "prior experience with Japan or the Japanese language." It is noteworthy that by critically looking at the current educational system, the university students exhibited their sensitivity to and respect for minority children's background language and culture, both of which are fundamental to offering supportive education to immigrant children.

As indicated in research, among many aspects of minority children's backgrounds, their home language, or heritage language, is especially important. Earlier studies (e.g., Garcia, 1985) have shown that immigrants who maintain their HL performed academically better and demonstrated higher educational expectations than those monolinguals speaking only the dominant language. As such, nurturing bilingual children who speak both Japanese and their HL must be one of the goals of multicultural/multilingual education in Japan.

5. Empowering Minority Students

Cummins (1983) makes crucial points as to how a teacher can empower minority students by valuing their L1 proficiency. In the U.S. and Canada, in the 1970s, for example, minority students with limited English proficiency were often labeled as "deficit," and their L1 knowledge and skills were seen as a hindrance to their English learning. Some parents also believed that improving their children's English ability was

the first priority. They even discouraged their children from using their home language, leading to their low self-esteem. If the teacher values the students' linguistic and cultural background as a resource that will enrich the diversity in the classroom, the students could gain a positive identity and confidence in L2 learning.

Cummins' (1983) approach centers on the tenet that minority students are "empowered" or "disabled" as a result of their interactions with their schoolteachers. He suggests that empowered students develop the ability, confidence, cultural identity, and motivation to succeed academically. Cummins further argues that the most successful bilingual programs are the ones that emphasize and use the students' L1. In Japan, too, the questions of how to empower those minority students and how to value their home language will be critical factors in enabling them to be academically successful learners and socially active participants.

Cummins (2005) proposes strategies for recognizing HL competence as a learning resource. He aims to confront and critically re-examine their own monolingual instructional assumptions. He concludes that affirmation of students' home languages within the school and after-school programs can significantly encourage HL speakers to perceive their multicultural and multilingual talents as valued components of their identities.

Unfortunately, however, stories are often heard of students with foreign backgrounds experiencing bullying or discrimination from their classmates in the Japanese context. There need to be educational measures that promote minority students' self-esteem and sense of being an essential part of society. Such attempts can, in turn, benefit the Japanese students as well by making them more culturally sensitive and more open-minded towards diversity.

6. Implications for Heritage Language Education in Japan

HL learners are ethnically tied with their parent(s)' home country, and some of them maintain their HL contact with their family members who are the native speakers of the

target language. In most instances, they naturally grow up listening to the HL at home while interacting with the speakers of the dominant language outside. In some cases, however, when the parents believe the ability to speak their HL will hinder the children's academic achievement, they may not encourage them to communicate in their HL in and outside their home.

Every HL learner approaches HL learning with differing backgrounds and motivational orientations. Therefore, the instructors need to be sensitive to their socio-ethnic status and the unique sociolinguistic characteristics they bring to their classrooms. Such differing characteristics have a significant impact on the way they approach the target language. Likewise, depending on how HL learners position themselves and embrace their bi- or multicultural identities, the extent and the direction of their language learning motivation will vary, consequently affecting its acquisition and maintenance to differing degrees.

Hornberger and Wang (2008) advocate investigating the individual learner meticulously about how they perceive themselves as a language learner as it will help examine the relation between their learner identity and HL learning. Researchers have studied the systematic relationship between HL learning and learner identity and their relevance to HL proficiency, self-esteem, or self-efficacy (Lee, 2002; Lee, 2005; Whitesell et al., 2009; Yu, 2015).

According to Nakajima (2017), an HL differs from a mother tongue: It is the language coupled with the speaker's identity fluctuating together, while a mother tongue serves as the foundation for the speaker's identity. Similarly, the HL speakers' perceptions and attitudes toward their HL depend greatly on how the HL is perceived or valued by others and society. Currently, children of immigrants in many countries outside Japan are treated as prospective citizens who are indispensable to society. However, as Nakajima (2017) points out, in Japan, they can at best be placed in a special class prepared for intensive training in the Japanese language. Their HL maintenance is likely

to be neglected, let alone their identity as a learner. As a result, it is not surprising to find that the high school dropout rate for non-Japanese students is more than seven times higher than for Japanese students (MEXT, 2020).

Every HL is a valuable resource to society, which is a view linked to Freire's philosophy discussed earlier. Shintani's (2018) study on the HL use and maintenance by Peruvian immigrant communities in Japan indicates that the HL is positively associated with the HL learners' self-esteem and confidence. As such, the HL must be preserved with the help of the community, teachers, and parents.

Other HL studies in different contexts also emphasized the importance of the community and the family. For example, Sugita (2000)'s ethnographic case study of HL learners in Hawai'i showed that the learners' "continuity" with other Japanese Americans in Hawai'i and their "connection" to the home language and culture in Japan significantly influenced each student's identity construction. Equally, more scientific studies need to be conducted in the context of HL learners in Japan, regarding the HL learners' continuity with their family or community within the society and their connection to their parent's home culture.

Other researchers (He & Xiao, 2008; Muramoto & Karsten, 2017) have reported that the resources HL learners bring help enrich the language classrooms linguistically and culturally and promote the other students' awareness and sensitivity to different languages and cultures. Such awareness and sensitivity, in return, promote the pride and self-esteem of the HL learners (Nakajima, 2017). Thus, growing up and being educated multilingual with rich cultural sensitivities, those HL learners can contribute to the language classrooms, society, and the nation as a whole to a great degree. For such potentials to be realized, pedagogic support is crucial in the classroom as well as at the local and national policy levels.

At the classroom level, the different amount of linguistic and cultural knowledge and the identity frame concerning their backgrounds may lead the HL learners to have

entirely different motivational attitudes to their language learning. Their demotivation or resistance to the ways they are taught their "own" HL becomes fully understandable when they are treated the same as other FL learners.

In Japan, where HL learners have become visible only recently, they are most likely placed in an FL class designed for Japanese learners of the target language. In such mixed classroom settings, the instructor may face challenges responding to the different linguistic needs of the HL and FL learners (Abdi, 2011). When those mixed learners are in the same classroom, it is important to promote peer interactions so that both learner groups benefit from each other. It is likely for the students to possess different levels of linguistic proficiency and cultural knowledge and position themselves differently, having unique identities, attitudes, and motivations for learning the target language.

The population of students with multicultural family backgrounds who go on to higher education has significantly grown for the past few decades in Japan. Nonetheless, the number of learners who decide to pursue learning their HLs in the long term is still limited, and their voices are often unrecognized. Those students may come from different learning environments and enter the university for unique reasons or specific goals. Consequently, they may be isolated from the mainstream classroom culture, which is often dominated by Japanese FL learners. With HL learners' voices unheard, there will be no way to liberate them from social and cultural hegemony, as advocated by critical pedagogists, and therefore fully educate them.

There is no doubt that HL learners are becoming more visible and identifiable with their linguistic and cultural richness in contemporary Japan. It is, therefore, crucial to critically examine the current educational circumstances HL learners belong to, understand the difficulties they may encounter in their academic pursuits, and offer support systems to value and foster further development of their languages, literacies, and cultural competencies (Kondo-Brown & Brown, 2008; Li & Duff, 2018; Sugita & Park, 2020).

7. Conclusion

This paper attempted to shed light on the need to understand the challenges that minority students in Japan, especially HL learners, may face in their academic paths. HL education must be recognized as a field of scientific inquiry that is distinguishable from the traditional bi- and multilingualism and FL education. Pennycook (2021) points out that merely recognizing multilingualism as the norm underlying language learning and use is not enough. Many essential research agendas require applications of society and country-specific inquiries.

The literature mentioned above is based to a great degree on studies on bilingual education in North America, but it provides a lot of implications for the Japanese context. In particular, Cummins' (1983) perspective, which is consistent with Freire's framework, of empowering minority students is crucial. This approach will enable scholars in Japan to perceive the minority students' home language or HL as a "resource," which will enhance the linguistic and cultural enrichment of their learning environment, making it beneficial both to the minority and Japanese students.

Historically, Japanese authorities have neglected and sometimes negated the significance of indigenous languages and cultures such as Ainu and Ryukyuan. Likewise, the two largest ethnic groups of the Chinese and the Koreans have often been discriminated against in various societal situations. It is regretful that our students have typically been given very few chances at school to deepen their understanding of the country's cultural and linguistic richness.

As repeatedly mentioned, one way of empowering minority students is the use of their home language. Some researchers have introduced the attempts made in Japanese public schools to incorporate the students' L1 into classroom teaching concerning Chinese, Portuguese, and Filipino students (Kiyota, 2016). Nevertheless, we believe education for linguistic minorities in Japan still has much room for improvement to raise the cultural and linguistic awareness of students of all ethnic backgrounds, especially

Japanese students, and realize a truly multilingual and multicultural society. The first step is the "emancipation" of students, one of the fundamental conceptions of the critical theory developed by the Frankfurt School intellectuals.

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