

# JALT2023 • GROWTH MINDSET IN LANGUAGE EDUCATION

NOVEMBER 24-27, 2023 • TSUKUBA, JAPAN

# English-Speaking Spaces: An Ethnographic Study

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#### Reference Data:

Hauser, E., Jackson, D.O., & Bennett, P.A. (2024). English-Speaking Spaces: An Ethnographic Study. In B. Lacy, R.P. Lege, & P. Ferguson (Eds.), *Growth Mindset in Language Education*. JALT. https://doi.org/10.37546/JALTPCP2023-42

Two locations in a Self-Access Learning Center where service transactions regularly occur are described. The locations are a coffee shop and a service counter. The use of English is stipulated in both locations, but the default language for service transactions in the coffee shop is Japanese, while at the service counter, it is English. The descriptions of the two locations focus on spatiality, the linguistic landscape, and aspects of the people who work there. Transcripts of video-recorded service transactions are shown to illustrate default language choice and to show how, even in the coffee shop, the use of English is still an option. Possible reasons for the differences in the default language are discussed, followed by a discussion of implications for this Self-Access Learning Center and, more generally, for the design and construction of physical spaces for the use of English.

本稿ではSelf-Access Learning Centerにおいて定期的にサービス取引が行われるコーヒーショップとサービスカウンターに着目し、そこでの相互行為を会話分析により記述する。特に空間性、言語景観、およびそこで働く人々の様々な側面に焦点を当て記述を行う。どちらの場所でも英語の使用が規定されているが、サービス取引のデフォルト言語はコーヒーショップでは

日本語, サービスカウンターでは英語である。ビデオ録画されたサービス取引場面のトランスクリプトを用いて, デフォルト言語の選択を詳細に示すとともに, コーヒーショップにおいても英語の使用が選択肢として残されていることを示す。まず, 場所ごとのデフォルト言語の違いについて考えられる理由を議論する。続いて, このSelf-Access Learning Centerや, より一般的に英語を使用するための物理的な空間について, その設計と建設に対する示唆を提供する。

In this paper, we describe two locations in a university Self-Access Learning Center (SALC) where service transactions occur and where the use of English is stipulated. The two locations are a coffee shop, which sells coffee and drink and food products, and a service counter, at which student users can do such things as check out self-study materials and gain access to a reserved study room. The descriptions focus on the physical layout of the location, features of institutional representatives who participate in the service transactions, and examples of service transactions. Even though the use of English is stipulated in both locations, in the coffee shop, the default language for service transactions is Japanese, while at the service counter, the default language for such transactions is English. Following the descriptions of the two locations, we will discuss some possible reasons for this difference. We end with a discussion of implications for the design and construction of English-speaking spaces.

As Schegloff (2007) points out, what kind of person a participant relevantly is in a particular interaction is not given in advance but is, at least in part, an outcome of interaction. This is not to make the implausible claim that a participant can take on any identity they like, but to recognize that for any given individual, there is an unbounded set of attributes which may be relevant to their identity in certain circumstances. Nevertheless, an individual may have visible attributes which render a certain identity relevant in some circumstances. For example, in an ethnography of an Orthodox Jewish community in California, Tavory (2016) shows how aspects of appearance, such as dress and hair style, make identity as an Orthodox Jew something that can be rendered relevant on the basis of physical appearance. As a perhaps more familiar example, in a university language classroom in Japan, features of participant age, dress, location and actions in the classroom, and possibly ethnicity may make relevant identities of teacher



and student. One possibility that we discuss below is that language choice in the coffee shop and at the service counter may be related to the visibly relevant identity of the institutional representatives, that is, of the people who work at the coffee shop or the service counter, even though such visibly relevant identity cannot be said to determine language choice. (See also Mondada, 2018a, for language choice and participant identity, and Lindström & Fox, 2023, for other aspects of participant identity, in different types of service transaction.)

Face-to-face interactions, a class that includes the service transactions described below, always occur in a socially- and culturally-organized space (Duranti, 1992; Enfield, 2013). Duranti (1992), for example, shows how the places that people sit in Samoan village meetings are socially-organized and something that cultural members can see at a glance. In addition, the physical layout of a given space can be meaningful for participants and therefore contributes to shaping interaction and is drawn on as a resource (Enfield, 2013; Enfield & Sidnell, 2022; LeBaron & Streeck, 1997; Mondada & Sorjonen, 2023). Enfield (2013), for example, shows that how a Kri son-in-law interacts with his father-in-law in his father-in-law's house is closely tied to the social organization of the space of the Kri house.

The research reported in this paper builds on such observations from anthropology and ethnomethodological conversation and membership categorization analysis. The focus of the research is on how visible attributes of service providers in the coffee shop and at the service counter and the physical spatial layout of these locations may have an influence on the default language choice in each location.

# Data, Participants, and Transcription and Analysis

#### **Data and Data Collection**

The data consist of video recordings and photographs from the two locations, supplemented by relatively informal discussions with some of the people who work at these locations. Video recordings were made at each location across three mornings, so that a total of approximately nine hours of video recordings were made at each location. Informed consent was obtained from the workers. Customers at the coffee shop and users of the service counter were informed of the recording through bilingual posters, which also contained information about opt-out procedures. This research was approved by the relevant ethics committees at Kanda University of International Studies, where two of the authors (DJ and PB) are employed and the data were collected, and

the University of Electro-Communications, where one of the authors (EH) is employed. We have chosen not to conceal the location of the data collection, as many people are familiar with the SALC, but have taken steps to protect the identity of participants.

### **Researchers and Participants**

The researchers are university faculty with varying degrees of prior familiarity with the setting, ranging from having visited the space on a tour (EH) to serving on the university-wide SALC committee (DJ) to working as a language advisor in this location (PB). These latter roles were beneficial in accessing the site and interpreting the study data. The participants in this study consisted of employees at the coffee shop and student assistants at the service counter. These participants read and signed a bilingual informed consent statement prior to data collection. Other participants were coffee shop customers and users of the service counter. Bilingual signs containing opt out procedures were deployed in each location to announce the study and establish informed consent for these participants.

# **Transcription and Analysis**

Detailed transcripts of example service transactions were made based on Conversation Analytic conventions for transcribing talk (Jefferson, 2004) and embodied conduct (Mondada, 2018b), supplemented by the use of video stills. However, as the main purpose of describing these examples is to illustrate issues of language choice, greatly simplified transcripts are used in this paper in order to increase readability. The transcripts include frames (i.e., stills from a video recording). The temporal relation between a frame and talk is shown in the transcript with a hashtag followed by frame number in gray font. The original transcripts can be found in the appendix. Images used in the analysis are based on both photographs taken at the two locations and stills extracted from the video recordings. They are filtered to protect participant identity.

Analysis of the data draws on membership categorization analysis (Housley & Fitzgerald, 2015), work in linguistic anthropology on the meanings of built space (Duranti, 1992; Enfield, 2013), and work in anthropology on physical appearance and identity (Tavory, 2016). Though we have included conversation analytic transcripts containing details of embodied conduct in the appendix, it should be noted that we will not be providing sequential conversation analyses of the extracts. (See appendix for more information.)



#### Research Focus

The focus of this study is on how built space and visible features of participant identity in these two locations may influence default language choice.

# The Two Locations: Spatiality, Linguistic Landscape, and Institutional Representatives

The spatiality of interactions (i.e., their physical setting and its design) is an important characteristic of service encounters, as are the types of participants involved (Mondada, Sorjonen & Fox, 2023). This section describes the two study locations, beginning with a general physical description of both settings and then moving on to provide additional details, including participant roles.

The two settings are located a few meters apart on the first floor of the SALC. The coffee shop (Figure 1) is the nearest of the two locations to the main building entrance. Although most of the first floor of the SALC has an open floor plan, the coffee shop is separated from the surrounding area by cubicle-style walls on three sides and a white column on the fourth side. Its elevation also sets it apart; it is accessible via ramp or a single step. The coffee shop sells hot and cold drinks and, around lunchtime, food items such as *bentos* and rice balls. This location is staffed by one or two employees who are not students.

Figure 1
The coffee shop



The service counter (Figure 2) is located near a gallery at the side entrance to the building. It is within a high-traffic open area of the first floor and hence slightly more accessible than the coffee shop. Adjacent spaces function as meeting points for students and language advisors. There is also a display stand for new materials nearby. The service counter does not handle any commercial transactions but provides services such as checking out study materials and facilitating access to study rooms. The service counter is staffed by students at the university.

Figure 2

The service counter



# The Coffee Shop

The design of physical spaces in the SALC concerns, among other things, the linguistic landscape, or displays of language found within the space. This has been identified as an explicit concern by members of the SALC team (Mynard, et al., 2022). These authors raised questions about the linguistic landscape including the following: (1) What language do students see when they enter the space? (2) Whose voices are represented by the landscape? And (3) how does such written language support student autonomy?

The signage in the coffee shop consists of informative and decorative signs. The former include a notice on the central white column thanking users of the space for using "English only" at the café (Figure 1). This sign orients viewers to the overall purpose of the SALC, which seeks to provide a space to study and use English beyond the confines of the traditional classroom setting. However, other informative signs posted around the café use both English and Japanese. These include signs announcing menu items such as "hot cocoa" and "caffemocha" along with their prices. One or two signs which serve as



announcements are written only in Japanese. The last of the informative signs discussed here is a bilingual announcement of the details of the present study. In contrast to these signs, decorative signs in English were posted mainly on the outer wall of the coffee shop. They show food items such as "hot dogs" and "pretzels" which are not, in fact, sold there (Figure 3). These signs may have been intended to enhance the décor, mark the space as a food vendor, and/or create an atmosphere more conducive to using English.

Figure 3
Decorative signs at the service counter



An employee of the coffee shop is visible in Figure 1, behind and partially blocked by the white column. In addition to a mask and plastic gloves, she is wearing a uniform consisting of a brown hat and shirt and black apron and slacks. This is the same uniform worn by other coffee shop employees. While it is relatively non-descript, it is also distinctive in being quite different from the dress of either students or teachers and SALC language advisors. A final thing to note is that the coffee shop employees are visibly above the age range of typical students.

#### The Service Counter

The linguistic environment of the service counter is somewhat different from the coffee shop. Here, there are predominantly informative signs, pertaining to the function of the space (e.g., "To borrow SALC materials, please come to the counter", see Figure 4) or offering encouragement to use English (e.g., "Why not try to speak in English!!").

Figure 4
An informative sign at the service counter



Some of the signs announce events that are regularly held in the SALC. The placement of these signs takes advantage of the counter space as a location that SALC users often visit. Close by this location, there is a poster with names, photographs, and brief profiles of students who volunteer to work in the SALC, which is one way of incorporating student voices into the landscape. Another difference in the written materials found here, compared to the coffee shop, is that there are some small, printed brochures and flyers placed around the counter that can be taken away. These materials are mostly written in English. Similar to the coffee shop, a bilingual sign has been temporarily placed in this location to inform users of the video-recording conducted for this study.

As mentioned above, the service counter is staffed by employees who are also students at the university. As such, they are within the age range typical for students at this institution. They do not wear a uniform and dress in their own clothes. While their physical location behind the counter contrasts with the student users of the service counter, there is nothing about their physical appearance that distinguishes them from other students.



# **Example Service Transactions**

As will be shown in two of the three extracts below, the default language for service transactions in the coffee shop is Japanese, while the default language for such transactions at the service counter is English. Nevertheless, there are occasionally service transactions conducted at least partially in English in the coffee shop. As noted above, it is not our intention in this paper to provide a detailed conversation analytic sequential analysis of these extracts. They are provided here, in simplified form, as examples of language choice to flesh out the descriptions of the two locations. (Detailed generic transcripts can be found in the appendix, for interested readers.)

# The Coffee Shop

Extract 1 shows a typical service transaction in the coffee shop.

#### Extract 1

01 ((CUS walks toward service area while unzipping
02 and looking in bag; WOR walks toward service area))
03 WOR irasshaimase#1
04 CUS kokoa ... kokoa hitotsu onegaishimas.#2
05 CUS hotto de [onegaishimas'.#3
06 WOR [hotto de.
07 ((about 1 second; cash register use))
08 WOR nihyaku en des'.
09 CUS hai.



#1



#2



#3

10 ((#4-#9, about 23 seconds; sounds of putting coins 11 on tray, closing wallet, zipping bag))







#6 0:17



#8 0:28



#5 0:13



#7 0:21



#9 0:31



```
12 WOR arigatoo gozai[mas'.

13 CUS [arigatoo gozaimas'.#10

14 ((CUS takes drink, walks away; WOR open drawer, picks

15 up money, puts it in drawer, closes drawer; #11))
```





The customer (CUS) approaches the counter and the employee (WOR) uses a formulaic Japanese expression while also approaching the counter (line 03, #1). The customer orders a drink (line 04) and then specifies it as hot (line 05). In overlap (shown through the use of left brackets), the employee confirms the specification (line 06). The employee then states the price and the customer responds (lines 08-09). There is no talk for about the next 23 seconds, as the employee prepares the drink and the customer retrieves money from her wallet, puts it on a tray, and then puts her wallet away (lines 10-11, #4-#9). As the employee delivers the drink to the customer, the two of them exchanges thank yous (lines 12-13). The customer takes the drink and walks away while the employee puts the money in the cash register (lines 14-15, #10-#11).

Though we have not quantified the video-recorded data, we present this example as typical of service transactions in the coffee shop (at least when it is not busy) in two ways. First, the entire transaction is in Japanese from start to finish. Second, all the talk is related to the service transaction. Though we have found cases of small talk between employee and customer, this is unusual, even when there is a long silence such as in lines 10-11. As extract 2 shows, though, customers do sometimes initiate the use of English for the transaction.

#### Extract 2

```
01 WOR irasshaimase
02 (1.1) ((WOR dumps coins from tray, returns tray))
03 CUS uh can I have a hot coffee?#1
```

```
04 WOR hot coffee? okay;#2
05 ((about 1 second))
06 WOR one forty please;
```





The transaction is opened as the employee uses the same Japanese formulaic expression (line 01) as in extract 1, while also putting money received from the previous customer in the cash register. The customer, though, orders in English while pointing to a menu on the counter (line 03) and the employee leans over to see what she is pointing at (#1). The employee then also uses English to confirm the order (line 04, #2) and then states the price. This transaction continues, but most of it consists of the employee and customer silently waiting while the coffee brews.

As in extract 1, the service transaction is opened by the employee in Japanese. Even so, in response to the customer placing her order in English, the employee also switches to English, both to confirm the order and to state the price. This shows that, while Japanese may be the default language, in that almost all transactions here are in this language, using English for service transactions in the coffee shop is an option that customers may, though they rarely do, choose.

#### The Service Counter

Extract 3 shows a typical service transaction at the service counter.

#### Extract 3

```
01 SA1 [hi may I help you?

02 SA2 [hi

03 USE uhm (.) [I have a reservation for  
04 ??? [good morning.
```



- 05 USE #1study room, eleven.#2
- 06 ((about half a second))
- 07 SA1 (eleven); can I have your name?#3
- 08 USE uh Miho Hobara.#4
- 09 SA1 Miho.#5



#1



# 2



# 3



#4



#5

- 10 ((about half a second; SA1 checking computer))
- 11 SA1 (ah) it's room fourteen.#6
- 12 ((about half a second))
- 13 USE yes yes.

- 14 ((very brief silence; SA1 turns twd USE))
- 15 SA1 thank you #7
- 16 USE thank you #8



#6



# 1



# Q

(In lines 02 and 04, there are some other people talking, but it is unclear whether this is part of the interaction between SA1 and USE.) As a student user (USE) approaches, the student employee (SA1) uses a formulaic expression in English (line 01), to which the student user responds with a service request (lines 03 and 05). The student employee then moves toward the computer (#2), but suspends this movement as she turns and asks for the user's name (line 07, #3). The user states her name, using the pattern of personal-name-followed-by-surname (line 08), and the employee repeats the personal name (line 09). (The name that appears in the transcript is a pseudonym.) The employee then resumes movement toward the computer (#5). The employee then states the room number, to which the student user responds, and turns toward a rack of keys (line 11, #6). The service transaction is closed as the student employee and user exchange thank yous (lines 15-16) and the student employee hands over the key (#7-#8).

Based on our viewing of the recorded data, we present extract 3 as typical of service transactions at the service counter in two ways. First, it is in English from start to finish. Second, as with the coffee shop, though we have found a few cases of small talk as part



of the service transaction (Hauser, et al., 2024), it is more typical for all talk to be directly related to the service transaction, as it is here.

To summarize, typical service transactions in the coffee shop are in Japanese from start to finish, while typical service transactions at the service counter are in English. Also, at both locations, talk within service transactions is usually directly related to the request for and provision of the service. However, it occasionally happens that a customer in the coffee shop uses English to place an order, which results in the employee switching from Japanese to English. It may also be noted that service transactions at the coffee shop involve the exchange of money, while those at the service counter do not.

#### Possible Reasons

These patterns of language choice for service transactions led us to consider the following questions: Why is English the default language for service transactions at the service counter, but Japanese is the default language for such transactions in the coffee shop? Put another way, given its location and the stipulation to use English, why is English not the default language in the coffee shop? Our discussion of possible reasons below is admittedly speculative. We do not present these reasons as hypotheses to be tested, but merely as plausible ways to make sense of these different language choice patterns.

The first possible reason for the differentiation of language choice between the spaces stems from the language used to initiate transactions. Since the coffee shop employees use *irasshaimase*, the customer could then be influenced to continue the transaction in Japanese (see also Mondada, 2018a). Second, the difference between the participants may also influence language choice. In the case of the service counter, the employees are students, as are the vast majority of users, and the interactions are largely student-tostudent. Also, the student staff are not in uniform but rather in their everyday clothes, which may signal that the space is a part of the learning environment. Conversely, at the coffee shop, the customers may be students, teachers, or other university staff, while the employees are in uniform and are above the typical age range of students, thus possibly creating a distance for student customers and making it less evident that it is also a space used for English. In other words, since student employees at the counter are visibly identifiable as students (i.e., English users/learners) and the employees at the coffee shop are visibly identifiable as non-students (Tavory, 2016), this may influence, though not determine, the use or non-use of English. Third, the nature of services offered may also sway English use as the coffee shop consists of commercial transactions for foodstuffs

while the service counter is a completely non-commercial service. Rather, the counter is only used to access the SALC language learning materials, services, and spaces. Furthermore, though this is highly speculative and may be reading too much into the situation, students may be expressing a kind of resistance to the attempted English-only language policy via use of Japanese for a commercial transaction.

The last two proposed reasons concern the physical spaces of both locations. First, considering the coffee shop, there are signs that are both informative and decorative (as seen in Figure 3) which may lead students to overlook or not notice the signs encouraging English use. Second, it is important to recognize the possible importance of the spatiality of the two locations and the possible meanings associated with this spatiality (Duranti, 1992; Enfield, 2013). The coffee shop is slightly elevated and is surrounded by three walls and a column that make it somewhat removed from the rest of the SALC. With such a set up, students might not treat it as a part of their learning space. As they step up and into the coffee shop, students may perceive that they are temporarily leaving the SALC. On the other hand, the service counter is not separated from the rest of the SALC. Located in an open, high-traffic area, it is visible as spatially integrated within the SALC. With this set up, students are more likely to treat it as part of their learning space.

# Implications for Design and Construction of English-Speaking Spaces

Considering the possible reasons students choose to use English in one area much more frequently than the other, we have some possible implications that may promote English use in self-access centers. Like other places within the SALC, both the coffee shop and the service counter are intended as spaces where English is used. However, it is up to the participants themselves whether and how this intention will become a reality. Some of the aspects that may contribute to whether English is used include who the participants relevantly are, what activities are accomplished there, how clear the rules are about language use, and possibly even the physical layout of the space.

Allowing and encouraging student ownership of a space and its promotion of language use may influence language choice in different SALC locations. We are not suggesting that employees at the coffee shop be replaced by student staff. Rather, student staff at the SALC could, for example, display information about using English at the coffee shop, as they do at the service counter. Additionally, the kinds of decorative and informational signage could be student-generated, such as posters for the coffee shop, as is done at the service counter.



Regarding commercial places like the coffee shop, one possibility to create more use of English might be for the employees to open the service transactions with English expressions, such as "Can I help you," or even simply a greeting in English, such as "Hi, how are you today?" Furthermore, informational signs on typical phrases used for commercial transactions could be displayed in areas such as by the register, as is done at the service counter.

Lastly, it may be effective to encourage a multilingual atmosphere at places such as the coffee shop rather than attempting to enforce an English-only rule. As mentioned above, it could be possible to allow students to take ownership and foster a sense of autonomy through encouragement of choice (e.g., a sign stating that either English or Japanese can be used), rather than discouragement through limiting language, such as the sign stating *English Only*.

#### **Bio Data**

**Eric Hauser** is an associate professor of English at the University of Electro-Communications. His research is primarily related to the analysis of L2 interaction, but he has recently become more interested in the social meanings and use of built space. He has recent publications in *Pragmatics*, *Ethnographic Studies*, and, with Cheikhna Amar, *Social Interaction*.

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# **Appendix**

# **Original Transcripts**

In the transcripts below, a vertical bar in gray font is used to mark the start of embodied conduct. A description of this embodied conduct appears below the talk. The following abbreviations are used for embodied conduct: gz (gaze), bd (body), hd (head), lh (left hand), rh (right hand), bh (both hands), ll (left leg), rl (right leg), twd (toward), and fwd (forward). This system for transcribing embodied conduct is adapted from Mondada (2018b). For information about symbols used for the transcription of talk, see Jefferson (2004).

Even though these transcripts are detailed, they are still generic. They are designed to show features of talk and embodied conduct for readers who are interested and who are familiar with how to read this sort of transcript. However, when it comes to what to include in a transcript used for analysis, especially with regard to embodied conduct, details are added or deleted depending on the focus of the analysis. It is in this sense that these transcripts are generic, in that they have not been constructed for the purpose of any particular analysis. Transcripts of the same data, if used in future conversation analytic work, are likely to contain somewhat different information. We have used more simplified transcripts in the body of the manuscript because they are accessible to a wider audience and because the nature of the analysis does not require this level of detail.

#### Extract 1

```
05 CUS |hotto de [onegaishimas'.#3
06 WOR [|hotto de.
w-gz |to CUS |to register
w-rh |up |to panel
w-hd |nod
```

- 07 (0.9)
- 08 WOR nihyaku en des'.
- 09 CUS ha:i.







#2



- #3
- 10 (23) ((sounds of putting coins on tray, closing
- 11 wallet, zipping bag))







#5 0:13



#6 0:17



#7 0:21



#8 0:28



- 12 WOR arigatoo gozai[ma:s'.
- 13 CUS [arigatoo gozaima::s'.#10 |release cup, to register w-rh
- 14 ((CUS takes drink, walks away; WOR open drawer, picks
- 15 up money, puts it in drawer, closes drawer; #11))



#10



Extract 2

- 01 WOR irasshaima↑se::
- 02 (1.1) ((WOR dumps coins from tray, returns tray))
- 03 CUS uh | | > can I have a < hot coffee: ?=#1

|point to menu

|to menu ((head/torso forward))

04 WOR = | hot coffee? \lokay: | #2

w-gz |to register ((body left))

w-rh |touch panel ((body turn))

05 (1.0)

06 WOR one |for|ty please;|

|to tray

w-bd |turn and step

c-lh |money on tray







u-bd

# Hauser, Jackson, & Bennett: English-Speaking Spaces: An Ethnographic Study

# 01 SA1 [|hi may I help you? 02 SA2 [hi:: s-bd |move twd counter s-gz | twd approaching USE s-rh |to chair uh:m |(.) [↑I have a reservation for= 04 ??? [good morning. |move chair under counter user ((enter video, walking fwd, gz on SA1)) 05 USE =#1study | room, $|=\uparrow e \underline{le} ven.#2$ |to computer s-gz |turn left s-bd |small step s-11 |to computer u-gz 06 | (0.3) |large step |°(eleven);° | tan I have your name?#3 u-bd |start moving right s-11 step |turn ((gz to USE)) 08 USE uh |↑Miho |Hobara.#4= s-bd |turn twd computer

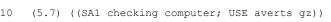
|lean fwd

09 SA1 = |Miho.#5|s-bd |lean fwd s-rh |to mouse s-rl |step









11 SA1 | (ah) it's  $\underline{r}$ oom four|tee:n.#6 s-bd |up

s-ll |step left

s-hd | turn left s-bh | twd keys



13 USE ↑yes ↓yes:.

14 (0.2) ((SA1 turns twd USE))

15 SA1 |thank you::\_#7

s-rh | key from lh, to USE

u-lh |to mask

16 USE | thank you:::\_#8

u-lh |to key







#7