Paper Title: Thinking through the Classroom Interpersonal Relationships: An Analysis of Dynamic Relationships among Learners and Teachers in Japanese Language Classrooms

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Abstract
The aim of this study is to examine the dynamic nature of connections between Japanese language learners and culturally constructed artefacts (physical and symbolic tools) in Japanese language classrooms, which could influence the way in which learners engage in their learning processes in Japanese language classrooms.

According to sociocultural theory (SCT), an individual is considered an “agent-acting-with-mediational-means” (Wertsch, Tulviste, & Hagstrom 1993) due to the fact that people’s actions are mediated by culturally constructed artefacts. Wertsch (2002) describes the relationship between people and cultural artefacts (mediational means) as an “irreducible tension” because they are interdependent on each other in order for people to act in given contexts (e.g., people cannot fly without an airplane and an airplane cannot fly without people who control it). Thus, one of the essential units of analysis for understanding human thoughts and behaviour is the mediated action, which is constructed by “irreducible” relationships between people and culturally constructed artefacts they uses.
In this presentation, while adopting the above concept of SCT as the main theoretical framework, I analyse Japanese language learners’ actions in Japanese language classrooms while focusing on the relationships among learners and teachers in the classrooms. In order to collect the data for this study, I have carried out the observation of Japanese language classes and interviews with learners and teachers who have attended the classes as well as a questionnaire and self-reflective journals.

The results indicate that, among a variety of artefacts to learn Japanese language in the classrooms, one of the most important artefacts is each learner’s relationship with one’s classmates and teachers. Every learner creates and develops a dynamic interpersonal relationship with each classmate and teacher. The relationship with each classmate and teacher becomes an important “thinking device” (Lotman 1988, p.36) to control one’s Japanese language learning in the classrooms. In other words, the learners engage in their own language learning processes and control their thoughts and behavior in the classrooms through the dynamic relationships with their classmates and teachers. Thus, it would be very important for teachers to provide learners with a variety of opportunities to interact with classmates and teachers in classrooms so that learners can create and develop interpersonal relationships with them.