GALE Newsletter Fall 2004

Newsletter of the GALE Special Interest Group (SIG) of the Japan Association for Language Teaching (JALT)

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Editor's Notepad

Dear GALE members,

As the days get cooler and the semester is going full tilt, Andrea and I want to invite you to the **JALT conference** in Nara. This issue of the GALE newsletter is the pre-conference newsletter with a tentative listing of gender related presentations and panels.

In this issue we also provide a **recap of GALE activities during the summer and early fall**, and we also share some **future plans** for the GALE SIG and hope that as many of you as possible attend the SIG meeting at JALT (Saturday at 4: 45). It is at the meeting that we will elect our officers for next year, and hear from members as to the directions we would like to see our SIG go. This year we are fortunate to have 55 minutes (better than the 25 we had last year) and thus there will be a chance for some substantial discussion.

We are fortunate to have an article by Roibeard O'Mochin (Bobby Mahon) on **Sexual Identity Politics In The Classroom** in this issue. Members may remember his article on using Bend it Like Beckham in the last newsletter.

With an earthquake(s) and typhoon(s) in the last month, not to mention all the man-made disasters around the globe, we want to wish all members a safe fall. And please remember, we would love to hear from you on the GALE email list <GALElist@yahoogroups.com>.

Best,
Steve Cornwell and Andrea Simon-Maeda

SUMMER AND FALL RECAP

There was quite a bit of activity this summer and fall with two presentations, a panel, and the co-sponsorship of a conference.

In May, Steve Cornwell presented at Kobe Jalt on the ideology of women's education in Japan. In June, Roibeard O'Mochin presented on Queer Theory Applications in the Language Classroom and then in September, Andrea Simon-Maeda and Steve Cornwell participated on a panel on Gender and Peace at the Peace as a Global Issue III conference (which GALE co-sponsored) in Kyoto.

JALT CONFERENCE

We hope to see GALE members at the JALT conference in Nara. Stop by the GALE table at the educational material exposition. The 30th Annual International JALT Conference on Language Teaching and Learning & Educational Materials Exposition will be held November 19th to 22nd, 2004 in Nara on the campus of Tezukayama University (Gakuenmae Campus). For more information, got to the JALT website at http://jalt.org/jalt2004/main/access.

Getting there
From Tsuruhashi Station on the JR Loop Line take the Kintetsu Nara Line to Gakuenmae Station (20 min.).
From the Kintetsu Namba Station take the Kintetsu Nara Line and get off at Gakuenmae Station (26 min.).

DON'T MISS THE GALE SIG ANNUAL MEETING!

Saturday, 16:45 - 17:40 in building/room16-74

Here is a listing of some of the gender-related sessions that you can see at the conference. The listings are by day and time order followed by the location (i.e. 14-B1) and the presenter and title.

Saturday:
13:15 - 15:15   14-B1   Fountaine, Donald   AIDS Awareness- A Way of Life
13:15 - 14:40   16-74   Cornwell, Steve *et al*   A look at women's education in Japan
13:45 - 14:10   16-93   Mori, Setsuko *et al*   Gender, Motivation, and Attendance among University Students

| 15:15 - 15:40 | 16-74 | Matsuoka, Rieko | Academic discourse socialization by Japanese females |
| 16:45 - 17:40 | 16-72 | Tuitama-Roberts, Odette *et al* | Being 'onna rashiku', is it a concern for female JSL learners? |

Sunday:

13:00 - 13:25	16-74	Sabatini, Yoko *et al*	Language Learning for Life: Experiences of Female Japanese Doctoral Candidates
13:30 - 14:25	16-74	Beebe, Jacqueline D.	Teaching English Through Gender-Themed Pop Music
15:00 - 15:25	16-74	Harashima, Hideto	Gender and Cultural Bias in an English Textbook
18:00 - 18:25	14-33	Rinnert, Carol	Are Gender-related Pragmatic Features at Work?

FUTURE PLANS

Look for the SIG special issue of the Language Teacher (Nov.). The GALE co-coordinators were able to conduct an interview with Aneta Pavlenko on her work with gender and bilingualism.

GALE is going to be a **co-sponsor of the 2005 Pan-SIG** conference along with the Pragmatics, Teacher Education, Teaching Children, Teaching Older Learners and Testing & Evaluation SIGs, and the West & Central Tokyo Chapters. The conference will be held **May 14 and 15, 2005 at Tokyo Keizai University** (Kokubunji Campus) 1-7 Minami-cho Kokubuunji-shi, Tokyo 185-0021, Japan. See <http://www.jalt.org/pansig/2005/> for more information.

GALE has committed to help Temple University Japan bring Cynthia Nelson to Japan in 2005 to participate in TUJ's Distinguished Lecturer Series. As soon as we know the dates, we will let you know. For those members not familiar with the series, the series is held one weekend in Tokyo and the next weekend in Osaka. The public can attend a lecture from 2-5 at no charge. For a 10,000 yen audit fee, participants can attend the entire weekend workshop (Saturday, 2-5 and 6-9; Sunday, 10-5). GALE has committed to five members attending at each venue so we hope that some of you (many of you) will take advantage of this wonderful opportunity. Cynthia Nelson is an Australian-based researcher and educator whose research interests include: sexual identities in language education; queer and poststructuralist pedagogies; writing research for performance; and ethnographic playwriting. She has written extensively on the above subjects and is serving as the guest editor for a special issue of The Journal of Language, Identity and Education on Queer inquiry in language education which will examine sexual identities within language education (or language-in-education) contexts.

SEXUAL IDENTITY POLITICS IN THE CLASSROOM: THE CASE AGAINST MONOSEXUAL PEDAGOGY
Roibeard O' Mochin

While issues of sexual identities in the classroom have gained increasing attention in recent years, they still remain both under-researched and under-theorized. On the one hand, it is clear that these issues are sometimes incorporated into classroom pedagogies. On the other hand, very little is known of what theoretical underpinnings are involved, or what the relation is to relevant publications. A survey of research into sexual identities in education reveals two principal approaches being developed by diverse authors.

The first has a focus on "inclusion" (Nelson, 1999) and seeks transformation through a politics of identity. It sees sexual identity as an inherent, stable attribute shared by a particular (minority) group e.g. "gay men" or "bisexuals." It is concerned with gaining full civil rights and social recognition for sexual minorities. Pennycook (2001, p. 142) points out the tendency here to acknowledge difference only along "static and predefined forms of differing… difference becomes reified and fixed through static definitions of Otherness."

A "politics of difference"-- which is the second principal approach being adopted by researchers of sexual identities in education--is needed to counteract this trend and more genuinely "engage with the profundity of human difference (p. 141). However, while Pennycook's contribution to theory is valuable, he leaves the pedagogical dimension unexplored. Hence, the need to fill a certain research gap and to highlight the reasons why a minoritizing approach to sexual identities in the EFL classroom is problematic. This study hopes to promote more progressive attitudes on sexual identities. It focuses on issues of theory and on issues of pedagogical application by means of

sample illustrations from a classroom context. The illustration in this case involves writing samples from students and data from an interview with the students' teacher. Data are provided here as illustrations of the type of classroom dynamic which may predominate within a politics of identity pedagogical approach. Perhaps by reviewing how a mainstream identity approach works in action in a particular pedagogical context we can better understand why it needs to be problematized. Further research is required to establish how representative these writing samples are of similar educational contexts.

Theoretical Overview

The most relevant exponent of identity politics with regard to sexualities is the "ethnic model." In an exploration of the "limits of identity," Jagose (1996, p. 61) notes the commitment of the ethnic model "to establishing gay identity as a legitimate minority group, whose official recognition would secure citizenship rights for lesbian and gay subjects." In his essay on the historical antecedents of contemporary activist homosexual movements, Seidman (1993, p. 117) adverts to the ethnic model of gay identity. "From a broadly conceived sexual and gender liberation movement, the dominant agenda of the male-dominated gay culture became community building and winning civil rights." Kulick (2000, p. 265) points out the strongly essentialist element in this model: "It seems that the politically motivated desire to envisage gays and lesbians as a "community" along quasi-ethnic lines, with its own culture and language, led many scholars to conceptualize that culture and language in an unusually reified manner."

A politics of sexual identity approach often adopts strategies of ethnic minority movements in the United States: African-Americans, Latino-Americans, Asian Americans, and so on. Lesbians and gays should begin to feel that "We are family" just

as those ethnic groups are, and this sense of community will help lead to empowerment.
Clearly, then, this type of ethnic self-characterization reflects the particular historical and
social conditions of the United States. The focus here is on inclusion. An individual
lesbian or gay person gains inclusion in the gay community by "coming out" to as many
people as possible. Then they can begin to work for recognition of gay rights and
complete legal and social inclusion of LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered)
individuals in all spheres of society. While not using the term "ethnic model" in her
article on Queer Theory in the language classroom, Nelson (1999, p. 371) does make a
contrast between a "focus on inclusion" (e.g. ethnic model) and a "focus on inquiry." The
latter turns our attention to the politics of difference. The problematizing practice "queer
theory" can be seen as an exponent of such a politics. Queer theory explores how
categories of gender, sexuality, and sexed difference are produced in discourse and how
they function in regulatory ways within cultural contexts as effects of power.
Heteronormativity is a key concept in many queer theory texts. Heteronormativity can be
seen as an on-going attempt to totalize the social field of gender and sexuality, to make it
"a seamless account of reality" (Butler, 1993, p.192). All participants in a common
symbolic order are affected by the fact that that the social world is fixed in terms of
binary sex and gender rather than in terms of multiplicity and polymorphism.

An obvious problem with a politics of sexual identity is that it may re-enforce the
"heterosexual/homosexual" dichotomy and minoritize sexual identity issues. If a study is
confined to lesbians and gays it implicitly affirms the common-sense validity of the
heterosexual/homosexual dichotomy, leaving heterosexuality as the unmarked norm from
which lesbians and gays depart. In fact, all categories of sexual identity are products of

social practice that mutually inflect with one another. Other difficulties that can be identified with a politics of identity approach can also be classified under two broad headings: philosophical/theoretical framing of the subject   and of identity, and psychoanalytical insights.

Illustrating a Politics of Sexual Identity Pedagogy

A friend and former colleague of mine, "Veronica" (pseudonym) who teaches an EFL writing/discussion class in a women's university in western Japan uses an EFL/ESL textbook that deals with "major social problems". Her class is made up of eleven students. All are nineteen or twenty year olds in their second year at university. The average language-learning level is intermediate. One ninety-minute class is spent exploring the topic in discussion. Later in the week a ninety-minute class involves writing out draft essays on the topic.

Topics as varied as, "Euthanasia", "Cloning", "Racial Discrimination", "The Declining Birth Rate in Japan" and, "The Need for Recycling" were covered over the semester (Fall 2000). The textbook often focused on legal changes; "Should gambling be banned?" "Should euthanasia be legalized?" "Should animal testing be banned?" and so on. One of the topics covered was gay marriage; "Should same-sex unions be made legal." Veronica believes that gay couples should have the right to get married and she had a positive attitude towards covering the topic in class. She brought in some newspaper articles that dealt with the legalization of gay marriages in Hawaii and in other parts of the world. She asked the students to find out more and to write about the topic of gay marriage and adoption rights. She explained that her friend –me- was researching

these issues, and obtained the relevant permission to use written samples for educational purposes.

Writing Samples

Some of the most important questions to be asked regarding the teacher's students' writings are: "What were the taken-for –granted assumptions they were working with?" "How did they frame the topic?" and, "What social changes did they envisage as desirable with regard to the topic?"

One of the assumptions of the students in this sample was that homosexuals are a rare, easily identifiable species.

"I have seen homosexual people on TV but in reality I have never seen them, and I think that there are not such people around me" (Yuko),

"Generally, there are almost all heterosexuals around us. As a matter of fact, I have only heterosexual friends and family members. I can't imagine how I would attend to them and how to take the news about their homosexuality" (Chika).

It was often assumed that homosexuals referred to males; only two of the eleven (female) students made reference to lesbians. Otherwise, males were taken as the given.

"So in loving the man of the opposite sex or the man of the same sex is a personal equation" (Azusa).

"That is, a gay man has been born to a man's body having had a woman's heart" (Kaori).

A final assumption may have been that homosexuals form a homogeneous group, which seeks the same rights of marriage and adoption as heterosexuals.

"At present same sex marriage is not recognized by the law in many countries but there are many homosexual people in the world so I think that the government should recognize same sex marriage and make a law for homosexual people. In the past, I did not understand why homosexual people demand desperately the right to marry under the law. However, now I understand the reasons" (Azusa).

Most of the students in the writing group placed the topic in two broad polarities: "Inclusion vs. Exclusion" and "Natural vs. Unnatural."

"Inclusion vs. Exclusion." Most of the students contextualized the topic as a question of overcoming discrimination and granting equal rights to a particular, stable, social grouping.

"Heterosexual people feel abnormal about homosexual. Though, homosexual people don't feel ridiculous about themselves. Homosexual people don't hurt us. So I think same-sex marriages should be recognized as legal" (Yukako).

"I think that we should recognize their marriages. This is the right of the individual. If we don't recognize it, this is discrimination. It's about time society recognized it" (Yukari).

"Natural vs. Unnatural." Most of the students in this sample contextualized these topics in terms of what is natural, understood in terms of innate or biological forces. The possibility of contesting the attribution of "Natural" or "Unnatural" was not an issue. It is also assumed that once a phenomenon or practice has earned the attribution of "Natural", then recognition of its morality and "normalness" is assured.

"Though I like men, I don't know the reason myself. Gay and lesbian couples also love naturally each other without their consciousness … So I think homosexuality is very natural and neither immoral nor abnormal" (Yukako).

"Of course I think that homosexual marriage is unnatural. There are men and women in the world and it is natural that men and women love and marry. I do not think that homosexual marriage is immoral. The partner is only the same-sex by chance. I think that if they are the best for each other it is good. Of course, they will have a lot of troubles" (Yuko).

"Homosexuals aren't crazy or sick. They were born with the wrong heart and body. That is a gay man has been born to a man's body having had a woman's heart … However, there is no change in the feeling of loving people. So in the future time Japan should become a society without the discrimination against homosexual (Kaori).

"Homosexuality is native so it is not their fault. I mean, if the mother's mental condition is continuously bad or unstable during their pregnancy, the probability for them to give birth to "gays" becomes high … To be sure "gays" is not normal. However there is no difference in loving someone … I think love is a clean and pure world" (Hiroko)

Interpretation of Writing Samples and Discussion

On the face of it, the opinions expressed here are encouraging for those who seek an end to inequitable social arrangements regarding same-sex unions. Approval for legalization of same-sex union was universal in the study group. No hostility was expressed towards homosexuals. Expressions of homophobia were hardly evident. The students' attitudes are certainly preferable to the expressions of ignorance and hostility

that have marred the educational experiences of countless LGBT students and teachers in diverse contexts. However, if we go deeper in our engagement with these issues, then the need for a more theoretically sound and a more challenging approach may become apparent. Within this framework, both teachers and students maintain a seamless logic of classifications for homosexuality. If there is love it is natural. If it is natural it should be legal i.e. certified by the legal contract of marriage. If it is legal it will be normal. Again we are dealing with dominant discourses of the "normal." Trans-cultural or trans-historical variations of what is "normal" never receive consideration.

If we consider the pedagogical value of this politics of sexual identity approach, it is clear that the learners have almost no space in which to relate the issues directly to themselves in any meaningful way. McVeigh (1997) shows that young women in tertiary-level educational institutions in Japan often experience strong social pressures to enact a version of exaggerated femininity. A future as a wife and mother is envisaged as the only legitimate narrative of self. Thus the limitations that are set in the relations to self are rarely called into question. I would argue that in this particular cultural context there is a need to problematize notions such as "femininity" and "marriage" or identity categories such as "wife" or "mother." By teasing out the constructed nature of these signifiers one does not destroy them or deny their indispensable role in social life. One may, however, provide students with the conceptual tools that help them engage with these issues in a more vital way and to script their own narratives of self.

The possibilities of a politics of identity approach for generating ideas are also quite limited. The student is either to follow the lead suggested by the textbook and teacher or adopt an overtly anti-gay stance. The unit is placed within a course plan that

has chapters on many "politically correct" issues such as gun control, cloning, animal testing, and racial harmony. The textbook may represent a type of emancipatory modernism (Pennycook, 2001, p.159). When such an approach is applied to issues of sexual minorities in the classroom it often leaves students with the impression that the central issue in question is the ability to appreciate or tolerate diversity. "Fundamental questions of identity get slotted into a framework of issues so that one week we may be dealing with "The Environment" or "Animal Rights" and another with issues of gender or sexuality." Pennycook rightly asks if such a pedagogy connects issues of gender and sexuality to the context of the class, to the lives of the students, or even to the language they are learning. It seems eminently appropriate to highlight the role of language in producing identities in face-to-face interactions in a language education context? This is preferable to leaving notions of fixed, monolithic identities uncontested.

The students in Veronica's class are, most likely, left with the impression that lesbians and gay men are eager to have their relationships sanctioned by the law. In fact, many homosexuals, and many heterosexuals, reject the notion that stable relationships require legal validation. People with such a perspective might promote a focus on inquiry into the discourse of "marriage." What does marriage signify in a particular culture? How has its meaning changed over time? Whom does it privilege, and whom does it exclude? Yes, the latter is being dealt with to some extent in the unit, but what of people who are denied marriage because of their age, because of physical or mental disability, because of religious or racial taboos, or simply because of a lack of funds? By placing the focus on the relations of power associated with how marriage is constructed in particular contexts this unit could be immensely more challenging and thought-provoking for the students.

An obvious difficulty with the teaching unit is that it inevitably frames issues in the dualistic terms of binary logic and core identities. The world remains nicely divided between men/women, heterosexual/homosexual, married/unmarried, tolerant/intolerant, and so on. A politics of sexual identity assumes that changes in the law will bring about changes in attitudes, but this is not always the case. Nor will they terminate processes of stigmatization of the "Other" as strange, unusual, or abnormal. The "Other" is constructed in terms of gender and sexuality, but also in terms of ethnicity, class, age, belief systems, and many other inter-related factors. Thus, Butler (1991, p. 14) writes of being permanently troubled by the use of identity categories. "[I] consider them to be invariable stumbling-blocks and understand them-even promote them-as sites of necessary trouble." It is these processes by which individuals are categorized and Othered that need to be called into question if lasting social transformation is to be achieved.

Evaluation of Research Issues

The provisional and small-scale nature of the data used as illustrative material in this paper sets limits on its power to convince those who see little relevance for intellectual coherence. "Why give up a politics of identity that can help secure gay rights in education?" "Why make things more complex by introducing obscure notions in a way that could weaken a sense of activism for the sake of elitist academic intellectualizing?"

The design of this study can be seen –justifiably- as unusual, or perhaps even polemical. Many will think it "queer" in another meaning for the term, that a researcher should make a critique of students who express positive attitudes towards homosexuals and the notion of same-sex unions. However, the positive aspects of this state-of-affairs were acknowledged, such as the strong sense of equality and justice being expressed.

And also, no critique is being made against the students themselves, but rather against the dominance of essentializing discourses that only provide them with one means of interpretation. The instructor in the study, Veronica, was working from a politics of identity approach. The same can also be said for her textbook, which framed issues of sexual identity in terms of rights and minority inclusion. The approach taken by Veronica and by the textbook authors is not without merits, but it also carries inherent dangers and limitations.

This paper adopts a politics of difference perspective to problematize the framing of sexual identity that was made in this particular pedagogical context. This strategy involves making a critique of some opinions expressed by the students in their essays. Some readers may find this strategy objectionable. Several points can be made in reply. Firstly human beings are social agents embedded in particular cultural contexts. We can only deal with any given topic in terms of the frames of reference and conceptual categorizations provided by our language and culture. The binary logic of "man/woman" and "heterosexual/homosexual" permeates both Japanese and Western cultures, notwithstanding particular variations or nuances. Without access to an alternative logic, such as that proposed by queer theory, it is highly unlikely that individuals can develop alternative views. Reference to excerpts from written samples here is simply a means to an end, a demonstration of the conceptual limitations involved with pedagogical applications of the ethnic model. Stated simply, a politics of identity approach in the classroom has little chance of undermining the hegemonic positions of heteronormativity and hyper-masculinity. Finding ways to free up our vocabularies of gender and sexuality (c.f. Rorty, 1993) is where the real challenge lies.

It is true that there are many different ways to use teaching materials. However, in this case, the teacher, Veronica, had limited options on how she could frame sexual identity issues. Her textbook based curriculum was already assigned and it was necessary that she implement it. Unfortunately, this is a reality for many EFL/ESL teachers in diverse educational contexts.

Secondly, the students in question may well be expressing opinions they believe their teacher wants to hear. Veronica usually adopted a "devil's advocate" approach in classroom discussions. "I wanted them to be able to give arguments to back up their opinion." She admits, though, that on the topic of legalizing same-sex unions she was "strongly in favor … this would have come out more, probably." It is possible that some students expressed the "correct" opinions for their teacher, and then reverted to normative opinions and practices in their after-school life. Thirdly, no implication is being made that Japanese students tend to be more inflexible about these issues than their counterparts in Western cultures. In this sample, explicitly homophobic attitudes are not expressed by the members of the group, and all express support – in principle- for legalizing same-sex unions. I agree with their stance on such legalization. However, as an educator who wants to provide effective conceptual tools to students, I take issue with the conceptual limitations of the pedagogical presentation involved here. It should also be acknowledged that the opinions expressed by the students in the writing samples cannot be taken as completely representative of their actual understandings of sexuality issues or of their ideological positions. The focus of this paper is on the theoretical limitations of a politics of identity approach in the classroom. The writing samples may be representative, however, of these limitations which would apply in almost any pedagogical context.

A final point is that no recommendation is being made here regarding feedback to students. If this had been my writing/discussion class I would not have made these criticisms to the students. I would not have been happy to accept the teaching position in the first place, as the textbook was mandatory and, to my mind, of limited value. If this were unavoidable, I would have sought a way to avoid teaching the topic in the context of social problems and favored a more open-ended framework of cultural inquiry, such as that suggested by Nelson (1999).

Conclusion

This paper has attempted to outline clearly the shortcomings of a politics of identity approach. It confronts issues of intellectual coherence and emphasizes the need to acknowledge the complexity of individual subjectivities and of social worlds. Its engagement with the underlying assumptions of identity politics is illustrated through reference to actual classroom contexts, materials, and products. It proposes a "politics of difference" and engaged research, instead of dominant varieties of "emancipatory modernism." (Pennycook, 2001). While such varieties may reap benefits in certain contexts, they involve reinforcing the self-limiting, essentialist discourses that leave present hegemonies unchallenged. Power works in complex, multi-faceted ways, and so the approach cannot be discredited totally. However, if it were the only approach on offer, the possibilities for lasting social transformations would be severely limited.

A poststructuralist interpretation of written samples from the study would point to the need for a more deconstructive type of inquiry. The question that remains for many educators is whether to continue perpetuating the binary logic of minoritizing views, or to

begin engaging in a politics of difference? A poststructuralist approach, such as queer

informed inquiry may provide a welcome alternative in many classroom contexts.

Promotion of a more complex understanding of sexualities and gender identities may help

to foster social practices less bound by essentialized notions, self-limiting narratives, and

power relations of inequality, and more open to the richness of human beings in all our

differences, complexities, and potentialities.

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