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JAPN 320S

Reading Reflection #7

This week there was one reading *Diversity and Inclusion of Sociopolitical Issues in Foreign Language Classrooms: An Exploratory Survey* by Kubota, Austin, and Saito-Abbott.

This reading was a study about students learning foreign languages and how their experiences relate back to their identity.

One topic the paper discussed was the double standard for foreign language education. “While bilingualism is encouraged for monolingual English speakers as a catalyst for their socioeconomic success, the bilingualism of immigrants and indigenous groups is perceived as a problem.” (pg. 13) This means that native English speakers are not expected to learn another language, however, people with another native language are expected to learn English, especially when moving to a country where English is the primary language. However, even people who may never visit an English speaking country are expected to learn, like Japan. English is portrayed as the language that people need to know if they want a job, especially those related to business where they might interact with people who speak it. In America however, many don’t care about learning a second language, they may only do so since their school requires it or knowing another language looks good on a resume. This is indeed a huge double standard placed on people, implying that English is the language everyone should know, making it more difficult for countries who don’t speak it and whose native language may be entirely different.

Another thing the paper mentioned that we also discussed in class was the reasons the students felt frustrated when learning a second language. One reason they mentioned was about the topics they chose to teach alongside the language. “Complex topics are difficult to

incorporate in beginning-level courses because students lack the target language control to discuss them, even if they have knowledge and opinions about them.” (pg. 21) This comes up often when I am in classes that are in Japanese teaching about culture and not language. We may start discussing a topic that I enjoy, however, I don't know the technical terms or the grammar to articulate what I am thinking. Also, since it is a culture class and not language, I may not have the opportunity to learn how to respond right away and instead have to wait until after to find the right words. We also discussed other reasons for frustration during class. One is that grammar is innately difficult, it is even worse when you may not understand the concept in your native language, so learning it in another may feel impossible. Another frustration is when teachers focus too much on the basics of the language. Although they are important, when they are focused on for too long the students don't feel that they are advancing in the language, it may have been a month and all they learned was the alphabet and some numbers. A frustration that affects us is that the two languages are so different. Japanese uses three different alphabets, all of them so different from ours. We also discussed a possible solution to fight frustration with learning, which is focusing more on actual communication through speaking as opposed to writing. This may build the students confidence and be more simple than learning kanji. We think it is also important to teach the language in conjunction with the culture, since that may have been the students' original interest and make it more fun to learn.

This reading relates back to Service Learning Outcome 3 because it discusses how teachers have to make sure to combat the inequality in their classrooms and community. The major inequality they may have to face is prejudice the students can have towards the people who speak the language they are learning. Although “foreign language learning may not

automatically help students develop unprejudiced attitude towards different racial groups” it can raise “student’s awareness of linguistic diversity.”(pg. 14) The teachers have to work to open up their students' worlds to these different cultures they are learning about facilitate acceptance of them.