THE OTHER HALF: MOTIVATIONS FOR STUDYING ENGLISH AMONG BIRACIAL COLLEGE STUDENTS IN OKINAWA

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Abstract

Due to the seventy-year American military presence on Okinawa, biracial children in Okinawa of American, Okinawan and other heritage parents have grown up under unique circumstances that transcend the barriers between Okinawan, Japanese and American languages and cultures, this despite being called the dichotomous term "*hafu*" in Japanese or "half" in English. Those biracial children who have chosen to major in English are thus subject to a more seamless continuum of learning experiences than their classmates who have only studied English in formal classroom situations, do not have an English-speaking parent at home, and do not appear racially different from the general population. Primarily through the use of interviews and participant observations, this paper is a critical examination of how biracial college students in Okinawa come to choose English as their major and how their formal and informal experiences with the English language have colored their learning of that language and their identity.

1 Introduction

The lights have dimmed in the university classroom where around one hundred people have gathered to watch the Okinawan premier of the documentary *Hafu* being screened on my campus by an English teacher in Okinawa who is the mother of biracial children. It is a lively public event with some comments made prior to the film by one of the biracial Japanese featured in the film followed by a formal discussion in the lobby that eventually moved to a local pub to end the festivities. I have been looking forward to this event for some time now as a public acknowledgment of the difficulties facing biracial Japanese and how they have or have not been able to cope. I was grateful to the participants for their candid on screen discussions of bullying, searching for identities, language use, problems in finding schools, and other issues biracial young people face in Japan, and for having done so in a format that can be easily presented to the broader public. But I left with a feeling that these family and individual stories from mainland Japan differed from our experiences in Okinawa. Chatting with people after the event, my impression that biracials in Okinawa had different stories to tell was seconded by the organizer. Two years later, and with the assistance of some biracial English majors in Okinawa, I am attempting to begin telling something of their stories.

The education of biracial children is part of a new paradigm in the study of Japan, one with the potential to influence classroom practices, family lives, workplaces and the communities in which biracials live. Once the academic community debunked the modern myths of Japan

as a country with a homogeneous culture (Weiner, 1996) and a single language (Noguchi & Fotos, 2001), it became more possible to view Japan as a transcultural society (Willis & Murphey-Shigematsu, (2008) and attention began to be given to the implications of this new paradigm for the education of members of less dominant cultures in Japan such as ethnic Koreans, Chinese, Burakumin and Ainu (Tsuneyoshi, Okano & Boocock, 2011; Lee, Murphey-Shigematsu & Befu, 2006). As Okinawa has one of the largest and most distinct cultures in Japan, research on education in Okinawa is a part of this new focus (Noiri, 2011) as is the intersection between English language learning and the American bases in Okinawa (Shibata, 2013). The study of how notions of race and purity impact the lives of biracials in Japan (Fish, 2008), research on the bilinguality of biracial students in Japan (Noguchi, 2001) and research that makes reference to the importance of English in identity formation of biracial girls in Japan (Kamada, 2010) were also natural outgrowths of this new paradigm. The plight of biracial children in Japan has also become more widely acknowledged outside of academia with the release of the aforementioned documentary *Hafu*, the growth of social media and various YouTube interviews with these people. Having raised my own biracial children in Okinawa and taught English to biracial students there, I have both personal and professional interest in exploring examples of how and why English is acquired by biracial students in what is increasing becoming accepted within academia as a multilingual, multicultural, multiethnic, and multiracial Japan. With its large concentration of biracial English speaking students and distinct culture within Japan, Okinawa provides locations for valuable case studies of diversity within Japan that have broader implications for students living in similar circumstances. The unique family lives, educational experiences, work experiences, youth culture and identities of these students in Okinawa demonstrate how their seamless continuum of English learning experiences transcend distinctions between formal and informal learning, between first, second and foreign language learning, and between what Pennycook (2007) describes as the distinction between competency and performance.

The analysis of the intersections between race, gender and identity in language learning that was engendered by the publication of a collection of articles edited by Curtis and Romney (2006) and a volume of *TESOL Quarterly* on the topic in 2006 has forced the field of English language teaching to more closely consider how race impacts both language teachers and students (Kubota & Lin, 2009 p. 1). The decision to focus in this article on race as the defining characteristic of the group in question is due to the fact that race is closely connected with Japanese and Okinawan perspectives on linguistic ability, ethnicity and nationality, and these societies perceive these students primarily based on their biracial appearance without reference to their individual identities and linguistic abilities. This can be seen in the term most widely used to label them today in Japan, “half”. Not fitting into traditional or mainstream Japanese perspectives of what it means to be Japanese or a foreigner, Japanese have devised a separate category for biracials that is based purely on their appearance and derived from Western notions of race created prior to scientific studies of DNA that have since debunked those notions. While many of them share common experiences, their stories are so diverse that being biracial is the only single trait that they all share, and most initial discrimination they face is because of their race, not their linguistic skills, identities or cultural knowledge. This article is an attempt to examine what is perceived in Japan as their other half, their foreign half and their English half in order to better understand the motivations this particular group of students have for choosing English, how they acquire English and how they construct their identities.

2 Research Methodology

The research for the paper is based in large part on ethnographic interviews with biracial students majoring in English in a college in Okinawa (Spradley, 1979). It also derives from participant observations of more than twenty years of teaching English to increasing numbers of biracial English majors in colleges in Okinawa and raising two biracial children there (Spradley, 1980). The results are presented in an ethnography of the participants and their community.

2. 1 Participants

Nearly all of the approximately twenty participants in this study were my current or former students and majoring in English. In some cases, the students were also members of my advisee group in which case, a participant's academic plans, financial situation, personal problems and family life have at times been topics of discussion that have added to my understanding of their individual lives. Most of the students would be considered and generally referred to as "half" in Okinawan society as one parent is Okinawan and the other is a foreigner and their physical features cause them to be noticed as such. This means that none of the participants were half Okinawan and half Chinese or half Korean as these students would generally "pass" and thus not be noticed as different. Two of the students would be considered "quarter" in that one parent is "half" and the other Okinawan. One was described by another participant as "only one eight" Okinawan as one of her grandparents was "half" and the rest foreign. While a small number of the participants have lived abroad, most were born and raised primarily in Okinawa. Two colleagues who have taught English to the same cohort of students were also interviewed regarding their impressions of the motivations and abilities that these students bring to their studies.

2. 2 Data collection and presentation

Because of the power imbalance inherent in the student/teacher relationship and the need to create an atmosphere of trust, I began by first explaining to potential participants that my interest in the topic was in part because my own children, though also biracial and also having grown up in Okinawa, had decided to not major in English in college. By identifying myself as a member of this community in Okinawa, it was hoped that participants might also view me as a member rather than an interloper, and be more forthcoming with information as a result. I also stressed at the first approach to potential participants that their names and personal information would not be divulged in any report. Finally, I also attempted to contribute to an atmosphere of trust by not recording or taking any notes during the interviews. As the biracial students in this English department all tend to know each other, word spread that I was carrying out this research, so when asked if they wanted to participate, some had already heard of the project and one participant came on their own with an offer to participate. While no student refused to participate, a small number who initially agreed to do so seemed uncomfortable discussing the issues, an indication that they may have only agreed to participate because of the difficulty of refusing a teacher's request. In these cases, the student was thanked for their assistance and the interview ended as soon as I noticed their reluctance.

No formal interview schedule was prepared for this research. Rather, I began with open-ended questions such as asking the participants why they chose to major in English. For some students, this was sufficient for them to begin to go into some detail as to both what influenced them to make that choice and how they had learned English up to that point. The most common response to my question was that they choose to major in English because they were good at it or they felt they needed to improve their English. For some participants, however, their unique English skills or need to improve them has been such an important aspect of their socialization in Okinawa that the decision to choose English does not need to be explained as it seems to them to be quite natural. This made it difficult for those students to initially understand the intent of the research. For those students who needed further prompting, I explained that they could have chosen other majors, but chose English. I also prompted them by asking for example if they had chosen English to help them get a job after graduation, because of family reasons or for other reasons.

The interviews were conducted both in English and Japanese depending on the English ability of the participant, their preferred language and the difficulty of the issue being discussed. The length of the interviews varied considerably as some students had little to say on the issue or seemed uninterested in discussing it while in other cases the discussion was quite animated and took as long as thirty minutes. One participant is a regular visitor to my office, at times staying for up to thirty minutes where discussions regarding her/his English studies, plans to visit family in America and study or live there, home life in Okinawa, ongoing relationship with a foreigner and other problems have taken place over the last two years. The interviews took place in a variety of settings including classrooms, hallways, open areas, a university seminar house located in a rural area of Okinawa and occasionally in my office over lunch. The relaxed nature of some of the interviews can be seen in the fact that some participants offered to discuss their motivations for choosing to study English in the presence of their friends, commenting that their friends already knew about their lives and their choices. There were also instances, however, of students approaching me when I was alone to discuss sensitive issues, especially family related problems.

Mental notes were made during the discussions and then written down following the discussion. In the case of some participants who spoke in detail about their motivations or seemed especially willing to participate, I revisited them to confirm what they had said or ask additional questions. After conducting approximately half of the intended number of interviews, I began to write up the findings of the initial interviews as well as background information on Okinawa and the place that biracial children hold in that society and culture. This process led to new questions and the reforming or rephrasing of questions that were in turn asked of new participants and participants that I was able to approach a second or third time.

The paper that follows is an ethnography of the participant group and the physical, cultural and linguistic environment in which they live. The environments presented in the discussion are divided into four locales: families, schools, workplaces and the American Village in Chatan Town. These are all locations where the participants have acquired English and the motivation to continue their studies by majoring in English. Each locale begins with a Weberian ideal typical model of a biracial English major constructed from the responses of several participants that serves to demonstrate how the motivation to study English and how the learning and practice of English is realized in each locale. Prior to this location-based

discussion, the circumstances biracial children face in mainland Japan and in Okinawa are separately described.

3 Biracials in mainland Japan: The nail that sticks up

Japanese society presented a less than welcoming reception to the biracial children born in Japan after the end of World War II. Many of these children were fathered by American servicemen who were stationed in Japan and Okinawa during the American occupation that followed that war. The mothers were often perceived by both Japanese and American authorities in Japan to be prostitutes or of low moral character and the children were discriminated against. Despite Japan's defeat in the war and the efforts of occupation authorities to make Japan more democratic and respectful of human rights, notions of the purity of the Japanese race, inculcated through the pre-war militaristic and nationalistic educational system were still deeply ingrained in the general populace in Japan. Inculcated from an early age with the myth of Japan as a homogeneous culture of a single race (*tan'itsu minzoku*) and the value of that type of society over less homogeneous cultures, difference was perceived as a negative trait, a feature of Japanese society often exemplified by the expression "the nail that sticks up gets hammered down" (*deru kui wa utareru*), and biracial children suffered as a result.

For forty years until 1985, the problem was compounded by Japanese law that did not allow children to gain citizenship and other rights in Japan unless their father was a Japanese citizen, a situation that resulted in biracial children being left stateless if abandoned by their foreign fathers. Additionally, at the same time Japanese were liberalizing their society under American tutelage by for example granting universal suffrage to Japanese women, they were also copying many American stereotypes of the postwar era that encouraged discrimination against mixed race children and especially against Blacks. As a result, biracial children of black foreigners suffered even more in Japan than lighter skinned biracial children (Murphey-Shigmatsu, 1986 pp. 5-10). An Okinawan example of this can be seen in the novel *Children of mixed blood* (See Molasky, 1999 pp. 65-69). American law also created barriers for these children to gain basic human rights. American servicemen who wished to bring their Japanese "war brides" back to the U.S. were prohibited by law from doing so until 1952 (Murphey-Shigmatsu, 1986 pp. 5-10). In addition, laws against mixed race marriage in some states in the U.S. meant that even if a war bride were allowed to immigrate there, the couple and their children would not be able to freely choose where to live. This all combined to create an environment that made life difficult for biracial children regardless of whether the lived in Japan of the U.S., difficulties that were manifested in Japan in both discrimination from society at large as well as bullying from their cohorts at schools.

Discrimination against biracials in Japan can be seen in the terminology used to label them over time. Ranging on a rough scale from the oldest to the most recent and from the most pejorative to the neutral or positive, the following terms used in Japan to label these students have changed over time with the oldest being the most negative and the more recent carrying more neutral or positive connotations: *zashu* (mongrel), *konketsu* (mixed blood), *aiko* (child between), Amerajian (Amerasian[1], a child of an American military personnel and an Asian

[1] "Amerasian" is a term coined by Pearl Buck (1892-1973) to refer to a child of an American military personnel and an Asian woman. It served many of the same purposes in the American Empire that "Eurasian" did in the British Empire except that the implication for Amerasian is that the father of the child is a member of

woman), *hafu* (half or more recently halfie) and *dabulu* (double) a recently coined word meant to be more positive by implying having twice as much to draw on as a result of birth rather than only half. In many cases, biracial children are also identifiable as such by their names, leading to discrimination even before they are seen. Parents of biracial children often give their children foreign sounding names that can be easily pronounced in two languages such as Karen, Angela or Emily in the case of English names for girls. These names are also often written in the Japanese *katakana* writing system rather than the normal practice of writing names in Chinese characters or *hiragana*. As a result of this, these children are easily identified as biracial by other Japanese, especially when the family name is non-Japanese.

Over time, however, some of these negative associations has been replaced by more positive perspectives associated with some phenotypic traits such as light skin and hair color, slim features and eye shape and with the assumption that these children have obtained fluency in English as a result of their parentage. As some biracial children in Japan have gained national attention as fashion models, entertainers and athletes and English ability has becoming increasingly valued for its cultural capital, being “half” has come to be seen by some Japanese, especially the young, as positive. Despite this progress, nationality and ethnicity is still equated with race in Japan and discrimination and prejudice based on race continue to cause problems for biracial children. An example of this can be seen in the mixed Japanese public reaction when Ariana Miyamoto, a biracial child of a Japanese mother and an African American father, was chosen Miss Universe Japan in 2015 with critics complaining that she was not Japanese enough (Wingfield-Hayes, 2015).

4 Okinawa: Diversity within supposed homogeneity

While biracial Okinawan children share much in common with their counterparts in mainland Japan, especially those who live in the vicinity of American bases there or whose foreign parent is associated with the U.S. military, there are nonetheless several features of Okinawa that make it a unique case study within Japan in how they approach the study of English and form their identity. Although not limited to the influence of the American military bases in Okinawa, and to the unique languages and cultures found in Okinawa, it is around these two factors that one can most easily appreciate how the lived experiences of Okinawan biracial children and their study of English differ from that of their counterparts in other parts of Japan. These two factors are best understood from an analysis of the history of interaction between Okinawans and Americans, the people of mainland Japan and other peoples in Asia that engendered these factors. In more recent years, the growth of English as cultural capital and the development of Okinawa as a tourist destination have added to the motivation to acquire English in Okinawa.

Okinawa is located in the Ryukyu Archipelago that runs to the southwest from Kyushu in southern Japan to Taiwan. This location has placed the people there within easy reach of neighboring countries resulting in trade and diplomatic relations with Yamato [2] Japan,

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the military. With the establishment of the AmerAsian School in Okinawa 1998, this term came back into use in Okinawa as an alternative to “half” but is not widely used.

[2] Yamato (大和) is used here to refer to the dominant culture and people of mainland Japan as seen from an Okinawan perspective. Some Okinawans see Japanese as a people (*Yamatonchu*) who have a distinct culture

Imperial China and various people on the Korean Peninsula and in Southeast Asia. The impact of this interaction on the indigenous Ryukyuan cultures was immense, touching the lives of political elites, traders, farmers and craftsmen and creating a hybrid culture that adapted elements introduced from all these countries and is still extant today. Even the word used to describe that hybrid culture in the Okinawan language today, *chanpuru* meaning "mixed", is itself a term borrowed from Southeast Asia. With the establishment of formal tributary relations between the Ryukyu Kingdom and the Ming Dynasty in China, trade relationships flourished and let to an unprecedented period of economic, political and cultural development in the kingdom, this at a time when Japan had entered a period of self-imposed isolation. The value of the Ryukyu/China trade and fears of encroachment by Western imperial powers from the south caused the Yamato powers in mainland Japan to allow the Satsuma Domain of Kyushu to invade the Ryukyu Kingdom in 1609 and take control of the China trade while leaving the Ryukyuans to maintain the necessary fiction of independence. (Kerr, 1958)

Official American relations with Okinawa began with the arrival of a flotilla of U.S. military vessels commanded by Commodore Mathew Perry (1794-1858) in 1853 on his way to force open relations with the Tokugawa Shogunate that controlled Yamato Japan from their capital in present day Tokyo. Not knowing that the Ryukyu Kingdom was already under the nominal control of the Satsuma Domain, Perry insisted on an audience with the Ryukyu King in order to establish diplomatic relations with the Ryukyu Kingdom and a coaling station for U.S. Navy vessels. Told by the Satsuma leaders to maintain the fiction of independence in order to allow Satsuma's continued access to the lucrative Ryukyu/China trade, the Kingdom's leaders tried to be as noncommittal as possible without upsetting Perry. Following Perry's forced ending of Yamato Japan's isolation and the Meiji Restoration (1868), all fictions of an independent Ryukyu Kingdom were ended with the forced abdication of the Ryukyu King and the establishment of Okinawa Prefecture as a part of Japan in1879. (Kerr, 1958) This did not however result in the erasing of differences between Yamato Japan and Okinawa as the different languages, cultures and identities of the Okinawan people survived to some extent despite the efforts of the Meiji and following Japanese governments to assimilate what they viewed as a backward region (Rabson, 1999).

Japanese control of Okinawa ended during the Battle of Okinawa in 1945 when the American military occupied the islands of Okinawa Prefecture in a battle that resulted in the deaths of one quarter of the civilian population, some inflicted by the Americans and some by the Japanese. The island's infrastructure and economy were also decimated. Taught by the Japanese authorities that they would be raped and killed by Americans, Okinawans were left in a quandary when the behavior of the American forces proved at first to be more benign than the Japanese propaganda had indicated it would be and then again when the postwar Japanese leadership allowed the U.S. to continue to occupy and control Okinawa under a U.S. military government. While a popular social and political movement to rejoin Japan resulted in reversion to Japanese sovereignty in 1972, the rejoicing quickly turned to disappointment as it became apparent that Okinawa would continue to host the majority of American military bases in Japan. Historically torn between their relationships with China and Yamato Japan, Okinawans in the postwar era became Japanese and American pawns in the Cold War and

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from their own people (*Uchinanchu*) and who speak a language referred to as "*Yamatoguchi"* in the dominant indigenous Okinawan language (*Uchinaguchi*).

have continued to be so to this day as both Japanese and American leaders play up the threat of China and North Korean to justify the continued American military presence and all its attendant land use, crime, environmental problems and stifling of local economic development (Johnson, 1999; Yoshida, 2001).

This is not to say that Okinawans were or are all opposed to the presence of the Americans on their islands. Following the end of the war, the American military government provided food, housing and medical aid to Okinawan refugees, built bases, roads and harbors and encouraged the development of schools, libraries and cultural centers. They also instituted the teaching of English beginning in primary schools, established an English language training center in Okinawa and created a special category in the Fulbright Program to send Okinawans to study at colleges and universities in the United States (Shimoji, 2001; Latona, 1993; GARIOA Fulbright Okinawa Alumni Association, 1987). The result was that many of the political, economic and academic leaders of Okinawa from the 1950s through the 1990s were American trained and sympathetic to American influence in Okinawa. Tens of thousands of Okinawans were also able to find work on the expanding American bases that were directly involved in supporting the wars in Korea and Vietnam, this at a time when Japanese investment in Okinawa was minimal and there were few jobs. English had become important cultural capital for Okinawans seeking work, whether as laborers on base or as elites after returning with American graduate degrees. Ordered by Japanese authorities before the war to abandon Okinawan languages in favor of standard Japanese, many acquired standard Japanese but maintained their proficiency in local languages and then became trilingual as American "base English" became the dominant language for work in the American military dominated Okinawan economy. To a greater extent than any other area of Japan, multilingualism became common in Okinawa and "foreign" came to mean American. Even today in Okinawa, "*amerikaa*" means foreigner.

Okinawan women who married American servicemen at this time could experience an immediate jump in their quality of life. The bases were awash with goods and services unavailable to local people. Whether married to American servicemen or not, however, Okinawan women who associated with these Americans could also face prejudice and discrimination. Termed "honeys" by the local population, these women were at times ostracized by their families and communities, a stigma that sometimes resulted in their feeling the need to leave Okinawa for America. The biracial children of these encounters had a difficult time due to anti base sentiment, the behavior of American servicemen off base, high rates of divorce, absent fathers, financial difficulties and the negative reactions of Okinawan families and society to these failed international relationships and the resultant children. In schools, these difficulties have continued to be most commonly manifested in bullying by classmates.

Disappointment with the actions of the Japanese and American governments since reversion to Japan in 1972 and a renaissance of Okinawan culture and pride in Okinawa uniqueness have resulted in the development of an Okinawan identity that is for some quite distinct from and in opposition to Japan. Many Okinawans today view themselves as more cosmopolitan and open-minded than mainland Japanese because of the history of Okinawan interaction with other cultures, the large number of foreigners living in Okinawa, the many Okinawans involved in international marriages, the large Okinawan diaspora and the resulting number of Okinawans who have foreign friends and coworkers as well as relatives who reside abroad.

Some Okinawans are adamant about describing themselves as Okinawan (*Okinawajin*) not Japanese (*Nihonjin*) and no more so than when they use an Okinawan language to describe their identity as Okinawan ("*Uchinanchu*" in the case of the main indigenous language in the southern part of the main island of Okinawa). Among the younger generation, the majority of whom are not proficient in a local indigenous language, the use of *Uchina-Yamatoguchi*, the Okinawanized version of standard Japanese, is a clear linguistic manifestation of that identity. Because of this notion of an identity built on difference, uniqueness and acceptance of cultural influences from outside Okinawa, the idea of an international marriage can be received more favorably in some Okinawa families than in the past.

The current Okinawan term for an Okinawan woman with an American military boyfriend is *amejo*, a pejorative term meaning "hungry for Americans" or "lover of Americans", but the younger generation of Okinawan women, and especially English majors, do not all view these women with the same disdain that the older generations do (Arakaki, 2013). In some parts of Okinawa, it is common to grow up surrounded by American military personnel and their families, and some young women are attracted to American men because they are thought to be more mature and gentlemanlike than Okinawan men, because relationships with them push the boundaries of societal acceptability and because they are native speakers of English. At the same time, the continued American military presence, the litany of sexual and other crimes committed by American service personnel in Okinawa, the high divorce rate among marriages between Okinawans and American service personnel and the number of biracial children abandoned by American fathers perpetuate the negative views that Okinawans have of relationships between Okinawan women and American service personnel and the resulting offspring.

The most common pattern in these relationships is for the mother to be Okinawan and the father to be American. Although most international marriages in Japan are between a Japanese woman and a foreign man, the pattern appears to be even more common when American military personnel are involved. Indeed, all of the participants in this study who had a parent who had been in the American military fell into this category of having a foreign father and an Okinawan mother. Similarly, although divorce is more common among international marriages in Japan, it appears to be even higher among marriages between American military personnel and Japanese. One participant with extensive contacts among the Amerasian community in Okinawa commented that members of the biracial community believe that divorce is especially common when the father in an African American serviceman.

Although biracial children in Okinawa face prejudice and discrimination, they are nonetheless able to craft their identity from amongst multiple languages and cultures including Japanese, American and Okinawan. The cultural mosaic becomes even richer when we recognize that the percentage of American minorities serving in the American military is larger than their percentage of the total American population which means that it is common to find biracial children in Okinawa whose foreign parents are members of Black, Hispanic, Filipino and other American minority groups. In addition, immigrants from India and the Philippines followed the U.S. military to Okinawa immediately after the end of World War II and members of the Okinawan diaspora community have also returned to Okinawa in recent years and added to the linguistic and cultural landscape (Ueunten, 2009; Nakasone, 2002). Okinawan biracial children also draw from these linguistic and cultural communities in

constructing their identities. Finally, increasing numbers of immigrants have also chosen to live in Okinawa due to the mild climate and friendly image that Okinawa works hard to project. The children of these non-military related families are also found choosing English as their major in college and bringing their own unique motivations and skills to English language classrooms.

5 Discussion: Seamlessly acquiring English and constructing identities in multiple locales

It is the middle of my Oral Communications class and Michelle, one of my biracial students, is busy texting someone, a habit I generally try to discourage in class. In this case, however, I know that she has been having some problems with her American military boyfriend and that he can't read Japanese, so she might be writing to him in English which could make this act of texting her most meaningful and authentic communication in English in today's class. Then again, it could also be a text message to her grandmother in America who has been trying to help Michelle repair her relationship with Michelle's absent father. It could also be a text regarding her part time job on base or just a friend who want to get together at the beach after school. I then ask myself if this is part of her formal or informal acquisition of English, or if I want to police her behavior, but can't come up with an answer and go back to what I was doing with other students. From home to school, workplaces and the wider community they run in, biracial English majors in Okinawa are seamlessly acquiring English in a continuum that blurs the distinctions between formal and informal settings, between learning English as a first, second or foreign language and between native and non-native competencies. It may also reverse or even transcend the distinction between competency and performance. In order to demonstrate how this seamless acquisition of English occurs, and how the above distinctions mask the complexity found in individual lives, I have presented my discussion in four physical settings that have significant and differing impacts on their acquisition of English, their motivation to study it and their construction of their identities.

The character Michelle described above is not a single individual student, but a pastiche, a Weberian ideal model created from the lived experiences of multiple participants. It is designed to preserve the anonymity of those participants while simultaneously illustrating examples of how biracial students in Okinawa are motivated to major in English and how they go about acquiring the language. A similarly constructed ideal model has been created for each of the four settings described in this section in order to demonstrate how each setting contributes to their acquisition of English, their motivation to study and their constructions of their identities. By examining separate locales labeled families, schools, workplaces and a popular hangout called the American Village, we can see how the lines between formal and informal learning are variously blurred in different locales, how their motivations and identities are multiple and changing based on varied settings and how assumptions regarding biracial students in Okinawa need to be reconsidered.

5.1 Families: "You all speak English at home, right?"

Having had Joan in more than one class and as a member of my adviser group, I was not surprised or too worried when she disappeared for two weeks in a row, not surprised because I was well aware of her family problems and not too worried because her English was good enough to make up any work she would miss. Joan was often called on to help when her

brother went off the rails, and I later learned that in this instance his problems had again landed him in Japanese court. Her brother had only attended English medium of instruction (EMI) schools in Okinawa and was not always able to follow the court proceedings in Japanese or read the documentation related to it, so Joan had spent the last two weeks in and out of court and the offices of the family lawyer. While their mother and father could each communicate in their own language with their son, Joan was the only one who could bridge both linguistic worlds, and the son had worn down the parents to the point that their communication with him often degenerated into verbal battles. Although Joan had her own problems, they paled in comparison to her brother's. Although both were biracial children born and raised in the same family in Okinawa, one was a bilingual who was poised to graduate from college and able to function in Okinawan society while the other was a troubled monolingual who might never be able to do so.

The home lives of the participants of this study are extremely diverse in terms of the amount and types of English learned. Although the interviews revealed some details of their private family lives, I choose to not directly ask about this in order to avoid addressing sensitive family issues and to focus on individual stories rather than make generalizations about this group. This has made it difficult to draw direct quantitative correlations regarding how the degree to which specific aspects of family life, such as for example the child's birth order, the types of schools attended, the presence of a foreign parent in their home or not and the Japanese or English skills of that parent, might have or not have a direct relationship to the participants' decisions to choose English as their major in college and their proficiency in each language. Nonetheless, when asked their reasons for choosing English, it quickly became apparent that the family situations of the participants were important considerations in their decision to choose English.

The influence of family can be seen as falling into two categories, the first being the desire to communicate with English speaking family members and the second being the formal and informal training in English that they received as a result of having grown up in a family where English is used. The desire to communicate with family members was most commonly expressed with regard to the desire to communicate with overseas relatives with whom they have interacted, either in Okinawa or abroad, or wished to have more interaction with. The participants noted that parents, grandparents, uncles, aunts and cousins who live overseas do not usually speak Japanese, so they felt the need to take on the responsibility to obtain the linguistic skills needed to communicate. In this regard, they have direct experiences in the value of English as a language of wider communication. The desire to communicate with siblings in Okinawa was not an issue for most of the participants as Japanese is generally the preferred language in these cases, but one participant needed English to communicate with a sibling who had attended only EMI schools. Another notable exception to this was an expressed need to use English to communicate with half brothers and sisters, that is children to whom they are related as a result of divorce and remarriage of a parent and who have not grown up in English speaking families. The participants also rarely mentioned their desire to improve their English in order to communicate with their English-speaking parent unless that parent lived abroad. Their reasons for this were the Japanese fluency of that parent, poor relations with that parent, and having acquired sufficient skills to communicate with that parent as a result of having grown up with them. The desire to communicate with members of an extended family living abroad, however, was often mentioned as a prime motivation. There were even cases where having only one English speaking foreign grandparent (these

children are called "quarter" rather than "half") was enough to motivate a student to pursue English.

In both Japanese and Okinawan societies, the assumption that there are direct correlations between race and language means that biracial students with a foreign parent from an English speaking country are assumed to be bilingual in English and Japanese. For young people and others without formal understanding of second language acquisition and degrees and types of bilingualism, these assumptions are reinforced by what they see and hear of spoken communication. Just as race, accent and national origin have long been assumed to be determinants of one's status as a native or non-native speaker (Brutt-Griffler & Samimy, 1999 pp. 415-416; Amin, 1999 pp. 94-95), it is on these same assumptions that non-experts base their assumptions regarding correlations between biracialism and bilingualism in Okinawa. The linguistic home-life of biracial children in Okinawa and their English and Japanese proficiency is however extremely varied. When the English-speaking parent no longer resides in Okinawa, there can be no English spoken at home, and when the reasons for this are related to divorce or abandonment, there can be a decided effort to exclude English from the home and little or no interaction with relatives abroad. At the other end of this continuum were participants who acquired English before Japanese, had regular and frequent contact with overseas family members and lived in families where both parents were bilingual and both formal and informal acquisition of English took place in the home. One participant described in detail how his father forced him to study English formally at home because that father had seen many Okinawan biracial children around him that were monolingual Japanese and wanted to ensure that his own child grew up bilingual. These formal lessons included reading and writing exercises that had to be completed before he would be allowed to play. Other participants spoke of watching English language television programs such as Sesame Street and DVDs with family for entertainment, the reading of bedtime stories in English, doing English homework or homework in English, listening to English musical artists and other activities that would commonly be found in families in English speaking countries.

The variety of English abilities found among the participants indicates that the societal assumption that they are all proficient in English because of their parentage and home life is problematic. Some biracial students who have acquired English at home have high English listening and speaking proficiency but no stronger or even worse reading and writing abilities than their classmates who have learned English primarily in formal classroom settings. Having learned more English informally as a first or second language at home than in more formal settings as a foreign language in school, these students can be at a loss when it comes to formal testing of specific items that they may be able to understand or use but not explain. Putting aside the problematic nature of binary distinctions between native and non-native speakers, some biracial students in Okinawa have what, for lack of a better term, might be called a "native intuition" in that they can guess correct answers on tests with greater reliability than their monolingual classmates, but are not sure as to why the answer might be correct. There are also biracial students whose English skills, including speaking or listening, are no better than their mono-racial classmates but have chosen to major in English due to a strong motivation to improve those skills that comes from their family situations.

Families also play an important role in choosing a student's major in college. Japanese students who wish to enter college must apply to specific departments with the result that they must choose a preferred college major while still in secondary school. Because of their young

age, it is common for parents, siblings and members of the extended family to weigh in with advice. In the last fifteen years, at least four families have sent more than one of their biracial children to study English at the university where I am currently working with one family sending all three of their biracial children to study there. Indeed, seeing multiple biracial children from the same family choosing to major in English was one my motivations to explore this subject.

Families of biracial children provide both multiple motivations for choosing to study English as well as multiple opportunities to improve their skills in settings that blur the distinction between formal and informal learning. At the same time, it would be a mistake to overgeneralize and assume that being biracial in Okinawa means being bilingual. The main home language is in many cases Japanese due to the Japanese proficiency of the foreign parent, the absence of that parent from the home and the simple fact that they are living in Japan. It is also problematic to assume that all children in the same biracial family have the same linguistic experiences and abilities. As will be shown in the following section, this is due in part to the fact that not all biracial children in Okinawa attend the same schools or have the same English learning experiences in school.

5.2 Schools: Alternative English classrooms and playgrounds in Okinawa

English always seemed to come easy to William, and he was encouraged by his high school teachers and guidance counselors to take advantage of his English skills when applying for college. Because he had grown up speaking English with his father, attended an EMI school for his three years of junior high school in Okinawa and lived in the U.S. for a year with his aunt, he was confident that he could pass the English exam at most of the local colleges in Okinawa. What worried him however was the Japanese (*kokugo*) exam that was also required for the written university entrance exam. Ever since hearing the word "semilingual" and having it explained to him, he had a sinking feeling that it might apply to him. Speaking with family, friends and teachers in Japanese was one thing, but the written word was never his strong point in either language. With good advice from his teachers, he won early admission to a local English department based on above average grades and a brilliant interview in both languages. He tested into advanced English classes in his first year and all was going well until the end of his second year when his dream of becoming an English teacher began to fade as he came to realize that he would never be able to teach English as foreign language because he had not learned it as such.

The participants in the study have studied at a wide variety of educational institutions prior to choosing to major in English, and in many cases, these educational choices have influenced their decisions to major in English, either by allowing them to improve their English and construct positive identities or denying them the chance to do so. While all of the participants studied in Japanese public schools at one point or another, many have also attended EMI schools in Okinawa or schools where English was a subject more strongly emphasized than in Japanese public schools. In addition, a smaller number have also attended schools in English speaking countries, primarily in the United States. The choice of primary and secondary schools, being generally out of the hands of the students themselves, again indicates that families have an important impact on the decision to pursue English study.

The alternatives to Japanese public schools that biracial children attend in Okinawa include Department of Defense Dependency Schools (DODDS) located on U.S. military bases, a wide variety of international schools, and the AmerAsian School in Okinawa. DODDS schools are found in many countries that host American military bases and follow an American curriculum with only minimal attention to the local language and culture of the country in which they are located. As the name implies, DODDS schools are for children of American military members, but they are not accessible to all children born to American service personnel. The international schools located in Okinawa vary in size and purpose (Kohatsu, 2005), ranging from expensive K-12 programs offering the International Baccalaureate (IB) to Christian oriented schools that may only offer preschool and primary school and smaller free schools. Many of the Christian schools were initially established to provide the parochial education desired by American military families that DODDS schools were unable to offer due to American constitutional constraints. Some, however, have since grown in size as local Okinawan and mainland Japanese families have also sent their children there to take advantage of the EMI they provide. These international and Christian schools have also provided a private English language learning environment for biracial students who are unable to attend DODDS schools, have been pushed out of public schools due to bullying or have been drawn to these schools because of the lack of bilingual and bicultural offerings in the public schools. The AmerAsian School in Okinawa was established in 1998 by a group of Okinawan mothers of Amerasian children as a non-profit free school. After failing in their efforts to gain free access to DODDS schools for their children and convince the local public schools to offer a bilingual and bicultural curriculum which would allow these students to develop more positive identities, these mothers decided to establish their own school (Noiri, 2011 pp. 92-93). Once Okinawan residents have graduated from secondary school, they are also eligible to apply to study at American universities located on American bases in Okinawa. Some Christian churches and missionaries in Okinawa also offer free English lessons to the local community. Although none of the schools in Okinawa are ideal for the language learning and other needs of biracial students, considerable choice does exist.

The act of bringing biracial Okinawan students, American military dependents and other students together in this wide variety of formal EMI learning environments in Okinawa has created an educational subculture within Japan where English proficiency can be improved. At the same time, more informal settings in these schools, such as playgrounds and lunchrooms, and informal gatherings of classmates from these school in the local community also provide opportunities to learn and practice English in ways that blur the distinctions between formal and informal learning. When combined, these formal and informal settings in this unique linguistic and educational subculture have also created an environment where being biracial is not always perceived as a negative characteristic and students are more likely to develop what Kamada (2010) terms “hybrid identities”, positive identities that biracial children can construct for themselves from their unique cultural and linguistic capital in opposition to societal discourses that have tended to marginalize them.

As mentioned above, Japanese students choose a preferred college major while still in secondary school. Senior high schools in Japan thus give considerable attention to assisting their students in finding appropriate places to continue their education. More than one participant mentioned that one of the reasons they chose to major in English was because they were advised by school guidance counselors to do so. Admission to any university is considered a success for the student, their high school and the family. There is a tendency for

biracial students who excel at English and can score well on English tests to use that to their advantage when preparing for tests and choosing a major. For those who have attended EMI schools, English comes easy but passing scores in other test subjects can require more than a basic knowledge of Japanese. For those biracials who lack of confidence in their Japanese (*kokugo*) ability, strong English scores can be seen as their best chance of success. Students who have some proficiency in English and any motivation to study it would naturally be encouraged to use this in order to help them succeed in entering a college and hopefully improving their chances in the tight job market that exists in Okinawa.

5.3 Work: Practicing base English and serving tourists

Back in my Oral Communications class, it is Monday morning and my first year student Richard pulls out a fat wad of U.S. dollars from his pocket to show me the tips he made over the weekend from his part-time job on base. Although his money roll is mostly one-dollar bills, they go a long way on base where prices are lower than can be found on “the economy” which is how people on base refer to Okinawa off base. With no tipping in Japan and the ability to “live in America” without the cost of going there, the cool factor is definitely at work for Richard and his job on base. His formal English training for the job consisted of taking home and studying the company manual for taking customer’s orders and running the cash register in English. While the English he uses on the job is limited due to the nature of the food service job he holds, it is becoming polished and second hand to him with practice. In his mind, the money and English practice are an ideal mix. He also knows that his access to the base and the people there provide other tempting opportunities to expand his linguistic horizons in informal settings and perhaps even land a secure and prosperous career. Richard has another direct experience with the benefits of working on base as his father, a retired U.S. serviceman, has a well-paid and fairly secure job related to the base and his Okinawan mother also works on base as a Japanese civil servant. Family, work, motivation and English skills are thus inseparable in his mind.

English ability is important cultural capital for all young Japanese seeking advancement into better schools and better jobs. The presence of the U.S. military bases in Okinawa and the growing importance of the tourism industry there make English an even more important consideration for students there. In the aftermath of World War II, the U.S. government and its bases provided food, clothing and shelter and became the single most important source of employment for local Okinawans, this at a time when the economy of Okinawa was devastated by war and financial support from the Japanese government was minimal. Although the bases now account for only approximately five percent of the Okinawan GDP, there are still approximately 8,000 full time Japanese civilian employees on these bases, and their remuneration is the equivalent of what Japanese civil servants receive (Pajon, 2010). Given that salaries in Okinawa are on average the lowest in Japan and that the unemployment rate is generally twice that of the national average, these well-paying and relatively secure jobs are highly valued in Okinawa society. English proficiency is a well-known consideration in the hiring process for these jobs and at least one *sennmon gakko*[3] in Okinawa made a concerted effort to provide formal training in English designed to help students obtain these jobs (Asakura, 2002). In addition to these full time positions on base, there are a number of

[3] Non-degree granting post secondary school in Japan (usually two year programs) with narrower, more career oriented curricula than colleges.

companies off base that have important contracts for work on base and thus hire bilingual Okinawans or retired U.S. military personnel who are familiar with on base language, culture and ways of doing business. Whether to speed the transition to full time work on base or merely to improve their English skills, many English majors have part time jobs on base while others look for and find work in those businesses near the bases that cater to American military members and their families when they go off base. The fact that many biracial students have a parent working on base and live in the vicinity of these bases also appears to have an influence on their decision to pursue English studies in order to find work on or related to the bases.

English majors in Okinawa are also seeking work in a number of other careers in Okinawa for which English ability is an important consideration and the participants in this study are keenly aware of these possibilities. The growing middle classes of China, Taiwan, Korea and Southeast Asia are creating increasing numbers of jobs for English majors in Okinawa as they flock to Okinawa in increasing numbers for shopping, sightseeing and enjoying Okinawa's beach resorts. Although the majority of the approximately six million visitors to Okinawa each year come from mainland Japan, the number and percentage of visitors from abroad is growing, and college graduates who wish to work for airlines, travel agencies, hotels and other tourism related employers are fully aware of the need to demonstrate their mastery of English. Finally, it is common for Japanese governmental organizations and larger and more prestigious companies of all types to include English on their employment exams.

Although English teaching in the public schools is one of the most highly sought after jobs for English majors in Okinawa due to the security and prestige these jobs afford, biracial English majors are conspicuously absent from this profession. Interviews with the participants, including two English teacher-training instructors, indicate that the reasons for this are connected with the way these students have acquired English. Biracial students who have acquired their English outside Japanese public schools discover that it is difficult to learn to teach English as a *foreign* language in the way it is taught in these schools. This inability especially manifests itself in the difficulty they have in explaining grammatical points and teaching how to learn a foreign language. Some biracial students who attend public schools find that they can succeed in those classes without studying much, instead relying on the ability they have acquired outside these schools. The result is that although some biracial students enter college with the intention of obtaining English teaching certificates and begin taking classes in that course, they nearly all switch from that course to a less rigorous course more oriented to obtaining jobs outside of teaching. Society expects biracial students to be fluent in English and many of them are fluent users of English because of how they acquired English in settings that transcend the dichotomy between formal and informal learning. Never having struggled to learn English as a foreign language as taught formally in schools, the prospect of relearning English as a foreign language in order to teach it as a subject in schools no doubt discourages them from pursuing this career.

Having grown up on and around American military bases, been surrounded by base related Americans and now increasingly by foreign tourists, and knowing full well the difficulties they will face finding good paying and secure jobs in Okinawa, it is not surprising that biracial students in Okinawa understand that continuing to improve their English and obtaining a university degree in English can go a long way toward finding work. In this respect, they may be no different than their monoracial classmates majoring in English. They

are, however, perceived as different by society at large, assumed to be good at English and in some cases experience different family, school and work lives that lead to increased motivation to find base related and other employment where English is valued and where their linguistic skills and cultural capital might give them an advantage over their classmates.

5.4 The American Village: Hanging out, hooking up and performing English

It is Saturday night closing in on Sunday and Michelle, Joan, William and Richard have all met at the Starbucks in the American Village to launch their sendoff for Michelle who has decided to leave Okinawa and have a go at living in America with her estranged father. She has been there before and still feels most comfortable here in Okinawa, but wants to experience cultural immersion there and explore her other half. They have been joined by three other English majors who have also just gotten off work from the restaurants and bars in this area of Okinawa most heavily influenced by the American bases. Michelle and Richard got to know each other when they attended the AmerAsian School in Okinawa while Joan and William became friends while working at the same modeling agency in Okinawa that specializes in biracial models. Michelle has brought along her American boyfriend, and one of their biracial friends who speaks no English but is fluent in *Uchinaguchi* is coming, so there will be a lot of code switching tonight. This part of Okinawa is where they were all raised. It is where they feel most at home. Here on their own ground they are no longer half Okinawan and half foreign. Their friends in the English Department treat them as equals. They all went to school with kids who were "half". Nobody stares at them except the Chinese tourists.

The American Village is a shopping and entertainment area built on land that used to be part of an American military base in the town of Chatan in central Okinawa. Located between the man-made Sunset Beach and Highway 58 that runs the length of Okinawa, this Disneyesque area is a local hangout often frequented by the participants of this study, American military personnel, other local Okinawans and visitors from mainland Japan and China. With its faux storefronts seemingly lifted directly from a Disney theme park, the American Village, and the communities around it, are nonetheless markedly different from the rest of Japan and emblematic of the unique linguistic and cultural environments to be found in this area of Okinawa.

Approximately 70 percent of the American bases in Japan are located in the main island of Okinawa, and most of these bases and their personnel are located in the central part of that island in the area around Chatan. With between 40,000 and 50,000 American military personnel, civilian contractors and their family members concentrated primarily in these communities in central Okinawa, it is common to find various kinds of English-speaking people there. Many of the participants in this study live in those communities, in part due to the fact that their American parent might continue to work on base after retirement from the military and because American military retirees and their families can gain access to bases where they shop, obtain work and enjoy other base privileges. Once on base, English replaces Japanese as the language of common use and one can be nearly completely isolated from the surrounding community and local languages. For biracial children growing up in this part of Okinawa, switching between English and Japanese can be commonplace as they use different languages with different parents, peers, classmates, teachers and coworkers depending on the settings and preferred language of that individual. Businesses, schools, churches, community

groups, government organizations and other institutions in this part of Okinawa cater to this diverse community of English language speakers who may be monolingual or multilingual and carry both Japanese yen and U.S. dollars in their wallets.

On the continuum between formal and informal learning, the American Village clearly leans to the informal, but it provides an example of how the relationship between competency and performance might become inverted or even done away with (Pennycook, 2007). Although the students bring the linguistic and other competencies they acquired at home and in classrooms to the American Village, they can also be seen as performing English in public as they wait tables, tend bar, dance and listen to the latest American, Okinawan and Japanese hip hop or raggae music, play beach volleyball and consume inexpensive American beer and pizza from the PX on base, and it is through these repeated performances and creation of multiple, changing and at times contradictory identities that the students might become what Pennycook (2007) terms the products of their performances (pp. 58-63). Their seamless learning of English in multiple locations through the practice or performance of the language allows them to live their own Japanese, American and Okinawan languages and cultures depending on where they find themselves and want to go. Whether hanging out with their diverse community of friends at the Sunabe Sea Wall and Sunset Beach or the enjoying the bars, restaurants and nightclubs clustered around this area, young Okinawan people use and practice a changing English unique to their generation and the local hybrid culture of American bases and local Okinawan life. Just as their parents may have met each other, biracial students of Okinawa pair up and pair off with other English users to create the next generation of multiracial children in Okinawa. Come the day of the graduation ceremony, American boyfriends and fiancés, some with a first child in tow are there on campus with a bouquet and congratulations for the happy English major who has leveraged their English capital to prepare for the next stage of life.

6 Limitations/ Future studies

The nature of the ethnographic approach employed in the paper, that is a study of biracial college English majors in Okinawa, has excluded those Okinawan biracials who have left Okinawa to study, biracials in Okinawa who have chosen majors other than English, biracials living in the vicinity of American bases in mainland Japan and the majority population of college students in Okinawa and Japan that are not biracial. Comparative studies of these groups would no doubt reveal significant insight in the motivations, identities and language learning experiences of all groups involved. Similarly, a focus on intrinsic versus extrinsic motivations, a consideration of gender, a more longitudinal study of individual identity construction over time as well as more attention to the nuances of race in Japan, should also be given attention in future studies of this group of students and their relationships with English.

7 Conclusion: Multiple motivations, multiple settings, multiple stories

Although the English learning that occurs in some of the locations described above is more formal than others, when considered as a whole, the experiences of the participants in this study indicate that an examination of the distinctions between formal and informal learning may be less useful than an understanding of the individual stories of language learning, identity formation and motivations to acquire English. In addition, the societal assumptions

that biracial students are bilingual due to their parentage are not born out by the life experiences of the participants. Rather, while some of the participants are highly proficient users of English due to having experienced a seamless continuum of English learning that transcends the barriers between Okinawan, American and Japanese cultures and between formal and informal learning, others are no more proficient at English than their monoracial classmates. Regarding their motivations to choose English as their major in college, however, it does appear that the participants in this study all have motivations related to family, schooling and/or work that set them apart from other English majors in Okinawa.

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