

Educational Effects of Creating Kansai Dialect Plays in Japanese Language Learning: Through Trajectory Equifinality Modeling (TEM) Analysis of the Process of Changes Seen in Four International Students

Shibata, Azusa

Kyushu University International Student Center : Associate Professor

<https://doi.org/10.15017/7172557>

出版情報：九州大学留学生センター紀要. 32, pp.1-18, 2024-03. 九州大学留学生センター
バージョン：
権利関係：



Educational Effects of Creating Kansai Dialect Plays in Japanese Language Learning:

Through Trajectory Equifinality Modeling (TEM) Analysis of the Process
of Changes Seen in Four International Students

Azusa Shibata *

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to identify the process and the factors of how four international students learning Japanese at a university in the Kansai region overcame their difficulties in learning Japanese in order to pursue learning and improve their proficiency, through the activity of creating and performing a play in the Kansai dialect together with Japanese volunteers. An analysis of interviews with the four students using TEM (Trajectory Equifinality Modeling) revealed that they followed a process with some commonalities but showing differences in timing and circumstances, and that they overcame anxiety about speaking and performing in Japanese and established new identities through several crucial actions. These actions are: 1) deciding to perform a play in spite of fear and anxiety; 2) changing their perception of being shy to one in which shyness itself is seen to be strange; and 3) going on stage in spite of trembling and sweating. Moreover, it was considered that the spotlight actually eased their tension, and that the laughter and applause from the audience made the students feel that their own behavior objective to “get a laugh from the audience” had been achieved, which also was a transformative experience.

[Keywords] Learning through theater, use of dialects, anxiety, support methods, trajectory equifinality modeling

1 . Purpose and background

This study aims to use trajectory equifinality modeling (TEM; Yasuda et al., 2015) to recognize the process and factors of four foreign Japanese language learners studying at a university in the Kansai region of Japan overcoming their anxiety through the activity of producing and performing a theater work in the Kansai dialect of the

Japanese language; the study’s objective is exploring new possibilities of theater and obtaining suggestions for better ways of using theater in Japanese language education. TEM is a qualitative research method that is used to capture and delineate the diversity and duality of human development and life paths, and in this study, the “narrative” in which learners reflect on the process of theater production and performance is

* Associate Professor, Kyushu University International Student Center

used as data.

When I was appointed as the coordinator of the Japanese language program at S University in the Kinki region, I recognized providing Japanese language education activities in which learners can make the most of their experience of staying in Japan and actively engaging in them as a major issue to be addressed. At that time, the university was asked to provide compulsory Japanese language courses that did not require students to take the basic-, intermediate-, or advanced-type classification of Japanese that is usually the basis of course design. Therefore, I wanted to make the classroom a place where students could feel that they were participating in natural exchanges in Japanese, and to increase and maintain their motivation. Therefore, I decided to invite native Japanese students (henceforth, “Japanese”) to participate as volunteers in an activity to create and perform theater productions in the Kansai dialect of the Japanese language. I focused on theater because I had high expectations that the “creativity” of theater might serve to establish a “collaborative” relationship rather than the “teaching / learning” relationship that tends to occur between native speakers and non-native speakers, and that there would be a high possibility of active interaction (interpersonal communication,⁽¹⁾ dialogue⁽²⁾) for the purpose of the learner participating as an adult. Theater, which has been called a comprehensive art, includes a variety of different activities, so there was a high possibility that all participants, whether learners or volunteers, would be able to demonstrate their individual strengths and connect with others to produce results.

Furthermore, another major advantage from the perspective of practicing Japanese is that there are many authentic exchanges in which communicating intentions is the main purpose, and there are activities included in which the sounds and intonations of certain lines of speech are repeated over and over again in an attempt to perfectly reproduce them. The reason I decided to use the Kansai dialect is that it would allow the volunteers to make the most of their unique knowledge, and because I thought that it could be a powerful tool for learners to fulfill their desire to have a deep relationship with the Japanese people around them. I also thought that the “cultivation of Japanese language proficiency of outspoken speech and jokes, occasional teasing and sarcasm, and performance of open-minded personal self-expression such as innuendo” (Chinami, 2007), which is said to be difficult to learn, could also be achieved using theatrical techniques.⁽³⁾

Attempts at Japanese language education through theater were successful, and about a year after this course began to be offered, a club consisting of over 50 Japanese members was established with the main purpose of “supporting Kansai dialect theater creation,” and during its three-and-a-half years of practice, a large number of spectators began to gather at the presentations at the end of the semester. However, not everything went smoothly from the onset, and many of the students expressed concern about performing a theater production at the beginning of the semester. For the event at the end of the semester, it is up to the students (learners) to discuss at the beginning of the semester whether to hold a

“drama performance” or a “speech contest.” In all seven semesters in which I was in charge of this course, the students chose theater, but not all the students were enthusiastic about theater from the start. Many clearly showed signs of anxiety, and it has been indicated that the combination of the lack of motivation, low self-esteem, and high anxiety and a strong affective filter results in mental disorder, and comprehensible input does not reach the level of language acquisition (Krashen, 1985), so there were doubts as to whether the theater activities would be successful for them. However, even the students who had expressed anxiety became quite lively and appeared to enjoy the activities by the time of the final performance.

In this study, among the learners who participated in this activity during the seven-semester period, four learners who had a strong sense of aversion to using Japanese at the beginning of the course and who had great anxiety about performing in theater were selected as subjects, and I asked them to talk about the changes that happened to them in the process of creating and performing theater. I analyze these data to clarify the process of learning progress and the factors that influenced it, and examine the possibility of using theater in Japanese language education.

2 . Overview of Japanese language course practice through theater creation and performance

2 . 1 . Course goals

As mentioned in the previous section, through this course I wanted to provide a place

where learners who were not at the same level of acquisition of Japanese could feel that they could naturally communicate with the Japanese people around them as if they were not children, even if they themselves lack Japanese knowledge and skills. Therefore, the following two points were set as goals of the course for the learners' actions, attitudes, and skills: 1) each learner with a different ability to use Japanese will frequently speak naturally in Japanese to improve their willingness to use Japanese; and 2) each learner will develop self-directed learning skills to learn while recognizing their own progress and challenges and setting goals for themselves.

2 . 2 . Specific measures for achieving course goals

In order to achieve the goals of this course, the learners needed to actively participate in all activities. To that end, although there are some points that are quite different from ordinary Japanese language courses, the following measures were taken.

2. 2. 1. Changes in the role of the learners

The learners were asked to proactively choose and execute actions, rather than being passively guided. First, as mentioned above, the learners were asked to select an event activity at the end of the semester. Next, for the evaluations, it was requested that the evaluation items and criteria be decided through discussion between the international students and the Japanese, and the evaluation itself was done with the instructor by the method of self and mutual assessment at the end of the activity. Furthermore, the students were asked to decide their action goals at the beginning

of the semester. Specifically, the two points of “what kind of play to make” and “what kinds of goals to practice” were discussed and decided upon among the participants, and as a result, the two goals of “make audiences laugh” and “speak Japanese like a Kansai native” were set for each semester. This reflects the learners’ desire to learn to build human connections as opposed to learning for the sake of learning, and the fact that the learners are sensitive to the local culture and know its importance in communication.

2.2.2. Changes in the role of the instructor

In order to allow the participants to exercise their independence and creativity, the mode of the instructors’ participation in the production site was changed. I acted as a facilitator rather than a leader or coordinator so that my relationship with them would not become dominant. I then undertook miscellaneous tasks such as adjusting schedules, procuring materials for making tools, and booking halls; and I communicated with them as much as possible through the confirmation of intentions and office contact, maintaining a relationship of trust and potential access opportunities.⁽⁴⁾ Furthermore, I not only set office hours, but allowed participants to contact me via email and social media in order to make it easier for them to ask for help.

As for Japanese language instructions, direct and explicit instructions were avoided to the greatest extent possible. Regarding the misuse of the language by international students during their activities, the instructor and the Japanese volunteers only implicitly informed them of the correct Japanese through recasting, not explicitly indicating or guiding them unless the international

students themselves asked for confirmation or correction.

Furthermore, in the role of the instructor, I focused on promoting the building of relationships that facilitate communication in an atmosphere of less anxiety. In the first class, I tried to reduce their mental distance by having them express their feelings with their bodies and words through improv games, and experience talking to and being talked to by strangers. Additionally, the group functions of social media were used as a communication network so that contact between learners and Japanese occurred outside the classroom. This increased the amount of contact, not only for preparation and practice related to the course, but also for drinking parties and weekend sightseeing tours together.

For learners whose Japanese proficiency was at the beginner level, direct support was not given by the instructor, but indirectly through Japanese volunteers. To that end, before starting the activity, Japanese students were provided with information about each learner’s learning stage and were asked to adjust vocabulary, expressions, and speaking speed as needed. When discussions and group activities were held, the seats of the learners who needed support were placed next to the Japanese who could interpret mainly in English, so that they would not be excluded from the activities.

2.3. Overview of educational activities

From April 2011 to July 2014, seven courses consisting of fifteen 90-minute learning activities were implemented as a general rule. Table 1

summarizes the participants and contents of the performances of all seven courses, and Table 2 summarizes the progress of the first semester.

The international students who took this class were exchange students, privately funded students, and Japanese language and culture study students from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology. Many of the international students were from Western countries, and most of them majored or minored in Japanese at universities in their home countries. There was a wide range of Japanese language learning levels, from beginner to

advanced, and about two-thirds of the total study-abroad period was for a full year (total of two semesters).

All the Japanese were undergraduates, and they came from various regions, including the Kansai, Kyushu, Chugoku, and Chubu regions. In classes, they played a variety of roles, not only speaking Japanese with the international students, but also demonstrating for the international students correct pronunciations, how to ask questions in Japanese, and how to paraphrase expressions; creating costumes, tools, and background paintings in groups; and being in charge of behind-the-

Table 1 Performance works in the Kansai dialect theater creation activities, and participating students ⁽⁵⁾

Semester	Activity content / work title (number of groups, performance time)	International student	Japanese volunteer
		Nationality (number of people) Japanese course level (number of people)	Grade (number of people)
I	Original play "Cinderella" (one group, approx. 20 min.)	Seven people	11 people
		U.S.A. (3) / Spain (3) / Germany (1) Lower elementary (5) / Upper intermediate (2)	1 st yr. (4), 2 nd yr. (1), 3 rd yr. (3), 4 th yr. (3)
II	Play production "Aladdin and the Magic Lamp" (one group, approx. 20 min.)	Eight people	12 people
		U.S.A. (3) / Spain (2) / Germany (2) / Finland (1) Lower elementary (1) / Lower intermediate (6) / Upper intermediate (1)	1 st yr. (4), 2 nd yr. (4), 3 rd yr. (3), 4 th yr. (1)
III	Play production "Super radish vs. General Toma" (one group, approx. 20 min.)	Six people	21 people
		U.S.A. (4) / Spain (1) / Germany (1) Lower elementary (3) / Lower intermediate (2) / Upper intermediate (1)	1 st yr. (5), 2 nd yr. (9), 3 rd yr. (2), 4 th yr. (5)
IV	Play production "Momotaro" (one group, approx. 20 min.)	Six people	19 people
		U.S.A. (2) / Italy (1) / Germany (1) / France (1) / Mongolia (1) Upper intermediate (1) / Middle intermediate (2) / Advanced (3)	1 st yr. (6), 2 nd yr. (8), 3 rd yr. (1), 4 th yr. (4)
V	Short film production "Ninja story," "Kaguya Hime," "Not invited" (three groups, approx. 5 min. each)	12 people	Nine people
		U.S.A. (7) / Italy (1) / Canada (1) / Germany (1) / France (1) / Mongolia (1) Upper elementary (2) / Middle intermediate (6) / Advanced (4)	1 st yr. (1), 2 nd yr. (6), 3 rd yr. (2)
VI	Play production "Christmas Carol" (one group, approx. 20 min.)	Eight people	17 people 17 people
		U.S.A. (2) / Canada (2) / Germany (4) Lower elementary (1) / Lower intermediate (5) / Upper intermediate (2)	1 st yr. (12), 2 nd yr. (2), 3 rd yr. (2), 4 th yr. (1)
VII	Short play production "Urashimataro (laugh)" "Little Red Riding Hood & The Homeless," "My Neighbor Totoro," "We were there"	Nine people	Nine people
		U.S.A. (1) / Canada (1) / Germany (4) / Turkey (1) / Brazil (1) / Russia (1) Lower intermediate (1) / Middle intermediate (6) / Upper intermediate (2)	1 st yr. (9)

Table 2 Overview of Kansai dialect theater creation activities

Stage	Activity content	
1. Advance preparation	Confirmation of course goals	Knowing the purpose of the activity / watching past performances
	Decision making	Choose an activity (original play or speech)
	Setting for co-creation and collaboraiton	Recruitment of Japanese volunteers
	Reducing mental distance between participants	First meeting, improv game, start contact with group function on social media
		Watching past performances, expand image
2. Creation	Script creation 1	Explanation of copyright law, selection of title, casting
	Exercising independence and raising awareness of action goals	Determine performance goals, overall goals, and individual goals (evaluation items at end of semester)
	Script creation 2	Examination of script, arrangement of contents, translation by Japanese into Kansai dialect, binding and distribution
	Focusing on Japanese phonetics and forms	Script distribution, reading and pronunciation tutoring, read-through
	Stage creation	Group production of props and background paintings
		Selection of sound effects and lighting, determination of prop positions, production of posters, leaflets, and staff name tags
	Focus on Japanese phonetics and forms	Practice, rehearsal
3. Performance	Showcasing of results, achievement of goals	Performance
	Saving memories	Commemorative photograph
4. Post-performance	Confirmation of goal achievement status	Watch videos of performances
	Study	Reflection session
	Verbalization and sharing of learning	The Way of Council implementation ⁽⁶⁾
	Learning evaluation	Filling out and submitting evaluation sheet (Japanese who can cooperate with all international students)
	Verbalization and consciousness of learning	Filling out and submitting questionnaire (Japanese who can cooperate with all international students)
		Face-to-face interview with instructor (international students)
		Issuance of volunteer certificates for Japanese (Japanese only)

scenes roles and actors in performances.

Educational activities were roughly divided into four stages: advance preparation, creation, performance, and post-performance.

In the advance preparation, the international students were informed of the course goals, and after watching previous performances, were tasked with deciding via a discussion whether to do a theater production or a speech competition. After theater was decided as the activity content,

the Japanese joined the class, and through improvisation, they tried to reduce the emotional distance and build a relationship where they would be able to call each other by their names. The communication network by social media also started operating from this time.

At the creation stage, the selection of themes, casting of characters, setting of goals and evaluation items, review of the script, practice, and production of props and costumes, etc.,

were conducted; throughout this process, creative ideas were exchanged in Japanese, and if necessary in English.⁽⁷⁾ Discussions took place mainly in the classroom, but sometimes took place outside of class hours. For example, in the third semester, the students were unable to come up with script ideas in class, and after a few hours, the participants resumed the discussion independently at an izakaya near the university. Then, with beers in hand, they created an original story featuring fruits and vegetables. The scripts often incorporated jokes by comedians popular at the time, as well as famous phrases from anime, manga, and games, and in order to receive an enthusiastic reaction from the audience, the international students received passionate guidance from the Japanese not only on Japanese pronunciation, but also body and hand gestures, how to pause between jokes, facial expressions, how act as the straight man and pose questions in jokes (“tsukkomi” / methods), and falling reaction methods (“kokeru” methods).

The performance attracted a large audience of students, faculty, and staff. There was frequent laughter during the performances, and there was a big round of applause when the performance ended. After the performance, we moved to the

exchange room, which is an affiliated facility of the university, where we all watched the videos of the performances together. A reflection session was then held, and at the end, each student gave their impressions by the Way of Council, reflected on their activities, and tried to verbalize and share their learning.

3 . Learning progress analysis method

3 . 1 . Survey subjects

Among the international students who participated twice (two periods) in the Kansai dialect theater creation activities, four participants (Table 3) showed particularly strong anxiety about theater activities and learning Japanese at first, but for whom it became clear after the performance that they had overcome their anxiety were selected as subjects for the survey. The reason why international students who had taken this course twice (two periods) were targeted was because it was thought that the factors that led them to overcome their anxieties could be closely observed. Each of the four subjects had very different characteristics.

First, when A had to choose between theater and speech in the first class, A’s expression

Table 3 Overview of the four survey participants

International student	Region of origin	Major	Participating period	Japanese level at end of course	Age at time of survey	Characteristics seen at start of class
A	Various Western countries	Japanese	VI / VII	Upper intermediate	25	Stage fright
B			IV / V	Advanced	25	Stage fright
C			I / II	Upper intermediate	29	Cautious personality
D			VI / VII	Middle intermediate	31	Stage fright

visibly stiffened, and even in practice sessions, whenever A performed a strange performance that the Japanese conceived, A's cheeks would always blush. However, at the end of the theater creation activities, they responded to the questionnaire by saying "I'm really not good at speaking in front of people, but I got a bit used to it / got stronger," acknowledging that they overcame their weakness. Additionally, when asked if they would like to do theater again, they responded, "Yes! It was a good experience, so I want to do it again! Moreover, it was fun."

Next, when B found out in the first class that it would be either theater or a speech, they were so upset that they had a stomach ache and had to go to the bathroom. However, after the enthusiastic invitation of the Japanese participants at the welcome party, B finally agreed to do the play. In the questionnaire at the end of the activities, they showed a response that their thinking had changed, responding, "I was scared of acting in front of everyone, so I didn't really want to do that, but I changed my mind later because it was fun," and "I'm looking forward to doing the play next semester. Since it was more fun than I thought."

C was a cautious type of international student, and when given a choice between theater and a speech in class, they were cautious about doing this activity at first, saying, "I've never done a play, so I don't know if I can do it well." Then, prompted by the other international students who wanted to do the theater, C finally agreed with that option. However, in the questionnaire at the end of the activities, B answered, "I want to do [the theater again]. Since it was fun.

The audience laughed a lot as well," showing a large change.

Soon after arriving in Japan, D showed a worried expression of "are we communicating well?" every time that I spoke with them in Japanese, and lacked confidence to the extent that they would sometimes confirm, "did you understand?" When I had the students first choose between theater and speech during the theater creation class, as with C, D did not say that they wanted to do it. D seemed to agree with this choice in line with the other students who wanted to do it. However, in the questionnaire at the end of the activity, D wrote an acknowledgment of their own self-transformation, saying "I've come to understand what I can do on my own. I've found out what I can do together with students."

3. 2. Data types and collection methods

In this study, I used narrative data obtained from semi-structured interviews with the four survey participants. The four survey participants were informed in advance about the purpose of the study, survey contents, and the anonymous handling of the data, and their consent was obtained. Additionally, I conducted in-person and Internet phone calls 1–4 times per person, about 1–2 hours each time from September 2015 to April 2018, about 1–3 years after they had completed the study abroad. Prior to the interview, I had the participants look at the question items, videos of the work that the students performed while studying abroad, and the data of the questionnaire that they submitted at the end of the activities, and I asked them to summarize their

thoughts on the changes in themselves that occurred before and after their theater creation activities, as well as their specific circumstances and factors. The interviews proceeded according to the four people's responses and the content that they wanted to narrate.

Data were created by first transcribing the narratives of the four participants that were obtained through the interviews and grouping them by labeling so that the time period and activity content could be understood for each sentence. The sentences within the group were then numbered and coded. Additionally, the overlapping experiences of the four participants were investigated using an online questionnaire tool that allows for collaborative work (Google Form). I then asked the participants to answer if the narratives of the other international students were applicable to them by having them circle or cross out the items, and inputting comments. Afterwards, confirmations and additional interviews were conducted as needed, and finally, all the data were integrated to create a TEM diagram (Fig. 1).

3. 3. Analysis method

3. 3. 1. Trajectory equifinality modeling (TEM)

In this study, I visualized the transformation process of the four international students in the original theater creation and clarified the process of learning progress and the social factors that influenced it. Therefore, I used trajectory equifinality modeling (henceforth, "TEM diagram"), which captures the transformation process of objects and phenomena over time. This model can not only express the life of the survey

participants as a diagram along with the flow of time (irreversible time), but also clarify the social factors that made them choose certain choices, so it is thought to be suitable for presenting an individual's world in an easy-to-understand manner.⁽⁸⁾

The equifinality point (EFP) shown in the TEM diagram is a point that is thought to be equally reached even if the time to reach it is different along the unique paths that the individuals follow (Yasuda et al., 2015). The EFP in this study was defined as the point at which the subject was able to speak in front of others with confidence. This is because, based on my observations and the learners' own reflections, it is precisely when they are able to "speak in front of others" that is the "important point" where they can change their until-then anxious self and confidently carry out their student life and later social life.

In the TEM diagram, the paths chosen by the participants are indicated by arrows, the paths not chosen by the participants are indicated by dotted arrows, feelings are indicated by ellipses, and actions and experiences are indicated by rectangles. Table 4 shows the terms of the TEM diagram (Yasuda et al., 2015) and the concepts applied in this study.

4. Results

Here, I outline the process of the four survey participants depicted in the TEM diagram "being able to speak in front of others with confidence" along with the five period classifications found from the analysis.

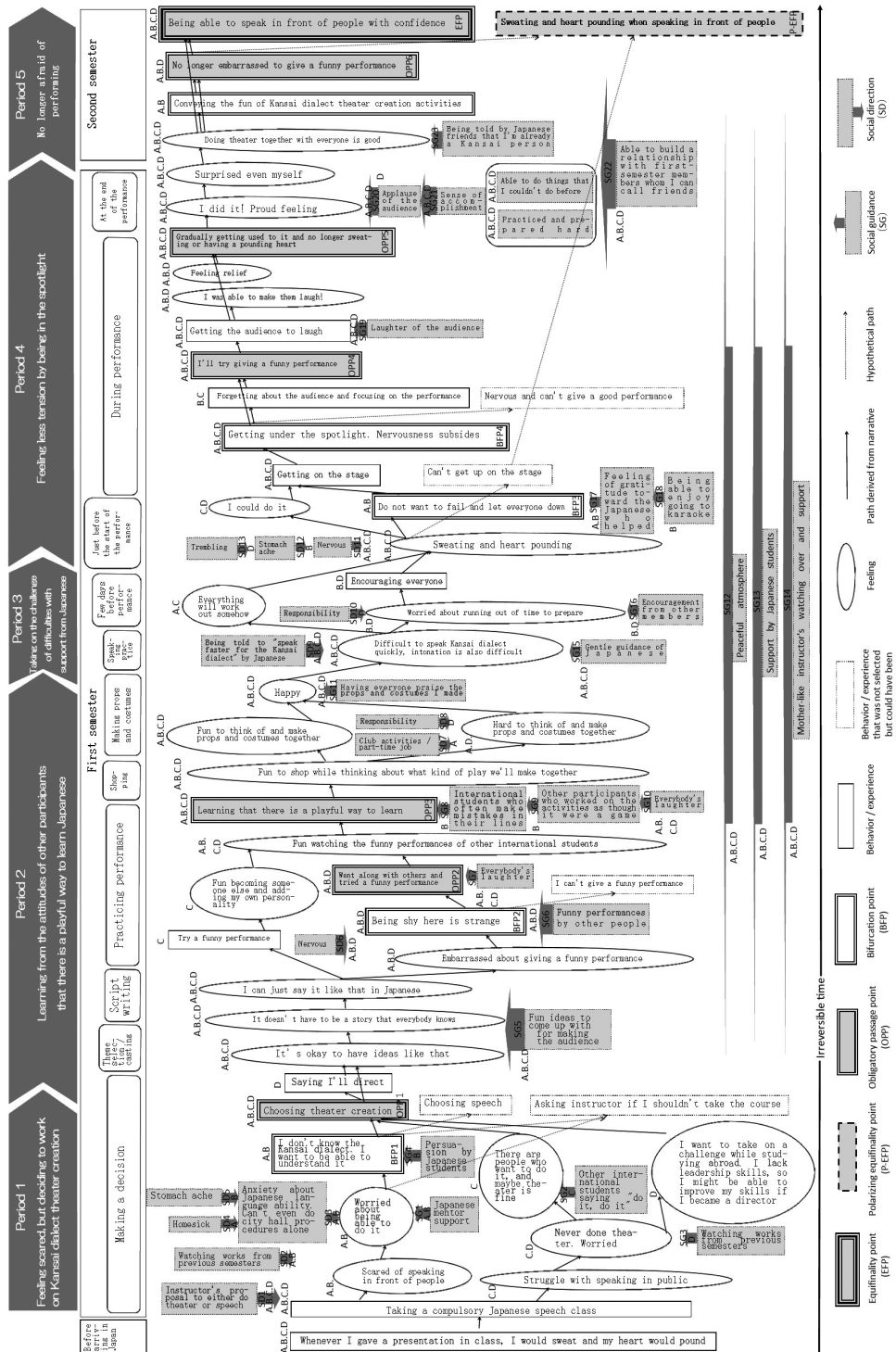


Figure 1 TEM diagram of the four survey participants

Table 4 TEM diagram terms and concepts in this study

Term	Concept
Equifinality Point (EFP)	Being able to speak in front of others with confidence
Polarized EFP (P-EFP)	Sweating and heart pounding when speaking in public
Bifurcation Point (BFP)	Point of important and meaningful realization for survey participants
Obligatory Passage Point (OPP)	Point of occurrence of event or behavior common to survey participants
Social Direction (SD)	Factor that hindered or restrained the choice of behavior of the survey participants
Social Guidance (SG)	Factor that supported the choice of behavior of the survey participants

4. 1. Period 1: “Feeling scared, but deciding to work on Kansai dialect theater creation”

When A and B came to Japan, they were afraid of speaking in public. Therefore, when the instructor suggested performing a play or giving a speech in the first class (SD1: A, B, C, D), the watching of performances from the previous semester (SD2: A, B), lack of confidence in Japanese language skills (SD3: A, B), homesickness (SD4: A), and stomach ache (SD5: B) were examples of “social directions,” and the participants felt anxiety about doing this activity. However, the support of Japanese mentors (SG1: A, B) and the persuasion of Japanese students (SG4: B) acted as “social guidance.” The participants then felt that they “don’t know the Kansai dialect [of the Japanese students]. I want to be able to understand” (BFP1: A, B), which then became a “bifurcation point,” and the participants decided to choose the theater creation option.

C and D were also not good at public speaking and had no experience in theater, so they felt anxiety about the instructor’s proposal (SD1: A, B, C, D) and in choosing to perform a play. However, C was encouraged by the international students to “do it, do it” (SD2: C), and D watched the performances from previous semesters (SD3:

D) and thought, “I want to take on a challenge while studying abroad. I lack leadership skills, so I might be able to improve my skills if I became a director,” thereby resulting in the “choose theater creation” (OPP1: A, B, C, D) that became the “obligatory passage point.”

4. 2. Period 2: “Learning from the attitudes of other participants that there is a playful way to learn Japanese”

The four survey participants were surprised to come across various ideas to make the audience laugh that the other participants put forward when examining the cast and script (SG5: A, B, C, D). This was because there was an exchange of ideas here that would normally not be considered. For example, Cinderella and the Prince were cast in opposite genders, and the fairy was to take out a dress and blue sandals (glass slippers) from a bright yellow paper bag from a famous grocery story and toss it out to Cinderella. Additionally, the narrator played the “tsukkomi” role, and asked the question (i.e., “tsukkomi”) to the male Cinderella with sandals in hand, “Wait wait, it’s usually glass slippers here, right?.” There were also scenes included where one actor makes a joke (“boke”) and the other actors all fall over (“kokeru”). Through

these kinds of exchanges, the four students gained various realizations, such as “it’s okay to have ideas like that,” “it doesn’t have to be a story that everybody knows,” and “I can just say it like that in Japanese.”

However, trials awaited A, B, and D in subsequent performance practice. The three individuals felt embarrassed about performing the funny performances written in the script (SD6: A, B, D). For example, A was supposed to intentionally drop the padding stuffed in the chest of their yukata and trot after it, saying “Ah, it fell out,” and sing an idol group’s song while dancing. B was supposed to lose a battle with a large pheasant on the way to Onigashima and had to fall to the floor and say a line. D was supposed to rush out of a refrigerator and then make a speech in a kabuki-style choreography. Even if they thought the script was funny, expressing themselves in Japanese and with their bodies was very embarrassing for the three participants. However, their concerns were short-lived, and there was an opportunity that encouraged A, B, and D. This was the scene where the other actors were not shy and played their roles in a funny way (SG6: A, B, D), and where the people watching them laughed and enjoyed themselves. The three participants, who felt that “being shy here is strange” (BFP2: A, B, D), then “went along with the others and tried a funny performance” (OPP2: A, B, D). Then everybody laughed (SG7: A, B, C, D) and the atmosphere became friendly (SG12: A, B, C, D). By repeating this process, A, B, and D became accustomed to performing funny performances.

Furthermore, B gained another realization

during this period. This was that, even when they made a mistake in their lines (SG8: B), people would laugh and let it slide (SG10: A, B, C, D), and that there were international students who worked on the activities as though it were a game (SG9: B). The focus in university classes in B’s home country is on translation, and in their eyes studying was “looking for answers with a dictionary and toiling away on a desk,” and they thought that it was not good to make mistakes. However, by participating in this activity, B learned that “there is a playful way to learn Japanese.” Additionally, the other three participants answered that they had the same opinion regarding B’s realization (OPP3: A, B, C, D).

Meanwhile, during this period, C did not feel embarrassed about giving a funny performance but instead enjoyed being in character and putting their own personality into the role.

Furthermore, when making props and costumes, C, who is good at sewing, made dresses and vests for the leading role, earning praise from the other participants. The other three participants were praised for the costumes and props that they made, which made them happy (SG11: A, B, C, D). At the same time, A was busy with extracurricular activities and part-time jobs (SD7: A) while making props, and D had the responsibility of being the director (SD8: D), and they felt the difficulty of the work not proceeding as expected even as the presentation date was approaching.

4. 3. Period 3: “Taking on the challenge of difficulties with support from Japanese”

As the main performance approached, the

Japanese were enthusiastic in their guidance during Kansai dialect practice. Then, after being told by the Japanese to “speak faster for the Kansai dialect” (SD9: A, B, C, D), the four participants felt the difficulties of the practice. However, at the same time, they were able to overcome the practice thanks to the gentle guidance of the Japanese (SG15: A, B, C, D). D continued to feel anxiety about their lack of progress in the production of props and costumes due to their sense of responsibility (SD10: D), but with self-encouragement and encouragement from others (SD16: B, D), the participants were able to overcome this stressful period. Meanwhile, A and C felt that “everything will work out somehow” during this period.

4. 4. Period 4: “Feeling less tension by being in the spotlight”

The four participants worked hard in the practice and preparations until the day of the performance. However, right before going on stage on the day of the performance, the participants felt nervous in front of a large audience (SD11: A, B, C, D). All the participants were sweating and palpitation, with B having a stomachache (SD12: B) and D trembling (SD13: D). According to Christophe and Légeron (1995), the anxiety that arises when performing in front of others is caused by the fear of “being evaluated by others.” Since there were many in the audience who were strangers, the four participants might have felt this nervousness here because of to the perspective shown in this previous research.

However, at this point, A and B remembered the “feeling of gratitude toward the Japanese who

helped” (SG17: A, B), and B remembered how “going to karaoke became fun” (SG18: B).⁽⁹⁾ Furthermore, C and D believed in themselves, feeling that they “could do it,” and A and B felt that they “did not want to fail and let everyone down” (BFP3: A, B), and got up on the stage.

They thought that their nervousness would reach a peak when stepping onto the stage, but the spotlight made it impossible for them to see the audience, and on the contrary relieved them of their nervousness (BFP4: A, B, C, D). Despite being surprised by the unexpected situation, B and C changed their mindsets and “forgot about the audience and concentrated on the acting.” Lighting is something that “participates in the creation of performing arts with its light” (Yoshii, 1995), and in this study, it played a role in relieving the nervousness of the four international students.

Afterwards, the four participants challenged themselves to make the audience laugh with their funny performances (OPP4: A, B, C, D), then when the laughter occurred (SG18: A, B, C, D), A, B, and D were happy that they had achieved their goal of “being able to make people laugh,” and felt relief. Additionally, as the performance progressed, the sweat and heart-pounding of the four participants naturally subsided (OPP5: A, B, C, D).

At the end of the performance, the audience applauded (SG20: A, B, C, D). The four participants then felt “proud” and were surprised at their own changes as a result of the sense of accomplishment (SG21: A, B, C, D) from “being able to do what they couldn’t do before” (A, B, C, D) and “working hard in practice” (A, B, C, D).

4. 5. Period 5: “No longer afraid of performing”

After the end of activities, the four participants came to feel that “doing a play together was a good thing.” Then, in the second semester, when classes started again and the students had to choose between a drama or a speech, A and B told their experiences to the new international students, saying, “before I started the theater, I was scared, but it was fun in the end” and “thanks to the theater, I could get along with the international students and Japanese that I did not know well at first.” C and D were also able to build friendships with the members from the previous semester (SG22: A, B, C, D) and were told that they “were already Kansai people” (SG23: D), and as a result, their feelings toward theater creation changed from before. Afterwards, in the second semester of the Kansai dialect theater creation activities, the four participants did not feel embarrassed about performing funny performances (OPP6: A, B, C, D), and they could speak with confidence even in front of others (EFP: A, B, C, D).

5. Discussion

5. 1. Recognized aspects in the analysis of the transformation of the four international students using TEM diagram

In this study, I analyzed the transformation of four international students who participated in Kansai dialect theater creation activities by analyzing their experiences with the TEM diagram. The results showed that, although the timing and specific circumstances of the four participants

differed slightly, they followed a common process, overcame their anxiety about Japanese language ability and theater activities by taking several important behaviors, and were able to speak with confidence in public. The important behaviors were as follows: 1) while feeling fear and anxiety, “deciding” to do theater because they “wanted to be able to understand the Kansai dialect”; 2) “changing their perception” of “being shy is strange” regarding funny performances; and “stepping onto the stage” despite having physical symptoms such as trembling and sweating, thinking that they “could do it” and they “did not want to fail and let everyone down.” It also became clear that the support of the Japanese and the learning attitudes of the other international students always acted as a “social guidance” for these participants. Furthermore, the spotlight on the stage played a role in relieving the nervousness of the four participants, letting them demonstrate their inherent abilities. The laughter and applause of the audience made them realize directly that they had achieved the class goal of “making the audience laugh” (building a human relationship in the Kansai dialect). In fact, the three behaviors mentioned above happened to have much in common with cognitive behavioral therapy, which is a psychotherapeutic technique for dealing with social anxiety (“cognitive modification,” “exposure,” and “social skills training”; Kaiya, 2006). It was also found, in light of Vygotsky’s (2003) statement that there is a level of problem-solving that is possible with the help of adults and the cooperation of friends,⁽¹⁰⁾ that the fact that this psychotherapy could be more effective by proceeding with a professional

instructor overlapped with the fact that the Japanese supported the four international students in these theater creation activities.

5. 2. Educational effects of theater in Japanese language education

In the educational activities of this study, a safe educational environment that was free of threats was created and provided so that the learners themselves could become aware of, accept, and deal with the anxiety that arises when learning and using a second language (Motoda, 2005). As a result, learners who felt uneasy about speaking or acting in front of others were able to actively engage in many exchanges in the Japanese language in order to achieve their goals, and they were able to speak a sufficient amount of Japanese. The four survey subjects and the other participants often acted together not only during class, but also during lunch, after school, and on holidays as “colleagues” and “friends.” Before long, the room where I did my work and classes became a “club room,” and even outside of the theater creation classes, participants gathered in their spare time to make costumes and props, do homework, and chat. Here, the students began to confide, give advice, and joke about their university life, part-time jobs, job hunting, and relationship worries to each other. After the club was set up in the middle of the third semester, the group started to open stalls at school festivals and hold international exchange events on campus together, and Japanese language exchanges began to occur in a range that exceeded my initial expectations.

Soon after arriving in Japan, the survey

participants A and B were unable to use Japanese as well as they had hoped and were beginning to lose self-confidence, but after doing the theater performances, they became less hesitant to use the language. It is possible that they built up their self-confidence by observing and imitating the language used by the Japanese in their class.

Furthermore, the lines that the international students repeatedly uttered have been used playfully in various situations as “memory” lines when reuniting after studying abroad, whether they were international students or Japanese. Such phenomena are rarely seen in textbook-based education.

6 . Conclusion

In this study, I used TEM to visualize and analyze the paths and factors that four international students who had problems in learning the Japanese language, such as stage fright, had taken to overcome their problems and gain self-confidence as a result of working with Japanese and Kansai dialect theater creation activities in an environment where the roles of learner and instructor were changed and measures to reduce anxiety were taken. The social factors that allowed for the international students to gain awareness, conduct behaviors, and undergo change in the Kansai dialect theater creation activities were visually presented by expressing the trajectories of the four international students as a diagram.

Furthermore, the interviews revealed that the four of them began to take on various challenges in their own lives after returning to their

home countries. After returning to their home country, A spoke to an employee of a Japanese airline company and who was a regular customer who visited the gelato shop where A had worked part-time, and told them that “they want to work at that company as well” and “they always use Japanese with Japanese people,” and after an interview was hired. Today, A is working as a part-time employee announcing boardings and escorting customers at a national airport, using both Japanese and their native language. After returning to their home country, B went on to graduate school, and after completing their degree took the national civil service employment examination. After giving a successful presentation on “Learning from the cooperative spirit of the Japanese people,” B overcame the obstacles to enter their home country’s Ministry for Employment. Prior to the study abroad, C was too cautious in everything they did, but when they saw a job offer in Japan after returning to their home country, immediately took action and applied, ultimately achieving the goal of returning to Japan. D subsequently participated in the Model United Nations at S University and became a journalist leader, and after returning to their home country used that experience to obtain a part-time job in the public relations department of the university in which they were enrolled. It appears that the four participants obtained a positive attitude toward promoting themselves and taking on challenges without fear of failure, thanks to their ability to speak with confidence in front of people as a result of the theater creation activities as well as various other experiences they had while studying abroad.⁽¹¹⁾

In the future, I would like to create and analyze individual TEM diagrams to recognize how the four survey participants transformed into an “active self” through their Kansai dialect theater creation activities and the other experiences they had while studying abroad. I would also like to increase the number of survey subjects and obtain more specific suggestions about the educational effect of incorporating theater creation into Japanese language education.

Notes

- (1) Fukada (1998) describes the purposes of interpersonal communication as (1) obtaining information and knowledge; (2) having fun; (3) conveying information and knowledge to others; (4) influencing others; (5) forming, developing, and maintaining relationships with others; and (6) solving problems. I also thought that the original theater creation activity develops communication to achieve a similar purpose.
- (2) Hirata (1998) argues that theater is an expressive activity that demands and includes the three forms of dialogue of (1) dialogue between characters in a theatrical production; (2) dialogue between individual human beings such as playwrights, directors, and actors within a theater group; and (3) dialogue between the performer and viewer in the theater (internal); and is a structure that cannot exist without such elements.
- (3) Previous research on Japanese language education using theater includes a reflection on collaboration among international students (Nakayama, 2012) and research on learning in voice instruction (Nakagawa and Nakayama, 2014). However, there are not many studies that capture the transformation of learners and recognize the factors involved, or touch upon collaboration with Japanese people.
- (4) This is a reference to the concept of status, which is the main concept of Keith Johnstone, the developer of improvisational theater. According to this concept, if the instructor always gives a high status to the students, then the students will feel dominant, and in contrast, if the student is always at a low status, then

they will have nothing to protect, which breeds anxiety and prohibits sufficient spontaneity (Takao, 2010).

- (5) During both the fifth and seventh semesters, at the university's request, activities were divided into two halves: one for introducing the students' home countries to local elementary school pupils, and the other for theater creation activities. Therefore, the form of the original theater creation activities also changed.
- (6) This was developed based on the discussion method of the Native American Pueblo people, in which multiple people sit in a circle and proceed according to the methods and rules that suit the situation (Zimmerman & Coyle, 2009). In this study, we established four rules: (1) start with the person who wants to talk, (2) you cannot say the same thing as someone else, (3) speak as briefly as possible in one sentence, and (4) do not say anything that hurts others; and an effort was made for all the participants to relax and reflect on activities, trying to share their feelings in words.
- (7) There was a loose rule that the language could be switched to English if there was a student at the elementary level when there was a complicated discussion or an important message to convey.
- (8) TEM is based on the invention of Valsiner (2001), who tried to incorporate the concept of equifinality into cultural and developmental psychology.
- (9) After arriving in Japan, B was invited by the Kansai dialect theater creation students and went to a karaoke session for the first time in their life, but in B's home country, singing in front of others is an embarrassing act, and at first B was unable to even hold the microphone. However, one day, when B mustered up the courage to sing, everyone praised B, saying "you're so good!" and "you have such a nice voice!," after which B began to actively sing and frequently go to karaoke sessions.
- (10) This is the view called the "tomorrow of development" in the theory of "zone of proximal development."
- (11) In the interview, C said that they acquired a positive attitude not only through the writing of plays, but also through their study abroad experience as a whole, stating the following.

I studied abroad in the middle of my third year at

university, but after returning to my home country, I had to think about what to do about job hunting in six months, and when I saw the Japan ▲ Association job offer in ○○ (region name), I was able to immediately make a decision to apply. I didn't feel scared, and I had courage and confidence. I think that, for all the challenges, just living there gave me a large amount of self-confidence. I think I changed not only because of the language-based theater, but through my study abroad as a whole.

References

- (1) Chinami, K. (2009) "Training Japanese socio-cultural skills using story manga," *Japanese Studies Papers: New Perspectives in Japanese Studies*, Taipei: Zhiliang Publishing, pp. 39–68.
- (2) Christophe, André and Légeron Patrick, pp., "Pyramid of social anxiety" *La Peur des Autres* [Fear of Others], Takano, Y. (ed.), Noda, Y., and Tanaka, Y. (trans.), Tokyo: Books Kinokuniya, pp. 44–47.
- (3) Fukada, H. (1998) "Chapter 2: Characteristics of interpersonal communication, Section 4: Purpose of interpersonal communication," *Interpersonal Communication: Psychology of Interpersonal Communication*, Kyoto: Kitaoji Shobo Publishing, pp. 28–30.
- (4) Hirata, O. (1998) "Towards 'participating theater': 2. Participating theater: Role of theater," *Introduction to Theater*, Chapter 5, Tokyo: Kodansha Gendai Shinsho, pp. 200–204.
- (5) Kaiya, H. (2006) "I want to change myself: Overcoming with cognitive behavioral therapy," *Everything to Know About Social Anxiety Disorder*, Tokyo: Kodansha, pp. 75–81.
- (6) Krashen, S (1985) *The Input Hypothesis: Issues and Implications*. New York, Longman.
- (7) Motoda, S. (2005) "Educational suggestions for alleviating second language anxiety," *Theory and Reality of Second Language Anxiety*, Hiroshima: Keisuishsha, pp. 160.
- (8) Nakagawa, C., and Nakayama, Y. (2014) "Cultural learning through sound instruction in theater project classes," *Proceedings of the 18th Japanese Language Symposium in Europe*, pp. 191–196.
- (9) Nakayama, Y. (2012) "Collaboration in creative works: Process of drama production in a Japanese

- class," *Waseda Practical Studies in Japanese Language Education*, pp. 107–118.
- (10) Takao, T. (2010) "Keith Johnstone, In Y. Kobayashi et al. (Eds.)," *Introduction to Drama Education*, Tokyo: Toshobunka, pp. 76–85.
- (11) Valsiner, J. (2001) *Comparative Study of Human Cultural Development*. Madrid, Fundacion Infancia y Aprendizaje.
- (12) Vygotsky, L. (2003) *Theory of "Zone of Proximal Development,"* Doi, S., and Kamiya, E. (trans.), Otsu: Sangaku Publishing.
- (13) Yasuda, Y., Nameda, A., Fukuda, M., and Sato, T. (eds.) (2015) TEA Theory Edition: *Learning the Basics of the Trajectory equifinality Approach*, Tokyo: Shinyosha.
- (14) Yoshii, S. (1995) "Is lighting useful for theater?: Lighting-sound mechanisms," *Tragedy and Comedy*, Vol. 48, No. 9, pp. 8–10.
- (15) Zimmerman, Jack, Coyle, Virginia (2009) *The Way of Council 2nd Edition*. Bramble Books.

Acknowledgment

In writing this paper, I have been fortunate to receive valuable guidance from Professor Kyoko Chinami, formerly of the Japanese Red Cross Kyushu International College of Nursing, and many other esteemed professors. I express my deep gratitude for their assistance. Furthermore, I extend my heartfelt thanks to the four international students who helped my research, to the students who supported my educational activities, to the members of the club LiNK, and to all the related faculty and staff for their support.

- * This paper is based on the author's article published in issue 170 of "Japanese Language Education" in 2018, with some additional revisions and modifications.