

Problem-Posing Method in the Brazilian Community in Japan

Prof. Hiroyuki Nomoto, Tokyo Metropolitan University, Tokyo, Japan

e-mail: EZI01434@nifty.ne.jp

Abstract

The number of the foreign residents has been rapidly increasing since the middle of 1980's in Japan, because of the lack of laborer in the areas of construction or production in the factories. The foreign residents or workers are mainly from Brazil and Asian countries like South Korea, China or Filipine.

The descendants of Japanese Brazilian and their families have been officially admitted to enter and stay in Japan without any immigrational condition since 1990, most of them working as cheap labor. Until the end of 1999, we have accepted about 250 thousands Japanese Brazilians and their families.

In Toyota-city where the head office and main assembly factories of Toyota(Car Production) are located, a big Brazilian community has been formed in which 3 thousands Japanese Brazilians living. Almost all of them work in the factories of Toyota as sub-contracted, having a lot of difficulties in daily life and at job places, such as lack of basic information, illiteracy in Japanese, exploitation by wicked employer or discrimination against the immigrate workers. In the community, there also have a serious conflict between Japanese and Brazilian residents.

The problem-posing method in the language instruction, already developed and applied by Nina Wallerstein in ESL(English as a Second Language) in U.S.A, has been applied in the classes of Japanese Instruction as a Second Language in that community. We tried to integrate acquisition of the Japanese language proficiency with humanization of their life in the community.

First, we studied to find the problems in the community and at their job places. Through those studies, we chose several basic themes like as prejudice, case of emergency, participation in the community activity, creation of community center for immigrate workers, isolation, influence of immigrate workers to local economy, garbage dump problem, traffic issues in the community, accidents at the job places, illiteracy in Japanese, use of telephone, health issues, communication in the hospital, education for their children, discrimination, gender issues and dream.

In the classes of Japanese as a Second Language in Japan, generally there exists functionalism. The Japanese language teachers try to teach Japanese as just a neutral instrument. Therefore they don't think that their activities have political aspects and that the learners are dehumanized by "teaching(=domestication)".

Our experience is attracting much attention among the educators or community workers who try to make the multicultural society more just and humane.

Paper

Immigrate Workers in Japan and their Difficulies

- 1) Increasing number of immigrate workers

The number of the immigrant workers has been rapidly increasing since the middle of 1980's in Japan, because of the lack of laborer in the areas of construction or production in the factories. Now, we have about 1 million immigrant workers, including illegal ones. They are mainly from Brazil and Asian countries like South Korea, China or Philippine.

The descendants of Japanese Brazilian and their families have been officially admitted to enter and stay in Japan since 1990, most of them working in the factories as cheap laborer. Until the end of 1999, we have accepted about 250 thousands Japanese Brazilians and their families.

2) Their difficulties in the community and at the job places

Japanese society has not established social system for cultural diversity ignoring the presence of some ethnic minorities such as Korean people or Ainu. Therefore, most of immigrant workers are facing great difficulties to live in the Japanese society. For example, the social services given by the local government are generally based on the mono-lingual communication (Japanese only). Then, the immigrant workers can't get important information for their humane life.

"Dangerous", "Dirty" and "Heavy" work leads to another difficulties. Many of them have had accidents at the job places and health problem because of bad environment. There also exists exploitation by the big capital or wicked employers. Almost all of them are part-time workers as sub-contracted. That always puts them to periphery of the society.

3) Illiteracy

The symbolic phenomenon of their difficulties is illiteracy in Japanese. Almost all of them don't have enough skill to communicate with Japanese characters (Kanji, Hiragana, Katakana), Following table (Next page) is a result of simple interviews to 80 Brazilian living in a certain community. This table shows us that a lot of them are illiterates in Japanese and can't read even "Danger" which is indispensable to save the life.

Critical method in teaching Japanese as a Second Language (JSL)

- Japanese classes for foreigners

In order to help these immigrant workers acquire communication skills, Japanese classes for foreign residents have been organized in the communities mainly by volunteer groups. In Japan, we don't have particular JSL law for immigrants. Then, organizing JSL class owes to a lot of volunteer teacher from the community. They have tried to give opportunity to learn Japanese for the foreign residents. In that sense, their works are becoming more and more important

	Can't read nor understand	Can read and understand
(Prohibition)	69(86.3%)	9(11.3)
(stop)	34(42.5)	37(46.3)
(Exit)	30(37.5)	36(45.0)

(Bus stop)	18(22.5)	37(46.3)
(Attention)	71(88.8)	8(10.0)
(Reception)	71(88.8)	9(11.3)
(Danger)	23(28.8)	43(53.8)
(Internal Department)	70(87.5)	6(7.5)
(Shelter)	28(35.0)	3(3.8)
(Accounts)	71(88.8)	5(6.3)
(Danger)	73(91.3)	6(7.5)
(Taxi)	26(32.5)	43(53.8)
(No Smoking)	68(85.0)	6(7.5)
(Change)	20(25.0)	39(48.8)
(Emergency Bell)	27(33.8)	5(6.3)

- **Functionalism**

However, generally, their teaching method are based on functionalism or instrumentalism. They separate learning Japanese from daily life, particular problems like discrimination, gender issues, social class issues. Some of the reasons are that in Japan critical studies in the area of language teaching have not developed, and in the curriculum of JSL teacher training course they put emphasis on how to teach. The Japanese language teachers try to teach Japanese as just a neutral instrument. Therefore they never think that their activities are political and the learners are dehumanized by "teaching (=domestication)".

- **Integration of acquisition of Japanese with humanization**

Against this tendency of functionalism or instrumentalism, we have proposed critical method that deny the dichotomy between learning language and realizing more humane life. Problem-posing method in teaching Japanese as a Second Language came birth in this context. Our proposal have not yet been understood well and accepted by the practitioners. But, new group called "Social Teaching Japanese as a Second Language" has appeared recently, which has the same critical point of view to the reality.

- **Problem-posing ESL (English as a Second Language)**

Before talking about our experience, I have to touch on the excellent work of problem-posing ESL. The problem-posing method in teaching language, already developed and applied by Nina Wallerstein in ESL in U.S.A. She wrote 'Language and Culture in Conflict' in the beginning of 80's that proposed problem-posing method, applying Freire's ideas. Elsa Auerbach, working with Nina Wallerstein has also developed problem-posing method through making program with clear point of view on gender and class issues, and with emphasis to using community-based humane resources. Their activities are so interesting that we should learn more.

Problem-posing method applied in teaching JSL

1. Main goals and its initial process

Our experimental problem-posing method has 4 main goals like followings,

(1) Conscientization = Acquire ability to solve the problems collectively in order to realize humane life through conversation, debate, exchanging opinion and action.

(2) Acquisition of communication skills in Japanese = Acquire basic skills in Japanese conversation and literacy

(3) Acquisition of basic knowledge and information = Acquire the basic knowledge and information indispensable for living and working in Japan. Priority to community-based information.

(4) Learning of volunteer teachers = Not only know the learners' problems and local issues, but also find the problem to solve together with learner.

With these 4 goals, initial process is set as followings

- **Research:** through interviews or questionnaire in the community, make a list of problems related to their life and community.
- **Choice of themes and problems:** among the list, choose several themes to be discussed in the class
- **Making curriculum and materials:** coordinating the grammatical issues with the chosen themes.

2. Structure of material

Followings are main components of the problem-posing material. This owes to the problem-posing ESL, developed by Nina Wallerstein, Elsa Auerbach etc.

Codo(photography)
Conversation model SEEANNEX
Question
Dialogue
Action

Grammar
Words and expression
Variation
Read and Write
Information
Theme of assistant Opinion

3. Concerning on evaluation

Evaluation process is not so simple as functional teachers do. Because it needs long term process and various point of view. Some important points in problem- posing method are "How does teaching or learning Japanese as a Second Language contribute to realization of humane life of learner and teacher?" "How does it improve the condition or environment of the community? "

An Experience in the Brazilian Community

1. Overview of the community and Japanese class

In Toyota-city where the head office and main assembly factories of Toyota(Car Production) are located, there is a big scale of housing development called "Uomi- Danchi" in the suburb of the city. There live more than 10.000 residents. Among them, 3.000 are Brazilian, forming a biggest Brazilian community in Japan. Almost all of them work in the factories of Toyota as sub-contracted, having a lot of difficulties in daily life and at the job places.

In this community, they are having serious conflicts between Japanese residents and Brazilian residents. That results the bud of expulsion movement.

We opened the JSL class in this community in November, 1998 and have developed problem-posing method in teaching Japanese as a Second Language.

2. How to list the problema and eboice of the theme

We used three ways to find the problema such as research through questionnaire, dialogue in the daily communication and taking photography by learners. Using photography was very interesting activity. We know this method were used by Augusto Boal. All learners were handed a disposal camera and asked to take some pictures with the theme "Our life in Homi and our difficulties". The pictures taken by learners were used in the discussion to find the problema. After that, some of them were put on the materials as code.

Through those studies, we chose several basic themes like as prejudice, case of emergency, participation in the community activity, creation of community center for immigrate workers, isolation, influence of immigrate workers to local economy, garbage dump problem, traffic issues in the community, accidents at the job places, illiteracy in Japanese, use of telephone, health issues, communication in the hospital, education for their children, discrimination, gender issues and dream.

3. Findings

Through this experiment, we could say this alternative teaching Japanese as Second Language might have great possibilities, which lead to realization of humane life and improvement of local community. In the case of this community, new movement based on the class activities has appeared against expulsion movement.

Our experience is attracting much attention among the educators or community workers who try to make the multicultural society more just and humane.

Hiroyuki Nomoto