



Taking a critical pedagogic turn in L2 teaching

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While second language (L2) teachers pursue advanced language acquisition theories and methods, they also have to meet an increasing demand for L2 education situated in broader and more diverse social contexts. Critical pedagogy may be one way to respond to such a demand. Critical pedagogy emphasizes students' interests and needs and attempts to lead them away from receptive learning to more active student-centered language learning. It enhances students' awareness of society and justice and promotes their critical thinking and interpersonal communication skills. In this paper, we explore this revolutionary ideology of education in English as a foreign language (EFL) classes in Japan. First, rationales and theoretical backgrounds of critical pedagogy from different viewpoints are presented. Next, the results of three different attempts of incorporating critical pedagogy in Japanese EFL classes are reported, and its possibilities and difficulties in L2 education are discussed.

第二言語教師は、高度な言語習得理論・教育法・教材開発ばかりでなく、広範で多様な社会変化に即した第二言語教育の要請にも応えていかなければならない。クリティカルペダゴジーはその答えの一つとなり得るかも知れない。クリティカルペダゴジーは、学習者の興味と必要性を重視し、学習者を受動的な言語学習から学習者中心の能動的学習へと導いていく。また、それは学習者の社会的関心と公共心を高め、批判的思考法と言語運用能

力を向上させるものである。本論では、この画期的な教育法を日本の英語教育の中で模索する。初めに、クリティカルペダゴジーの理論的根拠をいくつかの視点から述べる。次に、日本の大学英語教育でクリティカルペダゴジーの導入を試みた3件の事例報告をする。その中で、第二言語教育におけるクリティカルペダゴジーの可能性と難しさについても言及していく。

Current development in L2 research and pedagogy has evolved around many academic disciplines such as linguistics, psychology, sociology, anthropology, cultural studies, and computer science. Now, while many L2 teachers pursue advanced language acquisition theories, teaching methods, and material development, they also have to meet an increasing demand for L2 education situated in broader and more diverse social contexts. In response, some academics advocate critical pedagogy. Critical pedagogy is an educational approach that promotes learning in relation to social change (e.g., Freire, 1970/1993; Giroux, 1992; McLaren, 2000; Simon, 1992). In a critical approach to language learning, language is not only “a means of expression or communication” but also “a practice that constructs, and is constructed by, the ways learners understand themselves, their social surroundings, their histories, and their possibilities for the future” (Norton & Toohey, 2004, p. 1).

Critical pedagogy does not constitute a single ideological framework or instructional method, but rather is interpreted and practiced in many different ways according to the educational institutions, the learners, the teachers, the problems that arise in the classroom, and the social, cultural, and political issues that surround the participants (Norton & Toohey, 2004; Pennycook, 2001). Yet, the central concern of critical pedagogy is reflection and praxis, that is, questioning every subject matter we take for granted and putting our

critical thoughts and desires into action, and its common feature is promoting students’ voices through dialogic exchange with the aim of their empowerment. Now in our increasingly culturally and politically complex society, we feel a strong need to foster through L2 learning students’ more critical and broader views of the world and their abilities to speak out for themselves and the people around them. We also feel it essential to critically examine and redefine our L2 teaching practice so that it can better fit our own educational site and bring more meaningful language learning experience for our students.

In this paper, four authors with the above aim will jointly explore critical approaches to EFL education at Japanese colleges. The first author will provide the rationales and theoretical backgrounds of critical pedagogy from various viewpoints. The second author will report a case of implementing critical literacy in a nursing class at a medical college. The third author will present the results of taking a critical approach in an EFL class for international students. Finally, the fourth author will introduce how critical pedagogy can be incorporated in leadership education at a cadet school.

Theories and rationales of critical pedagogy by Chieko Mimura

Critical pedagogy has been debated as a key topic in the field of education for more than 3 decades. Compared to the proliferation of various theories and practices of critical pedagogy in the late 20th century, recently critical pedagogy seems to be hesitantly implemented in the classroom amidst

critiques. It is necessary to consider how to interpret the concept of critical pedagogy so that it is suitable for our own educational settings, and how to implement the theory in our daily educational practices. This section will review the historical development of critical pedagogy as well as critiques against it and discuss the possibilities of critical pedagogy.

A brief history of critical pedagogy

Paulo Freire and Freirean-based critical pedagogy

Critical pedagogy is considered to be based on Critical Theory (for details of Critical Theory, see, e.g., Adorno, Aron, Levinson, & Morrow, 1983; Habermas, 1991), which aims at problematizing (i.e., deconstructing common knowledge rather than taking it for granted, allowing new viewpoints and actions to emerge) dominant features and ideas in human society, challenging the unequal social structures, and eventually overthrowing and transforming them through actions (Santos, 2001). In this vein, critical pedagogy is considered a pedagogical practice of Critical Theory (Santos, 2001) and Brazilian educator Paulo Freire is considered “the inaugural philosopher of critical pedagogy” (McLaren, 2000, p. 1). In his influential book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire defined his pedagogical philosophy as:

a pedagogy which must be forged *with*, not *for*, the oppressed (whether individuals or peoples) in the incessant struggle to regain their humanity. This pedagogy makes oppression and its causes objects of reflection by the oppressed, and from that reflection will come their necessary engagement

in the struggle for their liberation. And in the struggle this pedagogy will be made and remade. (1993, p. 30)

In this approach, Freire argued against the authoritarian *banking education* (i.e., the framework of education as an act of depositing, in which the teacher deposits knowledge into the students as depositories) as it “minimize[s] or annul[s] the students’ creative power” (p. 54) and reproduces the unequal structure of oppressors and the oppressed. Instead, he designed dialogical pedagogy, which encourages dialogue and open communication among students and teachers, to “strive for the *emergence* of consciousness” (p. 62) of oppression and in turn to transform oppressive social structures through praxis. Praxis here refers to cyclical interaction of “critical reflection and action” (Keesing-Styles, 2003, p. 3).

Freire’s philosophy had a tremendous impact upon educators, and various interpretations of his pedagogical practice emerged (cf., hooks, 1989; Lewis, 1993; Shor & Graff, 1997; Simon, 1987). The common feature of these Freirean-based pedagogical practices is bringing students to voice through dialogical interactions so that the students will be empowered.

Critiques of Freirean-based critical pedagogy

Despite many reports of positive reception of Freirean-based critical pedagogy, other scholarly articles, particularly those concerned with student identity, have reported that materials and activities brought into the classroom by teachers aiming at its espoused consciousness-raising of the students or

bringing students to voice are not always successful (e.g., Canagarajah, 1993; Fujiwara-Fanselow, 1996), and the cause of this failure has been attributed to fundamental problems of the Freirean-based critical pedagogy.

One of the critiques comes from the postmodernist perspective, in which the aim of critical pedagogy, i.e., liberation and democracy, is questioned as it creates one fixed, domineering ideology. The concept of empowerment is also problematized in light of “the regimes of truth” (Foucault, 1983, p. 133), which explicates the danger of discourses making people believe that any received knowledge is absolutely true and normal. In the educational context, the agent of empowerment (the teacher) and power as property are taken for granted (Gore, 1992); in other words, power is uncritically considered to be “possessed” by teachers and “given” by them to students without considering alternative conceptualizations of power as existing everywhere and interplaying with resistance (Foucault, 1983).

Another critique claims that critical pedagogy is ambiguous and lacks practicality. Especially, the dialogical pedagogy is said to be confusing and underdeveloped (Simon, 1992) because it lacks practical guidelines as to how teachers and students should interact, nor does it describe possible effects arising from the interactions. Furthermore, critical pedagogy is not seen as going beyond an abstract political vision and “should not be called *critical pedagogy*, but *critical educational theory*” (Gore, 1993, p. 42).

The third critique points out the difficulty of the implementation of critical pedagogy without meaningful analysis or reformulation of the institutional power

imbalances between teachers and students, or of the essential top-down traditional organization of education itself. If the students’ diversity is overlooked or carelessly ignored by the teachers in the name of the creation and imposition of “liberatory” pedagogy, then “‘empowerment,’ ‘student voice,’ ‘dialogue,’ and even the term ‘critical’ are repressive myths that perpetuate relations of domination” (Ellsworth, 1992, p. 91). Lather (1992) strongly protests in the same vein that critical pedagogy is “sins of imposition that we commit in the name of liberation” (p. 129).

These critiques of critical pedagogy indicate that “doing critical work is dangerous work” (Pennycook, 2001, p. 138). However, I believe that we need critical work in education because, as Johnston (1999) states, it is the only way to obtain insight into the educational process and the society that surrounds education. Critical approach in education is also needed because all the activities, interactions, and materials in a classroom have “broader implications” and need to be seen as “social and cultural practices” (Pennycook, 2001, p. 139). We educators should consider the possibilities of critical pedagogy in order to understand students as well as to reflect on our own educational practices, so that we can provide educational materials and environments that connect students with their real lives in society.

Critical pedagogy for us now

Now a key approach to our practice of critical pedagogy may be postmodernism (e.g., Giroux, 1992), concisely summarized in Lyotard’s (1998) exhortation to have “incredulity toward metanarratives” (p. 391), i.e., turn a

skeptical eye toward received knowledge. In this stance, educators should remain skeptical, questioning, and reflective, without blindly imposing prevailing beliefs, such as liberation or empowerment (e.g., Lather, 1992; Pennycook, 2001). Pedagogical process should also, in this view, be local, practical, and specific, so that it may suit the students' needs and situations. Specifically, in the classroom, for example, teachers cannot expect students to agree about how to act or whether or not to act in response to the teachers' perceptions. It could be possible that teachers' attempts to raise students' critical consciousness might lead to different beliefs and opinions from those of the teachers. Such lack of consensus or students' unwillingness to adopt certain political positions should not be considered failure; rather, these moments of disagreement should be used as productive opportunities that allow for difference.

Postmodernist educator Lather (1992) proposes "post-critical pedagogy" (p. 131). In addition to problematizing the idea of emancipation and self-conscious human agency, she suggests "postmodern re-positioning of critical intellectuals" in the struggle to "decolonize the space of academic discourse that is accessed by our privilege, to open that space up in a way that contributes to the production of a politics of difference" (p. 132). This is the way to bring students' voice into the educational process itself, i.e., involving students in curriculum planning and instruction, and in doing so, we educators can avoid normalizing the top-down positioning of ourselves.

In conclusion, I argue that critical pedagogy is not a pedagogy of Critical Theory, but a questioning process. In this sense, pedagogy is not just a matter of teaching

but includes all the educational activities; thus, not only students but also teachers are expected to be critical and skeptical at all time about educational goals, teacher-student relationships, classroom materials, systems of knowledge production, and institutional structures, in addition to social issues, to selectively decide on classroom materials and activities in accordance with the educational environment.

Case study 1: An implementation of critical literacy in a college nursing class

by *Rasami Chaikul*

When there is a culture of silence, as occurred in my English conversation class for nursing students in Japan, I find it an intricate task to have students express their voices, which means both their opinions and English speaking performances (Pennycook, 2001, p. 130), especially in front of the class. Because the students are accustomed to a receptive learning style, they expect the teacher to play the role of knowledge source who deposits knowledge in the students' brains. Thus, this study began with the question of whether an EFL classroom can serve as a site for a change, breaking down the culture of silence, promoting the emergence of voice, and leading to the formation of critical consciousness. This coincides with the inquiries raised by Brown (2004): how an English teacher can engage in critical pedagogy in a classroom and whether there are activities that respect students' points of view and enhance their critical consciousness.

Methodology

The study took place in a required English conversation course during the second semester, 2005, at a medical science academy. The 14-week conversation course had two main objectives: (a) to encourage the students to voice their opinions and improve their speaking abilities, and (b) to promote their critical consciousness.

Twenty-seven 1st-year nursing students participated in the English conversation class. They were all Japanese aged from 18 to 24. All of them had had English learning experience in secondary school for 6 years or more. I took the role of teacher-researcher and adopted critical pedagogy as a teaching scheme for this class.

As Wink (2000) described the legacy of critical pedagogy as “to name; to reflect critically; to act” (p. 8), the critical approach in this study consisted of the cycle of decoding, reflection, and action. Decoding is supposed to deal with the students’ personal experiences, but, from observation, I found that the students did not like to talk about their problems to their peers and that it was easier for the students to discuss issues which did not involve them too personally. Therefore, I decided to introduce social issues which the students would be easily able to relate to their experiences, such as patient rights, discrimination, and women’s rights, and designed a syllabus for the class. In each lesson, the students were asked to recognize a problem, find its causes, express their feelings toward it, and think of what they would do and how they would act toward the problem.

Here, I will present the results of a lesson about life, death, and patient rights, the idea of which was taken from *Impact Issues* (Day & Yamanaka, 1998). The lesson started

with brainstorming about patient rights, and the students were asked to share their experiences related to this issue. Apparently, the students did not have much knowledge about patient rights. They also claimed that there were no patient rights problems in their country. Then, the students read a letter from the daughter of a patient dying of cancer. She was having difficulty deciding whether she should inform her father about his illness or not. Next, the students discussed in groups patient rights in general and in Japan and decided how to write a letter to the dying patient’s daughter. At this stage, the students began to demonstrate their realization of the problem. They also came to share some knowledge about patient rights and experience they had as future nurses. The students were free to express themselves and share their experiences because, as Cadiero-Kaplan (2002) noted, a critical approach should promote classrooms that value students’ voices, experiences, and histories as part of the course content. Finally, the students reflected on how they could act and react to the issue. In the whole class discussion, the students discussed in depth the issue they had talked about in groups, and acknowledged that in reality some patients are not informed of their medical treatment and it is quite difficult for patients to have a second opinion from another doctor. The students then decided it was one of their tasks as future nurses to improve the situation by promoting a better understanding of patient rights in Japan.

Results and discussion

It was not easy to apply critical pedagogy in my English class at the beginning. First, the students had a negative attitude toward the teacher’s teaching style because they

were more familiar with *banking* style education, in which the teacher acts as a source of knowledge and deposits knowledge in students' brains. Second, the students did not have sufficient language competence to voice their opinions. Many students did not know how to express themselves or what to say and how to discuss in groups. One student said, "I was ashamed that I had to announce my thought in front of all." Another student said, "I couldn't make English sentences to express myself properly."

However, by discussing in groups and listening to their peers' ideas, the students learned how to use the language to express their own voices. In an interview with the teacher, one student said, "I learned to say my opinion in English. If I have what I want to tell, I should say [my] voice." As many students wrote in their journals, the students spent a lot of time speaking English in the class through the reflective activities. One student commented, "I think everybody comprehends each other's culture, and everybody discusses each other's thoughts and finds an answer that is good [for] each other." The class observation by the teacher also revealed that the students increased their amount of speaking during the class period.

The application of critical pedagogy encourages authentic conversations and critical dialogues. It provides opportunities for students to discuss and express their opinions, so they become more skilled at speaking. Furthermore, as Hones (1999) remarked, critical pedagogy is a way of teaching and learning in which students are encouraged to develop their own voices as speakers and writers of English by posing problems about the world, with a goal of helping all participants become more fully human

and transform the reality around them. One student later remarked, "I want to teach [my] family the things which I learned from this class," while another student said, "When there is some issue, I can think [of what] I can do and there are various problems in the world. I learned my ignorance, and I'm in a comfortable environment."

Finally, I will close this section with a student's reflection expressed at the end of the semester:

Everyday we learn about medical treatment. I don't think [about] social and global issues and social action in school. So, English class was a good chance to think about the world through English.

Case study 2: Incorporating a critical pedagogy in EFL for international students at a Japanese university

by Yoko Sekigawa

As with Japanese students, international students studying at Japanese universities are required to take two to four English classes in order to successfully complete their academic studies. Through learning EFL, they can not only improve their English abilities but also broaden their views and deepen their understandings of the world and themselves, critically. In this section, I will report the results of a critical praxis, an attempt to incorporate a critical pedagogy in an EFL class for international students at a Japanese university. Praxis refers to "a constant reciprocal relation between theory and practice" (Pennycook, 2001, p. 3), or "continuous reflective integration of thought, desire, and action" (Simon,

1992, p. 49). Critical pedagogy here involves a critical practice of teaching/learning EFL with a goal of more inclusive social democracy (Kanpol, 1994, 1997).

Participants and course

The participants were 23 students registered for an elective English course for 2nd-year international students at a Japanese university. Their majors varied: economics, business, sociology, and law. Of these, 11 were males and 12 were females. 22 were from various parts of China and one was from Myanmar. The course was a content-based course that focused on a variety of contemporary issues with the aim of developing the students' reading abilities, self-expression and critical thinking, and intercultural awareness. The course was taught by the teacher/researcher. The class met once a week for 24 sessions. The data were collected in 2006.

Materials

The text that was used for the English course was *Insights* (Shaules & Miyazoe, 2005), which contains reading and discussion activities based on essays from a column, Crossing Cultures, in *The Japan Times*. The author of the essays, a female African-American journalist who has lived in rural Japan with her husband and three children for many years, gives critical insights into the Japanese society and her cross-cultural experiences.

Procedure

In the reading sessions, the students read an essay extracted from *The Japan Times* and answered reading comprehension questions. In the discussion sessions, which alternated with the reading sessions, the students gave a short speech on the topic related to the reading passage they had read in the previous week in groups of four. The grouping was changed on every discussion occasion. After the students presented their views, the listeners asked questions to the speaker. Then, the students outlined their speech and listed the inquiries and responses exchanged in the group, and submitted them to the teacher.

What made this read and discuss activity more critical and meaningful for the international students were the deeply personal intercultural experiences of the author living as a foreigner in Japan and her critical viewpoints on the Japanese people and society. In many EFL classes focusing on intercultural understandings, students tend to be provided generalized, and even stereotyped, differences between two cultures, in most cases Japanese and American, and express their opinions based on uncritically received intercultural knowledge. Moreover, because the issues the students discussed in this class were closely related to their current life and environment, they could easily share and personalize the author's cross-cultural experiences and react to her critical opinions sometimes positively and other times negatively based on their own beliefs, values, and experiences.

Results

The discussion topic that I focus here is “Is Japan open toward people from other countries?” Eleven out of 19 (58%) students responded that Japan is open towards foreigners, while five (26%) said that Japan is not open. Three misunderstood the question and answered mainly about the open market of Japan. The other four were absent.

Reasons for yes

The students pointed out some societal/cultural facts as the reasons for Yes (Japan is open):

1. There are many foreigners in Japan. For instance, they have personally met “many foreigners who come from different countries,” and have seen “many foreign tourists and business people in shops, restaurants, and hotels” and “many foreign workers in restaurants, supermarkets, and companies.” They have also seen many international “students from various countries in the university” who live in Japan “in freedom” and “grow up as fine people.”
2. “There are many loan words” from other languages in Japanese.
3. “Japanese people welcome people from other countries” and import “different cultures.”
4. Japanese people speak English. For example, “Japanese hotels and restaurants have staffs who speak English,” and “salesclerks explain about the electronic goods in English at a shop in Akihabara.”

Other reasons for the positive answer were attributed to the students’ individual experiences such as:

1. “Japanese are kind to me” on the street, in the workplace, in the university, and in the neighborhood.
2. “I have many Japanese friends.”

Reasons for no

Reasons for the answer No (Japan is not open) included:

1. Generational/historical aspects, e.g., “Older Japanese people have old images about Asian countries.” They ask strange questions such as “Do you have bicycles in China?” or “Do you have TVs in China?”
2. Cultural aspects, e.g., “Japanese tend to make groups” in the workplace and university, and “Japanese tend not to be friendly to strangers.”
3. Political/socioeconomic aspects, e.g., “It is easier for Japanese to get along with people from developed countries.”

Questions to yes students

The students’ voices received reactions from other students in dialogic exchange, some of whom displayed the same stance and others asked critical questions in opposition. The questions addressed to the students who responded Yes (Japan is open) included:

1. “Do you like Japan?”
2. “Is life in Japan easy for you?”

3. “Do you have Japanese friends?”
4. “Do you talk with other foreigners in Japan?”

The first three questions seem to have been asked to confirm the students’ affinity with Japan and Japanese people, while the fourth question has a different scope. It focuses on openness and internationality of the individual students.

Questions to no students

The questions to the students who responded No (Japan is not open) included:

1. “Did you try to make Japanese friends?”
2. Does “a longer stay” make “living in Japan easier”?
3. “Is there a difference in the attitude of Japanese toward developed and developing countries?”
4. “How did you deal with the absurd questions” from Japanese?

Here, we can see some critical inquiries about the subjectivity (i.e., the ways in which identity is formed through discourse) of the individual international students living in a foreign country (Q1 & Q2) and a critical social inquiry that questions “access, power, disparity, desire, difference, and resistance” (Pennycook, 2001, p. 11) that arise between them and Japanese people (Q3). On the other hand, the students pose themselves as more knowledgeable, therefore more powerful, agents when they call those older Japanese who ask unpleasant questions “ignorant” (Q4).

Discussion

In the dialogic exchange, the students’ critical inquiries which were first aimed at other people and other societies were then turned to those of their own. For instance, when one student argued that Japan is not open, another student asked, “Do you think your country is open towards people from other countries?” The first student answered, “No, I don’t think so. I hope my country has many places for foreigners to work.” When another student criticized the attitude of Japanese people, “Japanese people always protect themselves with silence from foreigners. I think Japanese should be more outgoing,” he was asked if he tried to make Japanese understand him by talking to them.

The students’ small individual experiences were often expanded to cover a broader scope, connecting micro personal problems to macro social, cultural, and political issues, and sometimes resulted in critical inquiry into their identities as international students and social subjects. To take an example, when one group was discussing whether or not foreigners are discriminated against in Japan, the discussion developed to discrimination against the socially vulnerable in general and to giving over a seat to the elderly and disabled on the train. Their ethical inquiry was “You may say you are treated badly, but do you treat others equally or do you take an ethical responsibility to others?” Here ethics is not as part of a fixed moral code that guides the behavior of the individual but rather as part of a contingent way of thinking and acting that is always in relation to social, cultural, and political relations (Simon, 1992). This ethics of compassion is what I envisaged in a critical approach to my EFL classroom as “a model of hope and possibility” (Pennycook, 2001, p. 9).

While the students engaged in group discussion, they may not have always wanted to expose themselves. They may not have written everything they had talked about in the report for the teacher. Furthermore, they may not have been able to adequately express their thoughts and feelings due to their limited English proficiency. Still, the students had an opportunity to voice their opinions in English, which served as a common and equidistant language for the students, and the teacher, of diverse linguistic, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds. Moreover, through successive discussions on gender, racism, individualism, globalization, advancing technology, traditional culture, generation gaps, violence, and international marriages, the students learned that everything they personally experience is linked to the larger society, and everything they see in the society is associated with their individual lives. By critically attending to these international and intercultural issues, their EFL learning not only provided them with improvement of their English language skills and understanding of the abstract concepts but also led them to an examination of their own internationality and interculturality.

Case study 3: Incorporating critical pedagogy into leadership education

by *Toshiko Sugino*

One of the aims of critical pedagogy is to consider how, in diverse sites of language education, practices might be modified, changed, developed, or abandoned in efforts to support learners, learning, and social change. At the same time, we should keep in mind that critical pedagogy cannot

be a unitary set of texts, beliefs, convictions, or assumptions (Norton & Toohey, 2004, p. 2). In this section, I interpret critical pedagogy in its weakened form, to nurture students' critical thinking, which is associated with reasoning or capacity for rational thought (Wallace, 2003).

There were two direct motives for incorporating critical pedagogy into leadership education at National Defense Academy. The first motive was the repeated politically incorrect remarks made by Japanese political leaders and many others, who seem to lack consideration for gender, age, and racial minorities. Another motive was directly related to the philosophy of our school, which is the only cadet school for future officer-candidates in Japan. It stresses that cadets should broaden their perspectives and enrich their sense of humanity. Because my students will become leaders in the near future, I felt the need to help them become well-balanced humanitarian leaders while also attempting to lead them away from receptive language learning and increasing their interests and abilities in English. I particularly focused on promoting students' awareness of "isms" such as racism, sexism, and linguicism (Phillipson, 1992) because I felt these concepts are essential for leaders-to-be who will need to communicate with various people in English, and because students in Japan tend to be less aware of these concepts than those in multilingual or multiethnic countries.

Background information of the students and course

National Defense Academy is situated in Yokosuka, Kanagawa Prefecture, enrolling 1,600 students. It has 500 faculty members in 18 science and three liberal arts departments including defense studies. It grants BS, BA,

MS, and MA degrees. The participants were 27 senior cadets. Of the 27 students, two were females, and one was from Vietnam. All were science majors including earth science, computer science, and aero-space engineering. Their TOEIC scores ranged from 385 to 800 with an average of 450. The course was originally a required general English course but was redesigned as a seminar-style course. This was the 4th year I taught this course. The class was a year-long course meeting 14 times in each semester. The data were collected in 2006.

Course objectives and student tasks

There were three kinds of course objectives: conceptual, linguistic, and skill-based. For conceptual, the students were expected to learn about racial, gender, and language issues. For linguistic, students were expected to develop their abilities in reading comprehension and vocabulary, write a draft for debate and a research paper, practice public speaking, understand videos, and participate in debates. For skills, students were expected to excel in autonomous learning skills, debating skills, critical thinking skills, logical thinking skills, and analytical skills. As for students' tasks for the first semester, they were to find controversial topics and prepare for and have debates about the topics. In the second semester, they were to find a research topic, write a research paper, and make a presentation.

Materials and teaching techniques

In order to teach social issues, I used both inductive and deductive methods because when I used mostly deductive

methods in a previous course, students became very frustrated. I felt if I used only deductive methods, it would hamper students from developing analytical skills. As for teaching techniques, I used graded reading, pair and group work, and individual presentations.

Various extracts for reading materials and videos were used for the class. The extracts for racial issues included *The Black Experience* (Dougill, 1999), *Jim Crow Laws* (Martin Luther King, Jr. National Historic Site, 1998), and *Teaching About Whiteness* (Harris, 2001). The videos used for racial issues were *Roots* and *Remember the Titans*. For gender and power issues, I used *You Just Don't Understand* (Tannen, 2001), *Adult Bullying* (Cooper, 2001), *Sexual Harassment: On Campus Definitions and Examples* (University of Newfoundland, 2003), and *Women's Education and Gender Roles in Japan* (Fujiwara-Fanselow & Kameda, 1994). The videos for the latter issue included *Joy Luck Club* and *A Few Good Men*.

Procedure

While studying about racial, gender, and power issues in the first semester, the students started preparing for a debate by looking at social issues critically. I first gave lectures on how to make an argument, stating their point of view clearly, persuading, and providing logical reasons. Then the students in groups of five or six members chose a topic from several choices of their own. Each group took sides and built up their argument in English. In order to present logical reasons, they provided evidence from the references. They spent 4 weeks for preparation and 2 weeks for preliminary and final debates.

Learning about racism and sexism and how to build up an argument for a debate eventually led to the second semester task of finding a research topic, writing a research paper, and making an individual presentation. I also introduced concepts related to language issues such as Language Policies, Language Imperialism, World Englishes, and English education in Japan later in the second semester.

Results and discussion

Because there was a large gap between students' expectations and the instructor's expectations about the class objectives and how to carry them out, the first few classes did not go smoothly. Many students expected to learn vocabulary and useful expressions and improve their speaking abilities. However, by learning about color meanings in different cultures and what the color black means, the students gradually realized that in some countries color is associated with race, prejudice, and discrimination. In the same way, the students came to realize how gender and power inequality creates harassment and discrimination in their social life.

After learning about the above concepts and issues in class, some students commented as follows:

- I came to think about what inequality meant through discussing and learning about sexism, racism, and sexual harassment. I felt it very important to be considerate to other people.
- Human beings tend to think that we are superior to others and try to justify our conduct even using our power. I learned that we need to be sensitive in the U.S.

because color is related to race and discrimination.

- I could understand sexual harassment better than racial discrimination because Japan is still a male-dominant society. I have more knowledge about discrimination in other countries.
- I realized people in the U.S. are more sensitive about racial and gender issues. I think Japanese people tend to look at them as someone else's affairs.
- Power dominance by the majority over a minority was more salient in the past, and we have worked hard to diminish it. In reality, however, it still exists.

As for debate, because this was the first time they ever participated in a debate either in Japanese or English, they had no idea how to begin. After exercising how to respond quickly and answer clearly while taking sides on some social issues, the students became able to build up an argument by giving definitions, proposing plans, and stating merits and demerits in English. The topics for preliminary debates included: Can married couples have different surnames? Should criminal law be applied to juvenile murders? Should children be restricted from playing video games? Should Japanese universities be like American universities? Should division of the Japanese Self Defense Forces (JSDF) be unified? and Should Japan be independent of the U.S. as far as military assistance is concerned? Most students expressed how difficult it was to express their opinions rationally in English because they needed technical terminology and special knowledge on issues. They felt they needed to understand what the opponent was trying to say. They also realized how important it was to collect information

beforehand and prepare well in order to convince the opponent.

For the final paper, the students chose topics such as gender inequalities at JSDF, racial discrimination and the civil war, social stratification, colonialism, gender roles, English education in Japan, harassment, and economic disparity in Japan.

One of the objectives of applying critical pedagogy in this class was leading the students away from receptive language learning and developing their critical skills. However, it was rather difficult for the science majors with lower-intermediate English abilities to master critical and logical thinking skills through debating and writing a research paper, not to mention understand the concepts of “isms.” Yet, overall, the students focused on their interests and needs in the task and engaged in active and autonomous language learning. At the end of the course, they remarked that they learned not only social issues but also various values and the historical and social backgrounds related to the topics they chose, and the skills for arguing not emotionally but objectively. They also noted that they further needed to develop higher logical and critical thinking skills for persuasion and refutation in debate and for writing research papers. Some students even made comments referring to their future: “I feel I have to learn a lot to serve as an officer successfully and internationally. I should not impose my opinions on people with less power, and think what is best and necessary for them from their standpoint,” and “I’ve learned a great deal about discrimination in various fields, some of which I didn’t notice before. It will be beneficial to me in the future. But I’m only at the beginning. I will study more about these social issues.”

Conclusion

In this paper, we have provided the theoretical background of critical pedagogy and three cases of incorporating critical pedagogy into EFL classes at Japanese colleges. As depicted in each section, critical pedagogy is a way of teaching and learning in which students are encouraged to develop their own thoughts and opinions by critically examining various social issues around the world and to become able to solve problems arising in their environment. Having employed critical pedagogy in several EFL classes, we have found it effective and meaningful for L2 learning. By voicing their opinions on social, cultural, and political issues in L2, the students can not only improve their L2 abilities but also increase their understandings of themselves and the society they live in. Through dialogic exchange, the students can listen to others’ opinions, which are not necessarily the same as theirs, and broaden their views of the world and deepen their understandings of other people. These, in effect, will lead to the students’ empowerment as language learners and users who learn and use language purposefully and as social subjects who think and act responsibly in the society. Critical pedagogy may still be unfamiliar to many L2 teachers and learners. We hope our studies help them understand the value of critical pedagogy and motivate them to adopt it in their L2 teaching/learning.

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