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Learning Japanese, from learners' points of view: affective and social factors in independent learning

Richard C. Smith

Abstract

In this article, autobiographies of three English mother tongue learners of Japanese living in Japan are presented, then analysed and discussed from the point of view of affective and social factors involved in their independent learning of Japanese. Feelings and actual phenomena of disempowerment and marginalization are particularly focused on, together with accompanying avoidance and resistance responses which may have had an important influence not only on their Japanese language acquisition but also on their overall adjustment to life in Japan. In the course of this analysis, a number of suggestions are made for improvement of conceptualizations of intercultural adjustment, in particular with regard to the possible role of social practices, and the role of second language acquisition in facilitating or hindering successful adjustment. Finally, possible implications are drawn, specifically for those involved in Japanese language teaching and learner development practices and/or international exchange programmes in the Japanese context.

Keywords

Independent learning
Learner development
Intercultural adjustment
Second language acquisition (affective factors)
Second language acquisition (social factors)

1. Introduction

This article focuses on some potential problems involved in the independent learning of Japanese in Japan by native speakers of English, as revealed in autobiographies written by three such learners. While the encouragement of independent or 'autonomous' learning is increasingly recommended in foreign language teaching contexts, there has been little discussion of problems involved, in particular with regard to the affective and social dimensions of independent learning. Instead, suggestions for classroom-based 'learner training' tend to focus positively (indeed, positivistically) on technical or purely cognitive aspects: goal-setting, time management, self-assessment etc. (e.g. Ellis and Sinclair, 1989) and the development of metacognitive and cognitive strategies (e.g. O'Malley and Chamot, 1990). However, affective factors might be expected to play as crucial a role in motivating or discouraging independent learning as they have been shown to play within contexts of formal instruction (see Bailey, 1983; Horwitz and Young, 1991; Macintyre and Gardner, 1991). Another limitation of technical/cognitive suggestions for 'training' learners to learn in naturalistic settings might be that they ignore the reception accorded to their attempts in particular social contexts (cf. Peirce, 1995). This article will suggest, then, that affective and social factors merit increased attention, and that

benefit might be gained from listening to the voices of independent learners themselves in order to develop more effective, affective approaches to learner development (cf. Smith, 1994) in social context.

2. Background

2.1 *Learner to Learner*

Data for the present study consist of extracts from learner 'confessions' first published in a newsletter for independent learners of Japanese in Japan, co-founded and co-edited by the present author and entitled *Learner to Learner*. In order to provide necessary background to these extracts, this section will describe the inception and membership of this 'Japanese learners' network'. The idea of a newsletter to support independent learners of Japanese living in Japan was first mooted at the 1992 JALT (Japan Association for Language Teaching) Conference in the course of a workshop entitled 'Japanese for Lazy People' led by Trevor Hughes Parry and myself. The motivation for this workshop and the rationale for *Learner to Learner* were based on the premise - derived from interviews with users of our own course for independent learners (Smith, Hughes Parry and Moeran, 1991) - that a considerable number of independent learners of Japanese with English as a native language are/were frustrated with their lack of progress in Japanese language acquisition, and sense that they have reached a plateau in their learning (that is, feel a sense of frustration that they are so-called 'lazy learners'). The workshop and the first newsletter were organized on the basis of this assumption, with the newsletter's stated purpose being as follows:

> Many learners are not particularly motivated to attend formal language classes, or are unable to do so, but nevertheless feel frustrated by their lack of progress in Japanese. We envisage the newsletter as a forum where all of us can share ideas on an equal and open basis.

The newsletter (called *Learner to Learner* to mirror the theme of the 1992 JALT Conference, 'Teacher to Teacher') was published bi-monthly for a period of two years (1993-94), with readership reaching a total of around 70 at the end of December 1993, but with this dropping back to around 35 by the middle of 1994. As a result of this decline in numbers, and logistical problems connected with printing and distribution of the newsletter, it was decided at the end of 1994 to incorporate *Learner to Learner* within the JALT Learner Development Special Interest Group, where it continued to be published until the middle of 1996, although with a decreasing emphasis on Japanese language acquisition, and an increased focus on the independent learning of any language. Extracts below, however, come from the early days of *Learner to Learner*, when the readership was almost exclusively one of native English-speaking *learners,* and the focus was on free and frank sharing of ideas and support connected with independent learning of Japanese in Japan.

2.2 Confessions in *Learner to Learner*

While the main function of *Learner to Learner* was to serve as a forum for the sharing of positive, practical ideas and suggestions among independent learners regarding the study of Japanese in Japan (see Smith, Hughes Parry and Aoki (1995) for a report on some of the ideas shared about use of authentic resources for listening), one section entitled 'Confessions of a lazy learner' was instituted from the very first issue in order to provide an opportunity for anonymous introspective self-analysis of some of the factors perceived as inhibiting the acquisition of Japanese by the writer in question. The rationale for this section was given as follows in *Learner to Learner* 1/1 (p. 1):

> Learners need opportunities to admit their failings in the area of learning Japanese, and to gain support from the knowledge that they aren't alone. To this end we suggest the occasional feature 'Confessions of a lazy learner' in which one of us learners describes the trials and tribulations involved in having to learn new Japanese.

Extracts from this section of the newsletter will be presented in this article in order to give an insight into some of the affective and social factors which might be involved in independent learning of Japanese in Japan by native English-speaking learners. First, though, we should briefly clarify both the validity of these extracts as data, and the validity of this type of study as 'research'.

Regarding the extracts themselves, salient features are as follows: they may be characterized as introspective 'Learner Autobiographies' written anonymously for a supposed readership of fellow-learners. Positive features of these 'confessions' as data may be as follows: Since they are anonymous, they might be regarded as providing potentially deeper, more honest accounts than if they had been produced under the learner's name (cf. the 'observer effect' noted by those who have analysed the use of introspective data in second language research, for example Faerch and Kasper, 1987: 18). Indeed, one confessional writer (Learner C in the extracts below) explicitly refers to the 'delicious cloak of anonymity' he was able to wear in writing his confession (*Learner to Learner* 1/5), implying that the anonymity involved enables him to say things he might otherwise have preferred to keep to himself. The second positive aspect of these extracts as data is that they were originally written for a supposed readership of fellow learners, not for teachers or researchers, and that there is therefore no tendency for them to 'give answers that are associated with perceptions of the predispositions of the researcher' (Oller, 1979: 17). Their integrity or 'honesty' may thereby be doubly reinforced.

Factors we should be wary of, however, may include the following: (i) these 'confessions' were written to be published, and in being - in a sense - literary creations they are to a degree polished, not 'raw' like interview data. One advantage of written accounts, of course, is that writers may have an opportunity to reflect more deeply than interviewees in their introspections, but a possible disadvantage is that elements of both self-justification and exaggeration may tend to colour such accounts. As has often been noted in the field of literary criticism, so-called 'confessional writing' may conceal as much as it reveals, involving not only the kind of 'self-flattery' noted by Oller (1979: 18) in his comments on self-ratings in the study of affective variables, but also a degree of 'literary' self-dramatization and exaggeration. We need to be aware that the data presented here were written in a certain 'genre', that of literary confession, and - although based on recollections of real events and emotions - may to a certain, unquantifiable degree be 'fictionalized'.

The data presented, then, have both advantages and disadvantages: advantages in giving us an insight into attitudes, emotions and learning approaches which might not normally be revealed to researchers or teachers, but disadvantages in that the accounts may be somewhat extreme, 'made dramatic' for literary effect.

Regarding the validity of any conclusions that might be reached on the basis of these data, it should be emphasized that our intention in this research is one of hypothesis-generation, and that our approach is qualitative rather than quantitative. In this regard, breadth is sacrificed for depth of analysis, and further research with a wider sample of learners would certainly be needed to validate any of the suggestions we make as a result of analysis of these extracts. Adopting a similar approach to that described by Bailey (1983: 170), then, we shall first present the extracts (pre-selected, it should be admitted at the outset, on the basis of their apparent 'interest value' in relation to the study of second language acquisition by independent learners), then proceed to summarize what appear to be 'significant trends' in the data, and finally discuss these factors in relation to previous studies of second language acquisition and intercultural adjustment.

3. Some affective / social factors and accompanying responses in independent language learning contexts

3.1 Feelings of disempowerment and marginalization

3.1.1 *Extracts from learner 'confessions'*

(1) Learner A

Just before coming to Japan, I had a week of intensive tuition with others about to depart for teaching posts here, but unfortunately (from my point of view), most of the instruction concentrated on the intricacies of hiragana and katakana; personally, I felt "infantilized", as if I was back in primary school being made to learn my "ABC" but denied any access to the spoken language the squiggles were designed to represent. My feeling of inadequacy wasn't helped by the consistently low marks I gained in daily "spelling" tests, nor by the spirit of rivalry these tests seemed to promote among classmates . . .

To make matters worse, soon after arriving in Japan I found that several of my former classmates were surging ahead in leaps and bounds where kanji were concerned (and letting us all know it!). At the same time, the Japanese teacher and textbook kindly provided by my new employers seemed to rather dogmatically take for granted that I'd be fascinated above all by the writing system, which I wasn't. The pressure was mounting, then, and I took what I probably rationalized as an "adult" course of action at the time: saying a definitive "sayonara" to formal Japanese study and the written language (linked by the feelings of inadequacy they both induced in me), I decided to drop out of the kanji race altogether, politely thanking my teacher for his trouble and saying I was unfortunately too busy to continue, and turning a "blind ear" when conversation among friends turned to the number of Chinese characters they'd memorized that particular week.

I was in a good position to "pick up" the spoken language, being surrounded by kind, helpful and largely non-English-speaking colleagues in the teachers' staffroom, and I became quite adept at avoiding the necessity to read and write in daily life. But just how have I managed to remain illiterate for so long?

Learner to Learner 1/1 (Jan. 1993), p. 2

(2) Learner B

I came to Japan very enthusiastic to learn Japanese [However,] I have been rather frustrated in that few of my expectations have come to be realized.

One false expectation that I had was created by my experience with another language - Thai. Before coming to Japan, I lived in Thailand and learned some basic Thai. Once I started learning I found that it had a snowball effect because through my daily interactions with people I would be encouraged and even helped by being introduced to even more words and phrases This pattern I think is familiar to some foreigners who have come to Japan. In my own case, however, this approach has been frustrated by my lack of opportunity to learn the language "naturally" through my daily interactions . . .

My problem, I feel, goes beyond the pervasive 'shyness' of the Japanese. Speaking my halting Japanese I would be treated with distaste. I would often be ignored or treated very rudely. If I

then spoke English people would then respond very promptly and politely. The problem I faced, you see, is that I am what is usually called a "half" - my mother is Japanese, my father American. If I don't open my mouth, people can mistake me for a Japanese or other Asian. If I tried to speak Japanese, and I have been told this often, people would mistake me for a retarded Japanese or other Asian, both categories held in low esteem by many, if not most Japanese. The moment that I said something in my American English my status would rise instantly to that of "Gaijin", which is at least equal to the status of most Japanese.

I don't think I'm being too sensitive in saying this. I have talked to others with similar experiences who face similar prejudices. Generally speaking, I would say that Asians have a different type of experience with the Japanese than do non-Asians. All cultures have their prejudices, my point is just to illustrate how this one has interfered with the way I expected to learn Japanese.

Needless to say, my enthusiasm for study dampened considerably. It took me a week to learn katakana and another two weeks to learn hiragana, and I learned a few words and phrases on my own, but I soon tired of trying to use them. Speaking English always got better results, even if the person I was trying to speak with couldn't understand a word of English.

As I stayed in Japan longer, I would be shocked as people spoke to me candidly. "Why can't you speak Japanese? You look Japanese. It's in your blood" - as if language was genetic. One former Japanese teacher told me, "I wanted to teach Japanese to foreigners, but when I found out I also had to teach Koreans and Chinese, I quit." I don't know if it's because of my Western ideals, or my American upbringing, but I can't identify with this kind of ethnic thinking. I know that often these comments are meant as a compliment, but that just makes it even harder to accept. Most of the "higher status" foreigners I know are not so troubled by this and tend to think of the Japanese as quaint in this regard.

Learner to Learner 1/3 (May 1993), p. 3

(3) Learner C

People were overwhelmingly, desperately friendly and generous to me when I first arrived, in a way that left me unable to reciprocate on anything like an equal basis. I spent the first month staying at different people's houses.

EVERYONE spoke English.

All the corners were ironed out for me, the difficulties deftly hidden, so that only occasionally like peeping through a crack in the wall did I become fleetingly aware that Japan was a culture that needed blood, sweat, toil and tears to master. I was almost constantly tense, worried about what people were *really* feeling and expecting. Not only did people seem to be dissembling the whole time, but everything also had to pass through the filter of English before it got to me. And what English! It seemed to have had all the emotion stripped out of it, as if the textbook from which it had come had ballooned incredibly till it occupied the whole Universe. To my interlocutors I was a hobby, a brief interlude at work or the object of a happy hour's chatting on the way back home. But for me these 'chats' were all I had. From them I had to extract the human warmth necessary to stay positive about myself and Japan. I gradually felt myself losing my grip on reality. In hindsight I suppose I was just plain old lonely, but at the time - because as an outsider here one tends to blame oneself for *everything* that goes wrong - I just reproached myself for not trying harder.

> Something was bound to snap sooner or later, I suppose. The catalyst was an article someone showed me about Japan, internationalization and English teaching. In a blinding moment of realisation I understood that it was the language that was locking me out. Only by learning Japanese could I escape the de-emotionalised Noddy land in which I was stumbling around. The Japanese learning became an obsession with me, fuelled by an anger that I still cannot shake off that I had been locked out, excluded because of my amusement value as a refuge for the Japanese around me who needed a source of true 'English conversation'.
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> *Learner to Learner*1/4 (July 1993), p.2

3.1.2 *Summary analysis*

One striking feature of the first two extracts is the way in which both Learner A and Learner B strongly emphasize feelings of disempowerment in relation to aspects of their early learning and/or use of Japanese. Thus, Learner A, commenting on initial formal instruction which focused on the written language, says ‘I felt “infantilized", as if I was back in primary school being made to learn my "ABC”. He also refers (twice) to ‘feelings of inadequacy’ associated in his mind with both formal Japanese study and the written language, and claims that he rationalized his dropping out of formal instruction and study of kanji as an ‘adult’ course of action at the time. Learner B also contrasts a sense of disempowerment, in this case when speaking Japanese (‘If I tried to speak Japanese , people would mistake me for a retarded Japanese or other Asian’) with one of empowerment, in her case linked with speaking English (‘The moment that I said something in my American English my status would rise instantly’). At the same time, however, Learner B expresses frustration with her ‘lack of opportunity to learn Japanese "naturally" through daily interactions’, and it is this kind of frustration with regard to a lack of opportunities to interact in Japanese which comes out most clearly in Learner C's account. Thus, rather than a sense of disempowerment related to learning/use of Japanese, what Learner C emphasizes is his increasing sense of marginalization (accompanied by feelings of loneliness and anger) connected with the English-only situation he finds himself in. At first, he interprets his experience of being treated as a ‘guest’ positively (‘people were friendly and generous to me when I first arrived’), but a strong sense of being marginalized which relates - according to Learner C's interpretation - to continually being treated as an object of amusement (a ‘source of English conversation’) emerges increasingly towards the end of the extract, where he expresses his ‘anger’ at being ‘locked out, excluded’ from more meaningful forms of communication.

3.1.3 *Discussion*

Taken together, these extracts seem to indicate that the learners concerned experienced feelings of disempowerment connected with (different) aspects of their early learning/use of Japanese (learners A and B), and/or feelings of frustration/ marginalization connected with a perceived pressure to use English and *not* use/learn Japanese (Learner B and, especially, C). The influence such feelings may have had on their Japanese language acquisition will be discussed in section 3.2 below. Here, however, it will be suggested that second language use/acquisition-related feelings of disempowerment and marginalization such as those identified above may deserve recognition and further analysis *on their own terms,* since - whatever their influence on second language acquisition per se - they can also be seen as important in a wider sense, in relating to the mental well-being of the individuals concerned and their overall adjustment or lack of adjustment to life in a foreign culture.

In this context, stage models of intercultural adjustment such as those originated by Lysgaard (1955), Oberg (1960) and, more recently, Grove and Torbiorn (1985) might be referred to in helping to explain the affective states revealed in particular by Learners B and C (Learner A's case is somewhat different, in that his ‘feelings of inadequacy’ were first produced *outside* Japan, and we shall return to his case in

section 3.2). What all of these models have in common is a U-shaped curve of adjustment in which an initial stage of superficially easy and successful adjustment is followed by a stage (or stages) of culture 'shock' or 'stress' characterized by feelings of 'loneliness' and 'crisis' (Lysgaard, 1955:49-51), 'a feeling of frustration and anxiety' (Oberg, 1960: 177), 'confusion and disorientation' (Adler, 1975: 16), 'reduction of confidence' (Grove and Torbiorn, 1985: 213) or 'partial breakdown of the mental frame of reference that originally was constructed in one's home culture' (ibid.: 217). Thus, an argument could be made for relating the language learning/use-related feelings of disempowerment and marginalization of Learners B and C, identified above, to a 'natural' tendency of sojourners in a foreign culture to experience feelings of loss of self-esteem and loneliness during the second stage(s) of intercultural adjustment.

Certainly, models of intercultural adjustment such as those referred to can be useful in helping those involved in international exchange see as 'normal' affective states and responses which might otherwise be perceived as 'aberrant' or 'aggressive' by sojourners and hosts concerned (see Barna, 1983: 43). However, such models do not appear to be adequate in completely 'explaining' the feelings of disempowerment and marginalization we have identified. So far, we have been careful to refer to 'disempowerment' and 'marginalization' only as affective states, but there is also some evidence in the extracts that these 'feelings' were at least partially produced by phenomena of actual language-related disempowerment and marginalization originating in the host culture. Thus, Learner B clearly concludes that the 'disempowerment' she experienced when she tried to speak Japanese was not simply a feeling but a reality, a conclusion made all the stronger by her circumspect style and reference to supporting evidence: 'I don't think I'm being too sensitive in saying this. I have talked to others with similar experiences who face similar prejudices'. In the case of Learner C, it is arguable whether his being treated as a guest and his hosts' attempts to speak to him in English can really be defined as 'marginalization' (indeed, in an extract not quoted, Learner C refers positively to 'all those friendly people (who surely couldn't help enjoying English, who tried so hard to make my first few months so happy)'. It might be suggested, however, that his interlocutors' 'good intentions' in treating him as a 'foreign guest' did contribute to the creation of a situation in which Learner C was - in reality - sheltered (excluded) from exposure to 'typical' Japanese interaction, and trapped instead within a kind of 'in-between land' in which English was the medium of communication preferred by his hosts (cf. Lummis (1977), Anon. (1993), Golin (1993), and Smith (1993) for reports of similar experiences).

It is beyond the scope of this article to investigate further the social mechanisms which might underlie actual phenomena (as opposed to 'mere feelings') of language use/learning-related disempowerment and marginalization in the Japanese social context (for further insights into social structures and language attitudes which might be related to such phenomena, the reader is referred to Nakane (1973) and Miller (1982), respectively). Our main purpose in this section has simply been to suggest that feelings related to independent language use/learning such as those we have identified seem to merit recognition and further investigation by those concerned with language learner development and/or facilitation of intercultural adjustment, but that any such investigation may need to take account of disempowerment and marginalization as objective social phenomena, not only as affective factors, thus adding a contextual, sociological dimension to the 'psychological' stage models of intercultural adjustment we have referred to (for similar considerations relating to the inadequacies of current 'psychological' models of second language acquisition, see Peirce, 1995).

3.2 Avoidance and resistance responses

3.2.1 *Extracts from learner 'confessions'*

(4) Learner A

Why, then, do I feel frustrated by my lack of ability in written Japanese? Why don't I just "accept", and get on with the serious business of living? I think the reason is that, just living in Japan, I *do* have needs for knowing how to read and write but am unconsciously and deviously getting round them; none of these needs are so pressing that I *can't* avoid them, but underneath I feel perpetually stressed, guilty and humiliated about being dependent on others and having to display my ignorance. Minor transactions are only slightly shaming - asking "romaji de ii desu ka?" when I have to write my address, "chotto kaite itadakemasu ka?" for more complicated forms, or getting colleagues to explain work-related memoranda. To a certain extent, life in Japan is well set-up for the illiterate foreigner bent on avoiding kanji - bills (previously a particular frustration for me) don't have to be read if they're paid automatically by the bank, we don't have to read Japanese newspapers because we have the English language ones, letters can be addressed in romaji, even Shinjuku station has become foreigner-friendly, and of course, above all, most Japanese people don't expect foreigners to be able to speak, let alone read and write Japanese, and tend to be quite willing to help sort out related problems.

As the years roll on, perhaps it's this last factor that causes me the most frustration - I figure I'll never escape being cast first and foremost as a "foreigner," not to say an "ignorant foreigner" by the Japanese I meet and work with until I can read (and write) their language as well as speak it But, having said this, I still wonder whether my desire to learn is really strong enough. There seems such a long way to go from studying the basic kanji to doing what I really want to do with them.

Learner to Learner 1/2 (March 1993), p. 2

(5) Learner C

What happened [then] was the beginning of Chapter 2 for me. Not only because I had started to learn Japanese, but because I had begun to take control of my life *even at the risk* of *offending the Japanese people I came into contact with.* And I can tell you in the next few weeks there was a whole lot more offending!

At work I began to bring unpleasant English conversations to a close as quickly as I could. Under the pretext of learning Japanese I deserted the teachers' room for the library, and then the general office, where no-one spoke English. After work I stopped going drinking with colleagues, diverse ESS groups and Cultural Exchange organisations.

But the hardest thing of all was to deprive my "friends" of English conversation. Whenever I was addressed in English I would reply in Japanese. Talking became duelling, and I quickly came to discover who my true friends were. Though I was never rude (just a little monosyllabic of necessity!) people really began to desert me. For several weeks I experienced almost complete solitude, but there was no turning back. I mean, you can't win a duel one day and then pretend you never fought it the next.

In my simple way, I had thought that learning Japanese would mean that all the English-speakers would now be replaced by Japanese-speakers rushing to me in equal measure. But I had been away from the real world too long. In the real world no-one rushes to anyone. A "public" object can be - is perhaps best - loved when passive, but by learning Japanese I was entering a more private world, where people are at first reserved and have to be sure of one's value before they open up.

So, as well as acquiring a new language, I was finding myself increasingly empowered and independent, with all the risks and pain that that entailed. There had been no pain in my previous

"public" anaesthetised life because events had been planned for me, thus excluding the possibility of disappointment. Most importantly, perhaps, proper relationships had now become possible and it was them that would ultimately keep me in Japan.

Learner to Learner 1/5 (Sept. 1993), pp. 2-3

3.2.2 *Summary analysis*

In response to his 'feelings of disempowerment', Learner A in somewhat heroic style said 'a definitive "sayonara" to formal Japanese study and the written language (linked by the feelings of inadequacy they both induced in (him))' and 'decided to drop out of the kanji race altogether' (as cited in 3.2.1 above). He ends this part of his confession with the words: 'I became quite adept at avoiding the necessity to read and write in daily life. But just how have I managed to remain illiterate for so long?' Extract 4 indicates a range of ways in which his 'avoidance response' subsequently seems to have became habitualized (following '(I) am unconsciously and deviously getting round (needs for knowing how to read and write)'), but it is clear that ultimately this situation has become a source of frustration for Learner A himself: 'underneath I feel perpetually stressed, guilty and humiliated'. Indeed, it might be pointed out that Learner A here expresses a feeling of marginalization remarkably similar to that expressed by Learner C, discussed above, relating to his lack of ability in Japanese: 'I figure I'll never escape being cast first and foremost as a "foreigner", not to say an "ignorant foreigner" by the Japanese I meet and work with until I can read (and write) their language as well as speak it'. What we have characterized as Learner A's 'avoidance response' to feelings of disempowerment related in his mind to study/use of written Japanese is paralleled in Learner B's avoidance reaction to feelings of a similar nature connected with her use of spoken Japanese, as expressed in extract (2) above. Like Learner A, Learner B is aware that her response (discontinuing her own use of spoken Japanese) is ultimately negative in the sense of hindering her learning of Japanese and integration within Japanese society (thus, she notes her 'lack of opportunity to learn the language "naturally" through my daily interactions' and that her 'enthusiasm for study dampened considerably'). Learner C, however, takes what might be characterized as an entirely opposite 'resistance' approach in reaction to a similar 'English-only' situation - responding to the feeling of marginalization he perceives to result from *not* being given the opportunity to speak Japanese (rather than to a feeling of disempowerment related to attempts to learn or use Japanese, as in the cases of Learners A and B), Learner C insists on a 'Japanese-only' policy, even at the risk of souring personal relations. Learner C recognizes that his response was somewhat aggressive ('talking became duelling'), 'obsessive' and 'fuelled by anger' (cf. extract (3)), but at the same time sees the results as ultimately positive: 'as well as acquiring a new language, I was finding myself increasingly empowered and independent'.

3.2.3 *Discussion*

In section 3.1 we concluded that, while stage models of intercultural adjustment may be useful in 'normalizing' feelings of disempowerment and marginalization such as those we identified, they may fail to take account of the role of the host culture in the production of such feelings. In this section, as we look at responses over time to feelings of disempowerment and marginalization, in other words at the effect such feelings might have on second language acquisition and intercultural adjustment, it is worth considering a related possible weakness of the stage models referred to, namely that in presenting intercultural adjustment as a series of seemingly inevitable psychological stages undergone universally regardless of context, they may tend to imply that adjustment is bound to 'complete itself' as a function of time, without accounting for the active contributions of sojourners and hosts themselves (here, we are reminded of Church's (1982:541) comment that 'stage models of sojourner adjustment encounter inherent conceptual and methodological difficulties in classifying individuals').

Thus, at the time of writing their 'confessions' (seven years after arrival in Japan in the case of Learner A; time post-arrival unstated in the case of Learner B), neither Learner A nor Learner B appears to be in sight of the 'fourth' stage characterized in such models as involving 'disappearance of a feeling of anxiety' (Oberg, 1960: 179) or 'completion of the process of adjustment' (Grove and Torbiorn, 1985:215). Instead, they both express frustration that their continuing avoidance response to engagement with written text (Learner A) or interaction in spoken Japanese (Learner B) has them trapped in a situation where little or no progress can be made (thus, Learner A realizes that his avoidance response has become habitualized in that he is 'unconsciously and deviously getting round' needs for knowing how to read and write, while Learner B appears to have had her preferred learning approach permanently frustrated by her 'lack of opportunity to learn the language "naturally" through daily interactions').

On the basis of these observations, the hypothesis might be formulated that affective / social factors such as those we identified in section 3.1 can have significant and long-lasting negative effects on learning, leading to withdrawal from attempts to overcome linguistic / intercultural barriers, and so hindering progress in both these areas. Although Learners A and B themselves concentrate on explaining their lack of *linguistic* progress, when Learner A says 'I figure I'll never escape being cast first and foremost as a "foreigner" by the Japanese I meet and work with until I can read (and write) their language as well as speak it,' he quite explicitly identifies lack of progress in intercultural adjustment with his lack of linguistic progress, and this insight underlies our relating of the two areas in the above hypothesis. In this connection, it might be noted that, while there has been some (though not a great deal of) research into the influence degree of acculturation might have on second language acquisition (e.g. Schumann, 1978: 34: ' the degree to which a learner acculturates to the target-language group will control the degree to which he acquires the second language'; cf., also, Acton (1979) and Brown (1980)), the inverse relationship does not appear to have been much considered, at least within the field of applied linguistics. Psychological studies such as those referred to in section 3.1 above also devote little attention to the contribution second language acquisition might make to successful intercultural adjustment. Learner A's comment above, however, forces us to confront the possibility that second language acquisition (or the lack of it) may have a strong influence on degree of acculturation, and that - conversely - intercultural adjustment *without* second language acquisition may not always be as simple as Brown (1980:161) seems to suggest in hypothesizing that 'Adults who have achieved non-linguistic means of coping in the foreign culture will pass through stage three and into stage four never achieving (linguistic) mastery. They have no reason to achieve mastery since they have learned to cope without sophisticated knowledge of the language'.

Further support for the idea that there can be very good reasons to achieve linguistic mastery precisely *in order to* 'cope' in a foreign culture seems to be provided by Learner C's ultimately positive experience of moving *via* second language use and study away from a feeling of marginalization and towards a situation where he 'was finding [himself] increasingly empowered and independent'. Looking again at the second language acquisition literature, feelings of anxiety and 'withdrawal' responses similar in nature to the 'avoidance responses' we have discussed in relation to Learners A and B have been previously identified in formal learning contexts, for example by Bailey (1983: 196) (although neither their possible long-term influence on subsequent learning in naturalistic contexts (cf. Learner A) nor their actual occurrence in such contexts (cf. Learner B) has been much discussed). However, with regard to the type of experience reported by Learner C, only Peirce (1993, 1995) would appear to offer a satisfactory explanation of the 'anger' which motivated his attempt to resist marginalization by means of second language acquisition (reflecting an 'aggressive' attitude which seems far removed from the characterizations of integrative or assimilative motivation in the literature (e.g. in Gardner and Lambert (1972), Graham (1984), and Gardner (1985)). In an important reappraisal of the concept of motivation (which has partly inspired our attempt to reassess purely 'psychological' conceptualizations of intercultural adjustment above), Peirce (1995:25) argues that 'SLA theorists have struggled to define the nature of language learning because they have drawn artificial distinctions

between the individual language learner and larger, frequently inequitable social structures'. Thus, reporting on the experience of one particular female immigrant to Canada, Peirce (ibid: 22) suggests that 'courage to resist marginalization' may be the best explanation of her perseverance with speaking English 'regardless of her (poor) command of the English tense system, the strange looks she received from interlocutors, and her feelings of inferiority'. Speaking of another woman's experience, Peirce (ibid.: 25) describes how her 'communicative competence developed to include an awareness of how to challenge and transform social practices of marginalization', thus emphasizing the important role (a certain kind of) second language acquisition may play in facilitating empowerment and integration of immigrants. These experiences are mirrored in those of Learner C, in a quite different setting, and this parallel may serve to indicate that not only are responses to feelings of disempowerment and marginalization such as those we have identified worthy of further investigation for their potential influence on second language acquisition in independent learning contexts but also - as we have attempted to argue in this section - because via their effect on second language acquisition they may have an ultimately even more important influence on the success of overall adjustment to life in a foreign culture.

4. Conclusion

In this article we have introduced the reader to a 'learners' network' for independent learners of Japanese living in Japan, presented extracts from the 'confessions' of three such learners, and seen how feelings / phenomena of disempowerment and marginalization and accompanying avoidance and resistance responses seem to have had a significant influence on both their second language acquisition and degree of intercultural adjustment. We have suggested that the affective / social factors and responses we have identified are worthy of further investigation by researchers into intercultural adjustment and second language acquisition, and have also suggested a number of perspectives and hypotheses which might inform such research. It needs to be emphasized, however, that these perspectives and hypotheses are necessarily speculative, being based on the 'confessions' of only three learners. Nevertheless, on the basis of our study, a few tentative suggestions might be made for Japanese language teachers and others concerned with international exchange in the Japanese context, and we shall conclude with these suggestions:

1) Ellis (1994:479) states that classroom learners ' *in particular* react to the learning situation they find themselves in (*sic*) a variety of affective ways' (emphasis added), but we have seen that affective factors may also be highly salient in independent learning situations. As we indicated in the introduction, suggestions for the encouragement of independent learning via classroom-based language learner development have tended to focus on technical or cognitive aspects, but our data and analysis seem to suggest that affective factors could also be profitably catered for in such instruction, in particular, perhaps, when learners are engaged in the difficult process of intercultural adjustment outside the classroom at the same time as being engaged in the acquisition of a second language (e.g. in situations involving the learning of Japanese *in Japan* as opposed to in the home country). While Oxford (1990) does depart from the more prevalent trend in offering suggestions for training in general affective strategies such as 'lowering one's anxiety', 'encouraging oneself' and 'taking one's emotional temperature', we might suggest that learner development which aims to deal with the learner as 'whole person' could be further enhanced through the addition of activities such as those suggested by Barna (1983) which derive from the intercultural training tradition and take more account of the particular forms of (culture) stress the learners in question are likely to be undergoing (cf. Clarke (1976) and Brown (1980) for similar suggestions).

2) In order for language teachers to play this kind of 'therapeutic role in helping learners to move through stages of acculturation' (as Brown (ibid.: 163) suggests they can and should), it would seem to be important for *them* to be as aware as possible of the affective factors involved in intercultural

adjustment for students. We hope that in a small way, through its prioritizing of the voices of learners and its discussion of stage models of intercultural adjustment, this article might have contributed to deepening such an awareness, or at least indicating areas for further study among teachers of Japanese. Ultimately, however, the best way for teachers to learn about and so learn to help their students as 'whole persons' may be from those very same students. As Tanaka (this volume) suggests, teachers can make efforts to constitute the classroom as a 'communication space' where the expression of feelings, including negative feelings related to intercultural adjustment and second language acquisition is encouraged in an atmosphere of trust and tolerance, perhaps through experimentation with discussion or role play activities which bring out the learners' affective responses to living and using Japanese in Japan.

3) In facilitating their learners' intercultural adjustment and second language acquisition, teachers should perhaps not be so much concerned to encourage acceptance of the surrounding socia! environment as as to place themselves in the shoes of the learner as language user (cf. Benson, 1995) and become aware that social factors can play a role in actual disempowerment or marginalization of second language users. While we have concentrated on the experiences of representatives of what might be considered a relatively 'privileged' group of learners ('privileged' in the sense of job status (all are English teachers in Japan) and national origin (all are from western countries)), language use-related problems in adjusting to life in Japan such as those experienced, in particular by Learner B, as a so-called 'half' living in Japan, are likely to be repeated at an increased level of intensity in the experience of sojourners in Japan from non-western countries. One challenge within JSL, it would seem, might be to develop ways in which teachers can reach out to and stand on the side of such learners, encouraging their own 'resistance' (cf. Learner C) to feelings of disempowerment and marginalization connected with language use in social context.

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