

Promoting Bilingualism in Japanese

Elementary Schools:

Exploring the Possibilities of the *Awakening to Languages* Approach

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This paper examines the promotion of bilingualism in Japanese education and explores the potential of *Awakening to Languages* in elementary schools. This is a methodology for the support of minority bilingualism and the promotion of bilingualism in the classroom. This pilot study focusses specifically on elementary pupils in grades one and two. Through observation of lessons conducted at a public primary school, this exploratory study revealed how *Awakening to Languages* may enhance learners' linguistic awareness and modify naïve conceptions about language. Furthermore, feedback from teachers provides useful insights into the needs of elementary school teachers in the domain of foreign language teaching.

本論文はまず日本でのバイリンガリズムを奨励する学校教育のあり方について考察し、日本の小学校における「言語への目覚め活動」について、とりわけ低学年児童を対象に実践する可能性について検討する。公立小学校で行われた低学年児童への実践から、「言語への目覚め活動」によってどのように児童の言語意識が高まり、また言語についての素朴概念が変容するかについて、探索的記述を行う。さらに実践に対する教師のフィードバックから、外国語教育における教師のニーズに関する示唆を報告する。

Bilinguals, people who regularly make use of two or more languages (Grosjean, 2015), form the greater part of the world's population. In Japan, however, bilinguals are rare. The reason for this lies in Japan's success in creating a unified nation-state.

The ideal nation-state has been defined as, “incorporat[ing] people of a single ethnic stock and cultural traditions” (Kazancigil & Dogan, 1986). Japan has rigorously pursued this ideal since the opening of the country, with the education system enforcing linguistic homogenization in standard Japanese (Sauzier Uchida, 2008). Historically, schools have punished the use of local dialects, through such means as *bōgen fuda*¹. Only standard Japanese

¹ Or, *dialect cards*, large cards that students were forced to wear as a punishment for speaking

has been legitimized. Under Japan's imperial expansionism, with the occupation of Taiwan and the Korean peninsula, Japan briefly became a much more multilingual entity. After its defeat and the loss of its colonies, however, Japan also shed a large amount of the linguistic diversity it had obtained, with a few exceptions, such as those people of Korean descent who had been recognized as Japanese citizens during the war and chose to stay in Japan. Post-war, cultural assimilation of those of Korean descent progressed, resulting in an exceedingly linguistically homogenous Japan (Ministry of Justice, 2018). As a result of the push for standard Japanese, and despite revitalization efforts, indigenous languages in Japan such as Ainu and several Ryukyuan languages remain listed as either severely or critically endangered (Moseley, 2010).

The present sociolinguistic climate in Japan is characterized by *double monolingualism*, that is, only two languages are perceived as being of value (Oyama, 2016). Domestic communication is conducted almost entirely in Japanese, while as an international language, the image of English as the only useful foreign language is dominant, and this is reflected in the national school curriculum. In public education, the focus of this paper, English is the only foreign language that most Japanese have access to, with schools that offer other languages being very rare (Hasegawa, 2013). According to Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT) statistics, at senior high schools, only 1.3% of students study a foreign language other than English (2015). Similarly, while five foreign language options exist in the National Center for University Entrance Examinations, over 98% of students opt for English (National Center for University Entrance Examinations, 2019).

For elementary schools, 2020 marks the year in which foreign language will become a compulsory, graded subject in the fifth and sixth grades (70 hours per year), replacing the current "foreign language activities," which involve 35 hours per year of language activities for which students are not graded. Foreign language activities will be brought forward to the third and fourth grades (MEXT, 2017b). Previously, schools have been able to incorporate other foreign languages in their activities, although the recent Course of Study, coming into effect in April, 2020, has the following addendum for both foreign languages (subject) and foreign language activities: "the language to be learned is, in principle, English" (MEXT, 2017b, p. 164/177). As can be seen in this policy, double monolingualism continues to be a distinguishing feature of the educational landscape. In reality, however, there is a minority population of bilinguals in Japanese schools. According to MEXT figures on foreign children who require support in the Japanese language, 41% of schools have one child who fits into this category, and 25% of schools have more than five such children enrolled (MEXT, 2017a, p.8). Amongst these children, the most common mother tongue is Portuguese (25%), followed by Chinese (24%), Tagalog (18%), Spanish (18%) and Vietnamese (4.4%), while English represents only

local dialects of Japanese. The practice was especially prevalent in Okinawa and the Kyushu and Tohoku regions (Noguchi & Fotos, 2001).

3% of this demographic (MEXT, 2017a, p. 8).

Languages other than English, and the children who speak them, are increasing. Between 2006 and 2016, the number of foreign children requiring support in Japanese grew by around 10,000. Of this number, the languages that showed the greatest growth were Tagalog (around 3,800) and Chinese (around 3,700) (MEXT, 2017a, p.7). Support for bilingualism in these children (other than Japanese/English) does not exist *a priori* in education policy. What classroom-level support exists has come from grassroots movements (Ikegami, 2007).

According to Grosjean: “In nation-states which maintain a policy of one or more official languages, recognition of bilingualism [in children who speak a minority language] is by and large non-existent” (2015, p. 122). As a model success case for the nation-state, this is certainly true in Japan. The small numbers of ethnic schools conducting bilingual education in Japan are an exception but are not usually considered in discussions on public education.

Minority Bilingualism in Schools

As immigrant and bilingual children in Japan represent a very small minority² of the population, their bilingualism is not usually regarded as a national issue. The education system, on the other hand, clearly values the learning of a foreign language (English) and the acquisition of high levels of competency and fluency. Foreign language education is seen as opening up the possibility of eventual bilingualism (i.e., the regular use of Japanese and English). From the viewpoint of bilingualism in education, however, minority bilingualism and foreign language education are different aspects of the same issue.

Both the public and private sectors continue to assert the need for an English-speaking populace in response to globalization. As the global dominance of English cannot be denied, there is an argument for English occupying the bulk of educational real estate. On the other hand, the reality is that English is essentially the *only* foreign language that most Japanese have access to in schools. For learners in the Japanese education system, escaping from the notion that *foreign language* = *English* is exceedingly difficult.

However, this belief that only Japanese and English are important is becoming less relevant to the current situation in Japan, and language policy researchers increasingly advocate for the diversification of foreign language education. Morizumi, Koishi, Sugitani, and Hasegawa (2016) propose making multiple foreign languages compulsory at the secondary level, arguing that this could help to develop the pluralistic critical thinking necessary in the globalized era. From a sociolinguistic viewpoint, Kimura (2016) has outlined the risks of

² From MEXT statistics on elementary school children who require Japanese language support (2017a), as well as statistics on the population of Japanese elementary schools (MEXT, 2016; 2017a), we can calculate that, as of 2016, only 0.4% of the elementary school population were classified as, “requiring Japanese language support,” (although distribution is uneven, with some industrial areas having a much higher proportion).

emphasizing English alone, including dependence on English sources for international information, and argues for the promotion of greater awareness and understanding of language in general (including Japanese). Language education policy in Japan has fallen into a paradigm of globalization *via* English, and reliance upon English to understand the outside world brings with it the undue influence of anglo-centric interpretations. Presently lacking in policy is any systematic recognition of foreign languages other than English in compulsory education.

With the present political climate opening up to the inclusion of foreign labor, there has been an increase in the number of foreign language-speaking children in Japanese schools. Far from excluding such children, several positive steps have been taken to make schools a more inclusive environment. Perhaps most obvious is the state's recognition that learning support must be provided for these children—and that support should be comprehensive, including assistance in school subjects as well as the Japanese language (Kiyota, 2016). However, there is also a need to develop the language awareness of children in the majority. While the language of instruction may continue to be Japanese, and English the key foreign language, for schools accepting speakers of other foreign languages, there is a need for the linguistic majority, both staff and students, to develop an openness to linguistic plurality. Recognition at the individual level of bilinguals already present in schools, through the instilling of open-minded attitudes to foreign languages, will require a different approach from the current language education policy.

Support for Bilingualism in Schools

In *Speaking Several Languages: The World of Bilinguals* (2015), Grosjean discusses school support for bilingualism at various levels of education. Using his work as a guide, this section will examine the possibility of such support in Japan, at the micro-, meso-, and macro-levels.

Support at the micro-level refers to individual assistance given to students. Grosjean describes how a teacher might react to a learner's linguistic errors. Rather than shaming the learner, a teacher could instead acknowledge the learner's language positively—perhaps with an exclamation such as, “That's a rather poetic use!” (p. 125). While this type of support is both valuable and readily achievable, it depends on the capacity of individual teachers, and is thus by nature a product of fortuity.

In order to properly promote children's bilingualism, assistance on an institutional level is necessary, for which various mechanisms can be envisioned. At the meso-level in Japan, when there is a sufficient population of speakers of other languages, and with the approval of local boards of education and school principals, support classrooms have been established. Such classrooms allow for students to engage in Japanese language study at their own pace, and several boards of education and non-governmental organizations now also hold teacher seminars to promote the skills necessary for support at the individual (micro-) level (see, for

example, Kiyota, 2016).

Much language support in Japan happens in the form of lessons in which students engage in concentrated study of Japanese separated from mainstream classes (MEXT, 2008). The objective of such support is to raise the learners' language ability to the point that they can fully integrate into regular classes. There is no official support at the policy level for the maintenance of the learners' first languages, although as Japanese is the language of schooling in Japanese public schools, there is a need for children to develop sufficient Japanese ability. For this reason, schools mainly provide support for Japanese language study and gradually move on to subject content to prepare students for mainstream classes conducted in Japanese (Kiyota, 2016).

Support for the maintenance of children's first languages requires decision-making at the macro-level (i.e., policy). Grosjean (2015) details several types of bilingual programs, including transitional programs, immersion programs, and dual-language programs. As such programs generate a considerable logistic burden in providing adequate staffing and resources and given that foreign language speakers are still an extreme minority in Japanese elementary schools, this type of support is not presently possible in public education. At least for now, the political impetus for such support simply does not exist.

In Japan then, are micro-level support and separate Japanese classes the only options available? Grosjean (2015) suggests that rather than focusing on bilingualism itself, schools might aim to foster instead the necessary skills needed to develop bilingualism. Two approaches to this are a) traditional language education and b) *Awakening to Languages* methodology.

Traditional language education in Japanese public schools is conducted as regular classes with the same (typically large) number of students as other subjects. According to Grosjean, this type of education, "does not transform monolingual children into bilinguals" (2015, p. 129). This is because the primary focus is on the *teaching* of language, whereas the development of bilinguals requires substantial engagement in language *use* (Netten & Germain, 2014). This type of education can, however, provide learners with the necessary linguistic base for eventually putting language into practice.

The other possibility is the *Awakening to Languages* methodology, which supplements traditional language education. Grosjean asserts that this approach, "allows children to become familiar with several types of languages, how they work and their usage, and through this fosters motivation for the later learning of languages" (2015, pp. 128-129). Furthermore, for bilingual children, "An additional advantage is that [the approach] values children who already know a language and can talk about it and illustrate their knowledge" (2015, p. 129).

Awakening to Languages

Awakening to Languages in the Literature

Awakening to Languages is a methodology that simultaneously incorporates many different language varieties (including dialects) into pedagogy. Inspired by the Language Awareness movement in the 1970s in England (Hawkins, 1984), which aimed to promote linguistic ability in children, it is now a plurilingual and intercultural education methodology practiced across pre-primary, primary, and secondary levels in Europe (Beacco et al, 2016, p. 158). The methodology has flourished primarily in the Franco-sphere, and is reported by De Pietro and Matthey (2001) to have the following qualities:

- a) promoting acceptance of foreign languages (through raising awareness of linguistic diversity),
- b) providing structure to linguistic knowledge (through developing understanding of the functions of language).

To assess the effects of *Awakening to Languages* methodology, the *Eylang Program* (sponsored by the European Commission), was conducted from 1997 through 2001 across five countries and 127 classrooms, with 63 traditional language teaching classrooms as controls. Results of pre- and post-tests showed statistically significant differences on measures of interest in diversity, openness towards the unfamiliar, motivation for the study of language, and ability to discriminate between and memorize phonemes (Candelier, 2003).

In Japan, there is only one longitudinal study known to the authors that addresses similar constructs in elementary school language education. Uematsu (2015) compared secondary students who had experienced English in education at elementary schools and those who had not. His study revealed no statistically significant differences between the two groups in attitudes towards intercultural communication, attitudes towards English learning, respect for self and others or reasons for studying English³.

It would appear that foreign language (English) education at Japanese elementary schools has not produced promising results in terms of promoting bilingualism. On the other hand, the European results of *Awakening to Languages* practice are encouraging. Thus, from the point of view of promoting acceptance of foreign languages other than English (De Pietro and Matthey's point a), above), and being pedagogically meaningful for both majority monolinguals and emergent bilinguals (their point b), above), we sought to explore the potential of the approach in the public elementary school classroom in Japan.

³ Experienced students' scores in listening tasks were higher than non-experienced students' to a degree "close to reaching statistical significance" (Uematsu, 2015, p. 107), while the only significant differences found were experienced students out-performing non-experienced students on specific types of speaking tasks that they had been instructed on at their elementary schools

Materials for Young Learners

Awakening to Languages has begun to appear in the Japanese literature, but has been mostly limited to introductions of the methodology, and there has so far been little research on implementation of the practice itself. While Oyama (2016) investigated practice with upper grades at elementary schools, no research has yet addressed younger learners, or how the methodology might be received by Japanese elementary practitioners. The pilot study in this paper therefore sought to explore the reception of *Awakening to Languages* at the elementary level, and investigates practice conducted over two months in early 2019. Here we will examine one of these lessons with reference to learner and teacher reactions. As this is an exploratory pilot, any conclusions that we draw will lead to the establishment of hypotheses which will need to be confirmed, rather than to readily applicable conclusions.

Awakening to Languages for Younger Learners at Japanese Primary Schools

Contextualizing Our Practice: Elementary English Education in Japan

From 2020, English will become a compulsory subject for fifth- and sixth-grade students at Japanese elementary schools. Alongside this, *foreign language activities*, which aim to, “develop the fundamental skills for foreign language acquisition” (MEXT, 2017b, p. 173) have been pushed forward to the third and fourth grades. While not compelled to do so, many elementary schools have introduced some form of foreign language activities in the first and second grades, too.

While policy clearly aims to accelerate the acquisition of a foreign language, sufficient financial and human resources have not been invested to achieve this. Previous research has shown that teachers are woefully underprepared to teach English, and that many of them (quite naturally) still harbor reservations about the subject (see, for example, Fennelly & Luxton, 2011; Machida, 2016).

Preparation for the Practice

In September, 2018, the authors approached a public elementary school in Kyoto to request cooperation. We met with the school principal and the head of language education for grades one and two. In an hour-long discussion, we introduced some representative examples of *Awakening to Languages* activities, and the following characteristics of the approach:

- a) Using multiple languages simultaneously: Through exposure to, and through examination and comparison of multiple languages, and the building of hypotheses about language form and function, learners (to a degree autonomously) acquire the skills necessary to pursue a target language (English).
- b) Exposure to a variety of speech input: With audiovisual equipment, as well as input

from bilingual classmates, learners can develop interest in language through discerning differences between sounds, without having to rely on the sole input of assistant language teachers' (ALTs')⁴ English pronunciation models.

c) Using languages that the children know: Through active take-up and inclusion of input from children about languages that they know or have been exposed to outside of school, their learning experiences and knowledge are given recognition in the classroom.

d) Teacher as facilitator: It is not necessary for teachers to have a perfect knowledge of the languages introduced, but rather work *together* with their students to observe and hypothesize, and to promote the study of language.

During the meeting, it was decided that two lessons would be conducted with three classes each in the first and second grade, for a total of twelve hours practice. It was also decided that the classes would be instructed by the authors. The lessons were carried out in February and March, 2019.

Method

Materials

The authors developed materials with reference to those published in the French volume *Les Langues du Monde au Quotidien* [Bringing the Languages of the World into Everyday Life] (Kervran, 2006), a compilation developed from the Evlang Program. The original materials were developed for younger elementary students in Francophone territories (Cycle 2: ages six to eight). We contextualized them for the Japanese elementary classroom before preparing the lesson plan in Appendix A.

Data collection

Each of the six 45-minute lessons was video recorded with a wide-angle lens to capture the reactions of the students. The flow of each lesson was identical, beginning with self-introductions by both teachers in several languages, before moving into a discussion about language with the students. Here, we elicited knowledge about foreign languages and foreign language words that they were aware of. Next, we introduced two foreign language folk songs (the Moroccan *A Ram Sam Sam* and the Māori *Oma Rāpeti*) before concluding the lesson with a reflection. For a full outline, see Appendix A.

The videos were later viewed by both researchers, with a focus on learner utterances related to language. Utterances that displayed learners' naïve conceptions were given particular attention, as well as feedback from the teachers and other learners. Interpretations of potential

⁴ Understanding that elementary school teachers are not prepared to teach English, the use of ALTs whose native tongue is (usually) English is promoted, and most schools have ALTs that join English lessons.

changes to learners' naïve conceptions that occurred as a result of such interaction will be explored below.

A feedback questionnaire was also distributed to each of the homeroom teachers ($n = 6$). All of the teachers provided feedback. Of the participants, four were female and two were male. The participants had varied backgrounds in terms of years of experience as elementary school teachers.

Transformations in Learners' Naïve Conceptions

This section will present observations of students' attitudes and reactions in the first lesson. We will look specifically at one class of first-year students, (although we include references to other classes in which reactions diverged), with a focus on the students' naïve conceptions as they become salient in interaction.

Interaction in the First Half of the Lesson

One of the authors began the lesson with, "*Kiā ora! Ko Raniera taku ingoa*" [Hi! My name is Daniel], and then asked the students if they could hear his name. It was the students' first exposure to Māori. "He's speaking in English, so I don't understand!"⁵ came a reply, amongst animated exclamations and children leaning forward in their seats, full of interest. When he repeated his introduction, it was still difficult for the children to identify his name, but a few tried to mimic his Māori. "Shall I try in English?" he asked, before repeating his introduction in English. This time, they heard the name, *Daniel*, although many of them returned the slightly different *katakana*⁶ pronunciation, *Danieru*. After giving the introduction in Japanese, he pointed out the different pronunciations of the name: *Raniera*, *Daniel*, and *Danieru*.

The other author then joined in, priming the students by announcing that she would introduce herself in a different language, before giving a short self-introduction in French. When she asked, "What language was that?" replies of, "Chinese!", "Brazilian!", "Italian!", "Korean!" began to fly forward. In other classes, some students were quick to identify French. When asked how they knew, various replies were forthcoming, including, "I heard *bonjour*," and "Because my mother is studying French."

Next, she gave her self-introduction in Spanish. No class was able to identify the Spanish language. When asked what it might be, students responded with, "Hawaii," "Great Britain," or "Australia." When "Africa" appeared, she replied: "Africa has many countries, and many more languages." When the guesses died down, she gave this hint: "Many famous soccer players speak this." "Holland!" came an enthusiastic response, followed by encouragement from the

⁵ Translations of the Japanese utterances are by one of the authors, and checked for accuracy by the other author. Both authors were present for the practice and therefore understood the context of the utterances.

⁶ *Katakana* is a Japanese syllabary often used for loan words and foreign names.

teacher, noting that Holland (the Netherlands) is home to many soccer players, “But this language is spoken a lot in South America.” One child began to search in an atlas, to which the teacher remarked: “We might be able to find the answer here.” Eventually, she wrote on the blackboard in a fill-in-the-gaps manner, leading to the answer, “Spanish!”

We then felt it was timely to introduce the lesson objective, “Learn about the world’s languages,” and to enter the second phase of the lesson: discussing language. First, we asked the learners to share what languages they had heard of. “Korean” came up again, as did, “Brazilian,” to which one teacher pointed out that the majority language in Brazil is Portuguese⁷. When “American!” was suggested, another student eager to share her knowledge exclaimed: “It’s English in America!” When responses slowed again, a teacher asked, “What are you speaking now?” to which the class erupted “Japanese!” enthusiastically. More answers began to emerge, such as “European,” “Malaysian,” “Russian,” and “Indian,” some of which displayed the naïve conceptions that the children held. We wrote only linguistically defined languages on the blackboard.

We then asked how many languages they had identified, and the students counted twelve (Figure 1). “How many languages do you think there are in the world?” was our next question. As first-year students do not yet have a full grasp of large numbers, we wrote, “70, 700, 7,000, 70,000” on the blackboard, and one teacher pronounced the answer (7,000) in English. Then, to have the children identify the correct figure, he pronounced all of the numbers in English. After a second pronunciation, the students arrived at the correct answer.

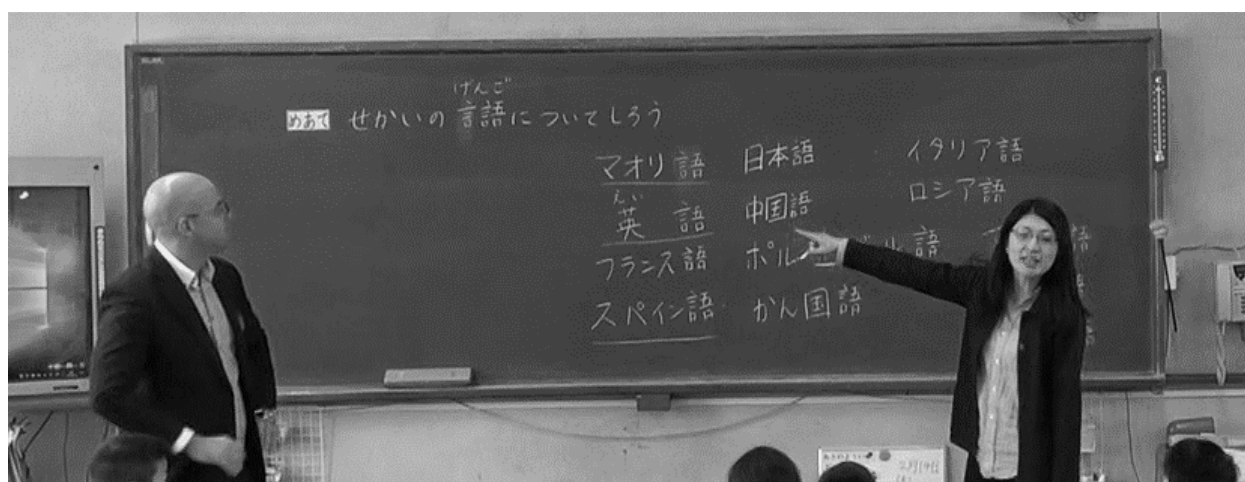


Figure 1. Awakening for Languages activities with younger Japanese learners. Language varieties elicited from the students are shown on the blackboard.

⁷ In another class, one student was able to identify Portuguese, as he was a fan of a Brazilian soccer player whom he had seen speaking Portuguese in television interviews.

Transformation of Naïve Conceptions in Activity 1

When preparing the lesson, we expected that the number of languages the children could identify would be limited, partly because of the naïve conception *foreign language* = *English*, but also because in first and second grade, other subjects have not yet dealt with foreign countries to any significant degree. We also imagined that, given the youth of the learners, few would have had experience of overseas travel or contact with foreign countries. This prognosis was, for the most part, accurate. However, a closer examination revealed certain hints about the nature of the naïve conceptions that the children held.

Upon hearing Māori, one student remarked: “He’s speaking in English, so I don’t understand!” Similar comments were made in all six classes. Even when students recognized the language was not English (with which they all had some experience), they used the word, “English” as a synonym for “foreign language.”

During activity 2, after having exhausted their known languages, the students began listing countries and regions, including Europe and Africa, as well as India, which, while of course a single nation, has many languages, none of which are called, “Indian.” From this we might infer another naïve conception: *country name* = *language name*. During the process of revising these conceptions, one author pointed out that in Brazil, Portuguese is most widely spoken, not, “Brazilian.” When a child ventured, “American,” however, this was addressed by another student with: “It’s English in America!” Here, the word *English* was clearly no longer being used as a synonym for foreign language. *Country name* = *language name* was apparently being updated to a more appropriate concept definition through collaboration amongst learners, with no explicit teacher input. It is also possible that a shift in understanding from *foreign language* = *English* to, “English is a particular foreign language” was occurring.

Amongst the country names that students knew, those in the Anglosphere (America, Great Britain, Australia) were prevalent. When given the cue about soccer-playing nations, however, while one student offered Holland, other responses included Brazil and Mexico. What can be seen from this is that, while many of the children have prior knowledge of Anglosphere countries, depending on individual interests, some have an awareness (have had input) of the names of other countries as well.

On the other hand, the hint, “This language is spoken a lot in South America,” led not to an explicit answer, but, armed with this new clue, to a student searching in his atlas for the solution. This hint was likely taken by the student to mean that, while the answer was beyond his knowledge or experience, the answer might be found by searching through countries in South America (given the *country name* = *language name* conception). When another student objected to the atlas use, “Hey, that’s cheating!” a teacher responded rather with praise of the student in question, remarking that it was a clever idea to use the resources at hand to search for an answer. This interaction, possibly resulting from a violation of classroom culture (it

might well have been against the normal classroom rules to try to look up an answer), may have also sent a positive message about autonomous discovery (i.e., looking for hints from other resources is a good strategy). This episode might have led to the development of the idea that knowledge about languages within one's own world experience can be supplemented by maps and books, or other resources.

Interaction in the Second Half of the Lesson

Returning to the practice, we next introduced the concept of *words*. We began by listing nouns in Japanese, such as desk, chair, boy, girl, and introduced the concept of *word* as “discrete lexical item.” We followed with another question: “What foreign words do you know?”

A few children had already begun to learn English, and they responded in earnest. *Name*, *fox*, *gorilla*, *raccoon*, *jelly*, and *toast* were amongst the words that were eagerly offered up. One teacher then attempted to elicit other languages, asking “How about foreign foods or sweets? Have any of you visited a cake shop? What do they call chocolate cake? Gâteau...” in a leading manner. “Chocolat!” answered a number of voices. *Chocolat* was written on the blackboard in Japanese *katakana*, with the word *furansugo* (French) alongside it. “I wonder if you know any more French words? Something else you might find at the bakery? *Furansu*...”⁸. “*Pan!*” exclaimed several children, and the teacher wrote the French word *pan* (bread) in *katakana* on the blackboard.

The other teacher then asked: “Have you had pizza before? What language is ‘pizza?’” to which the answer, Italian, was readily forthcoming. “Any other Italian food?”, “Spaghetti!” These were added to the Italian group on the blackboard.

After mentioning that many foreign foods were written in *katakana*, and wondering aloud if the students knew any more, *baumkuchen* and *churros*, amongst other non-English sweets were proffered. In an attempt to elicit an even further array of languages, the instructors then asked: “Well, other than sweets, what other foreign foods do you know?” In one of the second-year classes, as the children hesitated, a teacher offered the Chinese-derived *chahan* (fried rice), to which a child of Korean heritage returned two suggestions at once; *gimbap* and *bibimbap*. At this point, a variety of non-English words were arrayed on the blackboard, all offered by the students themselves. We concluded the activity with this message: “In your everyday language, there are a lot of foreign words, not only English, that you know. You all know a lot of foreign words already!”

Transformation of Naïve Conceptions in Activity 2

We have primarily focused on one class here, but in all the classes, the first elicitation of

⁸ In Japanese, baguettes are known as *furansu* (French) *pan* (bread). The instructor successfully elicited *pan*.

foreign words led to a hail of English, as if, to the children, English was the sole source of foreign words. It is plausible that this homogeneity in response was due to the students having learned English outside of school (as a number of children from families with the financial means to do so, do), or conditioning in school through questions and materials that tend to elicit responses to: “Do you know what this is in *English*?” When we intentionally drew students’ attention to what *they* knew in *their lives*, however, they were able to provide non-English words. Due to the fact that children will attempt to offer information that they believe will be positively evaluated in the classroom (Van Lier, 1988), the children may have been primed to offer English responses. However, as we explicitly requested non-English terms (i.e., we positively evaluated *non*-English responses), and were clear in naming the language of each word, we demonstrated that these languages were of equal value to English in our classroom. Through this, it is possible that we planted the idea that languages other than English also have value in their own right. Here it is worth drawing attention to the input of the child who gave us *gimbap* and *bibimbap*. To her, it was an opportunity to share information, (both valuable and relevant) with her classmates that she held, about her language at home, in a way that was constructive to their learning.

Questionnaire Results

A very brief questionnaire was given to the homeroom teachers. It was comprised of only three statements, which required a response on a five-point Likert scale (see Figure 2 for results) and open-ended questions about the reasons for responses.



Figure 2. Teacher questionnaire responses to a post-observation questionnaire on *Awakening to Languages* practice (see Appendix B for full questionnaire and results).

From the responses to Q1, the teachers felt that learners engaged actively in the lessons. For Q2, regarding whether the teachers would like to conduct these lessons themselves, the response was neutral leaning towards negative. However, when asked if they could conduct

such lessons with ALTs (Q3), the response was slightly more positive. It seems that the presence of ALTs is somewhat encouraging, perhaps lowering perceived hurdles. A closer look at the open-ended responses is revealing of the teachers' anxieties.

Would you do these lessons yourself?

The responses to Q2 ranged from neutral to negative, and there was a clear trend in the teachers' reasons: Lack of foreign language expertise. Answers included the following: "It was really interesting, and the students enjoyed it, but there were so many languages spoken I don't know... it would be impossible for me to lead"; "When I consider what I know, it seems beyond my ability. I don't think I could do it with just fleeting knowledge"; and "I don't know anything about languages other than English, like French or German." It is possible that such responses came about due to the (mistaken) impression that the authors can speak fluently in the languages that they introduced. In reality, the first author uses three languages (Japanese, French, and English) and the second author uses two (Japanese and English) on a regular basis. In the classes, we included Spanish and Māori, although we exhausted close to the extent of our knowledge in doing so. We simply delivered our self-introductions with confidence, and therefore may have appeared much more competent than we were.

An even more direct response by one of the teachers was: "I'm just bad at foreign languages." This teacher also responded to Q1 with, "Students with prior knowledge were eager to say 'I know, I know,' but [for] those with an aversion to foreign languages, or those who can't pick up spoken words easily, it was difficult to participate." We wonder whether first-year students, who have had very limited experience with studying foreign languages, have yet had sufficient experience to develop an aversion to foreign languages. It is possible that the teacher might have been projecting his own negative feelings towards foreign languages (we felt this projection, if it was so, was likely motivated by concern for students who had not yet had the opportunity to interact with foreign languages to a notable extent rather than a rejection of foreign languages or their teaching). While the same teacher also responded that it was "necessary to provide support to students who have negative feelings about foreign languages or about speaking," he was extremely positive about the lesson, remarking in personal comments that it was "great fun." When it came to the question of the teacher leading such practice himself, however, the response was firmly in the negative.

While many of the teachers' neutral or negative responses were rooted in the belief that they lacked sufficient knowledge, it is important to return here to a point raised in the introduction. Previous research has shown that teachers feel at least an equal degree of apprehension when it comes to teaching English alone, which they feel compelled to do, despite the fact that very few use English on a daily basis (Machida, 2016). What could be provoking such responses is the idea that, when it comes to teaching language (or about

language), a teacher must have deep knowledge about all the languages used in the classroom. This interpretation is further substantiated by responses to Q3, such as: “If the ALT was a good partner, and knowledgeable about other languages, then I might be able to,” and, “Even with two of us I’m not sure we would have enough language knowledge.” The idea that a language teacher must have a deep knowledge of the languages being used in the classroom seems to create the belief in teachers that they are incapable of using multiple languages in their lessons. It is probable that this belief creates a barrier to teaching language which likely operates not only in lessons with multiple languages, but also during lessons focused solely on English.

Some teachers did remark that they might be able to conduct these lessons with an ALT. One teacher stated: “The languages I can use myself are limited, so I don’t think I could make a class with as much variety as today. I guess it depends on how many languages the ALT could use.” To this teacher, who lacked the linguistic ability the authors *appeared* to have in the lessons, the hurdle to teaching by herself seemed too high. She did, however, continue with: “If I can’t use *even a little* of a few different languages, I’d be nervous, but if the lesson focusses on aspects of language, and with the support of an ALT, I think I could give it a go” (emphasis ours). In this response, she displays an understanding that the target of the lesson was not the specific languages introduced themselves, but rather learning *about* language, and while still intimating that a lack of linguistic expertise remains a hurdle, also indicates here for the first time a realization that complete knowledge of various languages is not a prerequisite to teaching them. The budding belief that even partial linguistic competences can lead to meaningful learning about language could potentially be of benefit to teachers, whether in plurilingual classes or in classes focused on English alone.

From the teachers’ responses to the lessons, and in light of the discussion of schools’ support of bilingualism, it seems that awareness-raising might be necessary for elementary school teachers in order to create a shift from the idea that “A deep knowledge of language is necessary” to “An openness to various foreign languages is important.”

Discussion and Conclusion

In this paper, we have argued that exclusively English-focused foreign language activities at elementary schools are not sufficient to develop the foundational skills and attitudes to promote bilingualism in majority and minority children in Japan. We proposed that the *Awakening to Languages* methodology may be a feasible alternative, and trialed the methodology with first and second grade students, about whom there has hitherto been very little research in this context. We will conclude our paper by discussing how the *Awakening to Languages* methodology may be effective in encouraging bilingualism, both in majority and minority bilinguals in Japanese elementary schools. Although the presence of minority

bilinguals was not salient in our practice, as the pupil of Korean descent demonstrated, we cannot rule out the possible presence of children who may use minority languages in the home.

The effects of the *Awakening to Languages* methodology are unclear if not conducted over relatively long periods (Candelier, 2003). Nevertheless, our two classes revealed important information about the pupils' linguistic interests: one child had knowledge of Korean vocabulary; one was familiar with French; another, through his knowledge of soccer-playing nations, was aware that Portuguese was spoken in Brazil, and had seen an athlete speaking the language. Through positive evaluations of the knowledge shared by these pupils, we were able to give recognition to their linguistic knowledge. This was possible due to the nature of our lesson, which did not regard English as the only language worth learning, but, because it incorporates multiple languages simultaneously, demonstrated to the pupils that their linguistic knowledge had value in the classroom.

Grosjean (2015) asserts that *Awakening to Languages* is a viable methodology for supporting minority bilinguals. While our pilot study was insufficient to establish this, it is adequate to hypothesize that this methodology can give recognition to the emergent bilingualism of those in the classroom with minority languages. Simultaneously, it may increase awareness amongst majority monolinguals of the languages around them, while also possibly demonstrating that languages other than English and Japanese also have value.

As this methodology focuses on fostering knowledge about language, rather than specific languages themselves, it makes it possible to identify learners' naïve conceptions about language. We considered transformations in the learners' naïve conceptions that may have occurred during the classes. Through eliciting naïve conceptions and building on knowledge and information the learners already possessed, we attempted to guide them towards more accurate understandings of language. Naïve conceptions that may have undergone transformations related closely to the following FREPA/CARAP⁹ descriptors:

Knows that one must not confuse country with language (K-5.6.1)

Is aware of the existence of situations of multilingualism or plurilingualism in one's own environment and in other places, near or far (K-5.7)

Sensitivity to plurilingualism and to pluriculturalism in the immediate or remote environment (A-2.5)

Assigning value to linguistic knowledge or skills, irrespective of the context in which they have been acquired (e.g. within school or outside school) (A-17.2)

Can identify (or recognize) loans or words of international origin or regionalisms (S-2.3.1)

(Candelier, et. al. 2012, ch.3)

⁹ The Framework of Reference for Pluralistic Approaches to Languages and Cultures (FREPA, also known as CARAP) defines standards for "pluralistic approaches in classrooms in order to develop the plurilingual and intercultural competences of learners" (European Centre for Modern Languages/Council of Europe, 2019, paragraph 1).

Our pilot study here suggested that our practice was successful in helping students begin to update their schema and develop more precise understandings, although longitudinal studies of practice would be necessary before drawing any definite conclusions. Longitudinal research may also provide insights into what long-term effects *Awakening to Languages* might have in the Japanese context.

Regarding the teachers, through their reaction to the practice, their self-perceptions as foreign language teachers became clear, and this highlights the potential for change in those perceptions. A final question that our study raised, but that could not be addressed with the data we collected, is what naïve conceptions the teachers hold, and how this interacts with and affects their teaching. As few teachers are experienced language teachers or learners, understanding their conceptions about language may help enlighten policy makers, curriculum planners, and materials developers about the needs of the teachers.

In the Franco-sphere, collaboration between school principals and university researchers has led to implementation of *Awakening to Languages* teacher training seminars, one of which, in Aube, France, one of the authors has participated in. A greater grasp on teacher needs may in time allow for such seminars to take place in Japan. The authors hope that at the very least, this study has brought to light some of the potential of *Awakening to Languages* in Japanese schools and raised awareness of the methodology as being rich with potential for further study and practice.

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Appendix A

Lesson Plan

Objectives:

Interest, attitude and motivation: Encourage thought and reflection about what language is, and about the languages that you know and speak.

Thinking, judgment and expression: Discuss how the languages introduced are related or how they differ. Express thoughts on languages that you know.

Knowledge and understanding: Learn what “language” and “word” refer to.

Activities (Time)	Procedure
1. Greeting (10 minutes) The teachers will give greetings and self-introductions in multiple languages.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •T1: Introduce New Zealand, self-introduce in Māori and English. •T2: Self-introduce in French and Spanish. •Both teachers will give a simple self-introduction in Japanese. •Write the objective, “learn about the world’s languages,” on the blackboard, and have the students say it out loud.
2. Talking about language (15 minutes)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •T1: Ask the students questions about language. E.g., What is language? What languages have you heard of? What are words? What foreign words do you know? (Elicit the students’ prior knowledge of foreign words). •T2: Join in discussion and write student responses on the blackboard. <p>(Teachers will take care to instruct in a dialogic manner, with neither taking a “lead” role.)</p>

3. Listen & Single Foreign folk song (15 minutes)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•T2: Introduce the Moroccan folk song <i>A ram sam sam</i>, demonstrate gestures and have students practice (fast, slow, super slow, fast).•T1: Introduce the Māori folk song <i>Oma rāpeti</i>, demonstrate gestures and have students practice (fast, slow, super slow, fast).
4. Reflection (5 minutes)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Reflect on the lesson content and what was learned. <p>(Make sure to encourage comments from students who have not spoken up much).</p>

Appendix B

Questionnaire and Likert Responses

	とても 思う	そう 思う	どちら もない	そう もない	まったく 思わな い
1) 子どもたちは、生き生きと学んでいると思いま したか	①	②	③	④	⑤
回答した理由：					
2) この指導案を用いて、 ご自身でも 実践したいと 思いましたか	①	②	③	④	⑤
回答した理由：					
3) この指導案を用いて、 ALT とご自身とで 授業 できそうですか	①	②	③	④	⑤
回答した理由：					

Figure 3. Questionnaire

Question 1: Did the students engage actively in the lesson?

Question 2: Would you like to try this style of lesson yourself?

Question 3: Do you think you could do this sort of lesson with an ALT?

Table 1

Likert Responses

	Teacher 1	Teacher 2	Teacher 3	Teacher 4	Teacher 5	Teacher 6
Question 1	1	2	2	2	2	2
Question 2	4	4	3	3	3	3
Question 3	3	3	3	2	3	1