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# NARRATIVE ACCOUNT

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## Exploring Understandings of Multilingualism in a Social Learning Space: A Duoethnographic Account

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As learning environments, self-access centers can provide opportunities for multilingual learning practices beyond the classroom. However, factors such as language policy or affective barriers can hinder efforts to foster such development. In this narrative account, two learning advisors in a self-access center at a Japanese university reflect on their endeavors to develop a space for multilingual learning. They employ duoethnography in order to juxtapose their experiences and their reflections on student interview data. Through this process, the authors reconsider the effects that definitions of multilingualism have on perceptions of such environments, while also reflecting on what kind of culture is necessary in multilingualism-supportive social learning spaces. The duoethnographic methodology facilitates the authors' realizations of how their beliefs and perceptions of the multilingual space evolved. This inquiry has implications for promoting multilingual learning, particularly in self-access settings, and illustrates the potential for duoethnography as a means for collaborative reflective practice in promoting multilingual learner development.

学習環境としてセルフアクセスセンターは教室外の多言語での学習実践の機会を提供している。しかしながら、言語ポリシーや情意的な障壁等が学習の発展を妨げる要因になり得る。本稿では、日本の大学のセルフアクセスセンターに勤務する2人のラーニングアドバイザーが、多言語学習空間の発展への自身らの奮励を省みる。学生からのインタビューのデータを取り入れながら、経験と内省を並列するためにデュオエスノグラフィーを用いる。この過程を通して、著者は多言語主義の定義が学習環境への認識に与える影響を再考するとともに、多言語を支援する社会的学習空間に必要な文化とは何か考察する。デュオエスノグラフィー手法によって、著者は自身らの多言語空間に関する信念や理解がどのように形作られてきたか、認識を深める。本稿では、とりわけセルフアクセスにおける多言語学習推進の実践的影響と、多言語学習者ディベロップメントを促す協同リフレクティブ・プラクティスの手段としてのデュオエスノグラフィーの可能性を論じる。

Como ambientes de aprendizagem, os centros de autoacesso podem fornecer oportunidades para prticas de aprendizagem multilngue para alm da sala de aula. No entanto, fatores como polticas lingusticas ou barreiras afetivas podem prejudicar os esforos para promover tais prticas. Neste relato narrativo, dois conselheiros languageiros em um centro de autoacesso em uma universidade japonesa refletem sobre seus esforos para promover um espao de aprendizagem multilngue. Eles empregam a duoetnografia para justapor suas experincias e reflexes sobre os dados gerados por meio de entrevistas com alunos. Por meio deste processo, os autores reconsideram os efeitos que as definies de multilinguismo tm nas percepes de tais ambientes, enquanto tambm refletem sobre que tipo de cultura necessria em espaos sociais de aprendizagem que apoiem o multilinguismo. A metodologia duoetnogrfica facilita as percepes dos autores de como suas crenas e percepes do espao multilngue evoluam. Esta investigao tem implicaes para a promoo da aprendizagem multilngue, particularmente em ambientes de auto-acesso, e ilustra o potencial da duoetnografia como um meio para a prtica reflexiva colaborativa na promoo do desenvolvimento do aluno multilngue.

### Keywords

duoethnography, self-access, translanguaging space, social learning, reflective practice

デュオエスノグラフィー, セルフアクセス, トランスランゲージング・スペース, 社会的学習, リフレクティブ・プラクティス  
duoetnografia, autoacesso, espao de translanguagem, aprendizagem social, prtica reflexiva

We, the authors, are interested in multilingualism in language learning due to our backgrounds: Isra as a lifelong multilingual, with parents who thrived speaking a second language, and Yuri as someone born in Japan, exposed to Japanese English education, and whose thoughts on multilingualism have been transforming since she started to work as an educator. While we have maintained hope that education in Japan can follow the global trend towards accepting multilingual education of languages besides English, research has revealed some disheartening truths. These include Kubota's (2018) noting of the dominance of American or British English in textbooks used in Japan to the exclusion of other varieties, and Yamazaki's (2013) findings that only 14% of Japanese secondary schools teach foreign languages other than English. As learning advisors in a self-access center at a Japanese university, we have felt that the self-access context might offer opportunities to support learners' multilingual understandings and practices, but we have wondered how we might provide such support while facing potential unseen barriers such as language policy or membership in either formal or informal communities. This narrative account documents our attempts to resolve these queries. Employing duoethnography as reflective practice, we juxtapose our reflections on interview data and our experiences, with the aim of gaining new understandings. These discoveries can inform our subsequent practices and have implications for multilingual support in language learning spaces.

We first introduce ourselves, as our backgrounds strongly affect our narrative, and then describe our context and specific key concepts that influenced our research. A description of our inquiry process follows. We next present our major themes and the reflective dialogues that comprise the core of our duoethnography, exploring different conceptualizations of multilingualism (and their effects) in our center, and questioning how we can establish a multilingual environment and culture. Finally, we conclude by summarizing our personal discoveries from the dialogues and suggesting how our account might benefit other multilingual learning environments or practitioners interested in duoethnography.

## Introducing Ourselves

### *Isra*

In my career, my beliefs regarding language use have gradually evolved. Before joining the Self-Access Learning Center (SALC), I had primarily taught in Japanese public schools as an Assistant Language Teacher (ALT). There, I often encountered the presumably unassailable principles that the L1 should be avoided in L2 learning and that native speakers were the ideal model for learners. For instance, I was advised by Japanese colleagues to avoid using Japanese in front of students. These notions were easy to internalize; they sounded reasonable and protected my position. Similarly, when I first learned about the SALC, the English-only policy at that time seemed sensible and corresponded with some of the SLA theory I learned about in graduate school; in contrast, the SALC's later multilingual policy felt as though it was potentially exempting students from having to use English. All along, however, I frequently noted, in schools and in the SALC, the learning that occurred through multilingual negotiation.

Additionally, as a Thai American (and learner of Japanese), I have instinctively used translanguaging practices (García & Wei, 2014) my entire life: At home, I naturally replied in English to my parents' Thai, to my friends' frequent amusement. Conversation with my siblings or other Thai Americans commonly included Thai words scattered among the English, when there was no equivalent word or out of convenience (e.g., "This shop is *phaeng* [expensive]!") Indeed, when I started reading about multilingualism and translanguaging, Canagarajah's (2011a, 2011b) description of multilingual users drawing from all available

linguistic resources and jumping between languages was immediately familiar. These practices, along with growing up in a bilingual, multicultural environment, shaped my perspective on the usage of multiple languages. Perceiving these languages as all contributing to my identity, rather than keeping them separate, is instinctive. Now, I question why we would limit learners' access to those resources and opportunities to define their identities. Contemplating these aspects of my background sparked my enthusiasm for how this inquiry could help our students, especially in using SALC facilities multilingually to serve their learning.

## Yuri

As an undergraduate learner of English, I benefited from the English-only policy in the SALC. The learning environment immersed me in English, which helped me develop my skills while living in Japan. Additionally, one of my English teachers in the first year introduced me to Kachru's three circles model of World Englishes (1985). It was an eye-opening experience for me, because I had thought English was only for people who speak it as their native or first language (the so-called inner circle). Understanding the diversity of Englishes had a positive impact on learning English together with my peers in the SALC. When I looked back on my experiences, the English-only policy in the center was a friendly reminder for me to communicate with anyone in the SALC without bias or prejudice.

In my career as an educator, I have encountered the dominance of native-speakerism in English education in Japan. I had to compare myself to native English-speaking teachers constantly while working in the same field. I had never had such feelings as a college student; learning English had been an exploration of myself to discover a new self. In contrast, I often feel pressure to use English professionally to prove my worth at work. In the SALC, my current workplace, I have seen many students with strong native-speakerist beliefs, such as "My goal is to be able to communicate with native speakers of English." They tend to think communicating with native speakers is the only way to improve their speaking. I often ask them in English, "English is not my first language, but do you still want to talk to me in English?" In many cases, they seem confused and cannot respond to my question. Conversations such as this have made me consider how I can support students' language learning, including challenging their beliefs, not only as a learning advisor, but also as a learner with a similar background as theirs. Moreover, in line with the recent multilingual turn for learner development, I believe it is important for the SALC to provide scaffolding for learners' multilingual learning. I hope this duoethnographic account, with our different backgrounds, can lead us in a new direction in order to design a multilingual space in the SALC.

## Context

The SALC at Kanda University of International Studies serves a student population of about 4,000, all studying a foreign language (students major in Chinese, English, Indonesian, Korean, Portuguese, Spanish, Thai, or Vietnamese) or international communication. The SALC opened in 2001 and currently occupies a purpose-built two-story facility.

Within the SALC there are several forms of support for learners' English use. The more structured forms of support are located on the all-English second floor and include the *conversation desk*, where students can book one-to-one sessions to practice speaking with an English lecturer, and the *Yellow Sofas*, where students can practice conversation with lecturers on duty and fellow students. These lecturers are usually, but not exclusively, native English speakers from countries in Kachru's (1985) inner circle. The first floor of the SALC has less structured support and is largely devoted to areas for students to work in groups. The SALC also has a team of learning advisors, including the authors, whose work mainly focuses on

nurturing students' autonomous learning, rather than language support.

Upon moving to the current facility in 2017, the SALC shifted from an English-only stance to a hybrid policy (see Figure 1). The first floor of the building is multilingual, in that all languages, including Japanese, may be used, while the second floor remains English-only. SALC advisors and staff mainly use English on both floors. Some reasons behind the change included emphasizing our support of learners of all languages, and making the facility more welcoming for students of all majors. Another benefit was the freedom to use other languages in support of target-language learning. In practice, however, many users appear to interpret the multilingual policy merely as permission to use Japanese while socializing. This tendency has made the multilingual area as much of a de facto student commons as it is a self-access center.



Figure 1. Language Policy in the SALC Brochure

It bears mentioning that the university has another self-access facility, the Multilingual Communication Center (MULC), with separate areas for each of the university's seven non-English language majors. Each area's design resembles traditional architecture in the language's country of origin. Although the MULC does support multiple languages, the explicit specialization and demarcation of the areas within mean it attracts a more specific user population than the SALC and users tend to stay in their own departments' respective areas. We had also anecdotally heard that in certain areas, while Japanese was allowed, English was discouraged. Even though the MULC was a multilingual center, we perceived the SALC's potential for encouraging actual multilingual practices on campus between students from all departments.

The situation in the SALC made us consider how SALC practitioners (i.e., learning advisors and administrative staff) could create a multilingual learning environment and support users in becoming multilingual learners. We ourselves, as advisors, often use both Japanese and English during advising sessions with individual learners. However, we hoped that we could encourage such practices on a larger scale. In order to create a supportive, comfortable environment, we established a space within the multilingual area, the English Speaking Practice Area (ESPA). In conceiving the space, we were inspired by Wei's (2011) concept of *translanguaging spaces*: social spaces where multilingual users may combine their histories, beliefs, and abilities "into one coordinated and meaningful performance, and [make] it into a lived experience" (p. 1223). Due to the multilingual policy, students can use Japanese or any other language in the ESPA; we hoped, however, that any other language use would be in support of their English speaking (and not, for instance, chatting completely in another language; for details, see Wongsarnpigoon & Imamura, 2020a).



After creating the ESPA, we soon realized that learners needed additional scaffolding to use the space for L2 speaking practice. As such, we started holding weekly drop-in conversation sessions, during which we, the authors, were present in the ESPA. Students could come and talk about any topic, using any linguistic resources in their repertoire. Although we have not explicitly discussed translanguaging during these sessions, we ourselves use and thus implicitly endorse translanguaging practices (mainly in English and Japanese). We also supported a small group of SALC *Peer Advisors* (PAs), student staff that advise fellow students, in holding a regular collaborative learning event known as TACO (short for “Talking Activity and Collaborate with Others”) Tuesday in the ESPA, where interested students could discuss relevant issues with their peers, such as time management or job hunting. Other events or student displays in the space were encouraged as well.

## Defining Terminology in Our Context

### *Translanguaging*

Yuri first encountered and developed an interest in translanguaging when she read Cenoz and Gorter (2015). They indicated the importance of how speakers use their linguistic repertoires in multilingual practices, including translanguaging, in research on multilingualism. García (2009) defined translanguaging as “multiple discursive practices in which bilinguals engage in order to make sense of their bilingual worlds” (p. 45), referring to how multilingual individuals can use any available linguistic resources, including their first or other known languages, in communication. Cenoz and Gorter’s (2015) work and the idea of translanguaging inspired Yuri to start researching multilingual use in the SALC.

These ideas helped us realize that translanguaging is part of our daily practices within the SALC; we use English, Japanese, and other languages to communicate with colleagues and students. We also translanguage in advising sessions, mainly when learners struggle to express themselves in English. As learning advisors focus on supporting learners through reflective dialogue, translanguaging often helps us build rapport and create a safe space for reflection. This mirrors the positive aspects of translanguaging practices noted by Adamson and Fujimoto-Adamson (2012) in their SALC.

Translanguaging also occurs between learners, for example in learner-led communities in the SALC, where learners naturally use translanguaging for communication (Thornton, 2020). Yuri wanted to know more about this peer-to-peer translanguaging; she and a community leader conducted observations in order to investigate translanguaging in the community (Kanai & Imamura, 2019). They found that the participants effectively used translanguaging to ensure smooth communication. Additionally, although Adamson and Fujimoto-Adamson (2012) described learners feeling guilty about not using their L2 exclusively, Kanai and Imamura’s participants did not express similar feelings towards translanguaging (Imamura, 2019). Expanding the research on multilingual spaces and learning in the SALC, we have recently investigated learners’ attitudes towards the use of multiple languages in language learning in the SALC’s multilingual areas (Wongsarnpigoon & Imamura, 2020a, 2020b).

### *Multilingual Turn in Self-Access*

Beyond the practices within our SALC, the broader multilingual turn (May, 2014) has also had effects on self-access contexts. We felt that language policy was one way to promote multilingual practices in such environments. Thornton (2020), however, in a study of user perceptions of language policy at two SALCs, found that while policy can provide an environment for target-language use, it could also affect students’ perceptions of

multilingual use. Learners at a center with an explicit “no Japanese” policy were more opposed to L1 use there, and Thornton suggested that users of a center with a more flexible stance were more open to discussion of translanguaging. While Thornton (2018) examined SALC practitioners’ preferences regarding language policy, there is little research on the application of SALC practitioners’ insights towards a multilingual policy and/or self-access space. We hope our ongoing research, including this account, will contribute to the continuing exploration of the multilingual turn in SALCs.

## Data Collection and Analysis

When Yuri approached Isra about co-writing this narrative account, she had become interested in duoethnography’s potential for building a narrative after reading research such as Hooper and Iijima (2019) on native-speakerism. Duoethnography is a qualitative research method in which “researchers of difference juxtapose their life histories to provide multiple understandings of the world” (Norris & Sawyer, 2012, p. 9). After further exploration, we became intrigued by how duoethnography emphasizes the emergence of new understandings through the co-examination of how our histories influenced us and led us here. In previous research (Wongsarnpigoon & Imamura, 2020b), we agreed that our presence might influence students, as well as spaces in the SALC. Therefore, we felt that duoethnography was ideal for investigating, through dialogue, how our views (as SALC practitioners) towards our multilingual learning space have developed over time.

As learning advisors, we support learners’ reflections through dialogue, so the duoethnographic approach was naturally appealing. We were interested in how, as reflective practice, it allowed us to “tell [our] own stories together, building community and collective voice as it emphasize[d] the value of dialogue and difference through inquiry” (Sawyer, 2020, p. xv). Furthermore, we were drawn to Lawrence and Lowe’s (2020) descriptions of duoethnography for reflection in English language teaching, particularly how the collaborative aspect offers new perspectives unavailable in solitary reflective practice. Thus, we felt that duoethnography could be a means for us to tackle our questions by juxtaposing our experiences.

Sawyer and Norris (2013) have suggested that duoethnographic dialogues can be spurred by artifacts (e.g., texts or images). We had already been conducting internal research on the ESPA space in hopes of improving it and the SALC environment. We had planned to interview students for that investigation but realized that the interview data was also a valuable artifact. Our dialogues would be not only about our own experiences, but also our reflections on the students’ perceptions.

In January 2020, we held semi-structured one-to-one interviews with four students that had participated in events in the ESPA and three SALC PAs that had co-organized the TACO Tuesday events. The interviews contained nine questions for the participants and 15 for the organizers, and lasted approximately 1 hour each. Interviews were mainly conducted in English, but both interviewers and interviewees used Japanese sometimes to clarify the questions and answers.

After transcribing the interviews, we focused on two student participants, “Ken” and “Hinako” (pseudonyms), as they were both active, regular event participants. We also used data from the three PAs (“Hiro,” “Kumi,” and “Akina”). We reread the transcripts separately to find relevant themes which stood out. Following Sawyer and Norris (2013), we used the interview data as artifacts to spark reflections. In several meetings held online via Zoom, we discussed and compared what we noticed in the interviews. The transcripts from these meetings served, in subsequent meetings, as texts upon which to further reflect, in a

recursive fashion. Following the principles of duoethnography (Norris & Sawyer, 2012; Sawyer & Norris, 2013), this was done with the aim of uncovering new perspectives on our previous reflection or discover themes hidden within. The meetings were recorded and transcribed, and we both analyzed the transcriptions in order to discover major themes that arose in our dialogues. This process provided a perspective that neither of us would have been able to find through individual analysis.

Through the reflective and analytical process, we hoped to gain insight into the following questions. As is common in duoethnography (Sawyer & Norris, 2013), the questions emerged during the dialogical process rather than starting out fully formed prior to our inquiry:

- How are multilingualism and the multilingual spaces perceived by the users?
- What would an effective multilingual learning environment be like?
- What is our role in establishing such an environment?

## ***Participants***

### *Student Participants*

Interviews with two regular participants of ESPA events provided a starting point for our discussions.

“Ken” was majoring in Chinese and had just finished his first year of university at the time of the interview. Ken had participated in TACO Tuesday events multiple times and had regularly met with learning advisors (other than us) and peer advisors. His peer advisor, the co-organizer of TACO Tuesday, recommended that he attend the event.

The second participant, “Hinako,” was a third-year student in the Indonesian department when Yuri interviewed her. She regularly joined the ESPA conversation gatherings we hosted. She had been frequently using other SALC services, such as the conversation desk, for improving her speaking skills.

### *Event Organizers*

Three SALC PAs also participated in our interviews. PAs are students that are particularly motivated, autonomous learners and that have undergone training to support peers in their language learning and college lives (Curry & Watkins, 2016). Their primary roles are conducting one-to-one advising sessions with fellow students and offering social learning opportunities in the SALC. They started organizing TACO Tuesday events in July 2019 in order to encourage students to practice speaking English in the ESPA, and to promote the peer advising service.

“Hiro,” a third-year student in the English Department, often used the SALC to socialize with friends, participate in events, and organize (along with fellow PA Akina) one of the learning communities, which are groups led by and comprised of learners who share their interests while using their target language(s) in the SALC (Mynard et al., 2020).

“Kumi” had already completed her B.A. in International Communication at the university in 2014 and was attending additional classes in order to become an English teacher. As an undergraduate, she had actively utilized the previous SALC with her friends. Because she came to the university only for attending classes, however, she did not use the SALC other than for organizing TACO Tuesday events or for conducting advising sessions.

“Akina” was a third-year student in the English Department. She organized a learning community with Hiro and enjoyed communicating with fellow students in the community. Among the three PAs we interviewed, Akina expressed the least confidence in her speaking



skills. She also admitted being uncomfortable speaking during TACO Tuesday events, saying, “The topics are difficult for me ... and I feel [a] little pressure to speak English.”

## Themes and Reflection

Several themes and topics emerged from the review of our transcripts. We retroactively adopted these themes as the questions we would ponder in this narrative account: how multilingualism and the multilingual spaces are perceived by students, what the nature of a more supportive multilingual environment might be, and what our role might be in creating it. The following dialogues resulted from our addressing those questions and are organized into themes: how students perceived multilingualism within our SALC, how we might counter potential effects of the language policies, and the creation of a multilingual environment.

For each theme, we first present a summary of relevant student interview data, followed by extracts from our dialogues, in which we reflected on both the students’ views and our own experiences. Following Sawyer and Norris’s (2013) principles of duoethnography, rather than reporting our dialogues completely verbatim as they happened, the narratives presented here have been edited and constructed from parts of various conversations.

### *Students’ Conceptualizations of Multilingualism*

There was little consensus in the students’ views on multilingual environments or the SALC’s multilingual space. When asked what the multilingual space meant to him, Ken did not directly emphasize language use: “We don’t care like races, or genders, or age, and of course, languages.... We can just talk [with] ... and respect each other.” There was some contradiction in Ken’s beliefs. While he sought collaboration with his peers, he did not associate with students who learned while socializing, such as users of the SALC’s first floor or of the MULC, which he disliked because “it [was] noisy from other languages’ area[s].” Additionally, he felt that even when Japanese could be used, English should be used as much as possible. This belief may be connected to his dissatisfaction with his classmates in English courses: “They speak Japanese in class ... that’s made me disappointed, [and] bored.”

Hinako viewed multilingual spaces as spaces where people could speak Japanese freely. That is, the SALC’s first floor was a multilingual space except for the ESPA, which she considered an “English space.” Interestingly, the MULC was also a multilingual space to her “because most people use Japanese.” Apparently it was not the availability of different languages but rather the freedom to use Japanese that affected her concept of “multilingual.” When Yuri implicitly broached the topic of translanguaging by asking her about using Japanese to support her use of other languages, Hinako related having done so, but stated, “Actually, I don’t want to use Japanese. But sometimes ... I can’t come up with the vocabulary that I want to say.” Like Ken, although she felt a multilingual environment allowed her to use Japanese, she preferred not to.

The PAs also exhibited varying views on multilingual spaces and even different levels of awareness of the space and language policies. Kumi seemed unaware of the reasons for the multilingual space and preferred to view the entire SALC as an English space: “For me, the SALC is only English. I know that the first floor is not only English but also other languages, but ... on the first floor and the second floor, I tried to use English only.” Her belief could be because she had only ever used the previous English-only SALC facility as an undergraduate student. Akina, when asked what “multilingual space” meant to her, hesitantly described a place for “all languages” without specifically referring to any spaces within the SALC: “A multilingual space is for practicing languages including English, Japanese, and other languages like Thai?” Hiro had a more nuanced view:

*The first floor [of the SALC] is a multilingual space can accept all the languages, like the MULC.... So I think the first floor is a multilingual space like Japanese, English, whatever is fine.... Maybe the SALC officially sets the rule, but ... actually the reality is a monolingual space. Almost [all] Japanese, sometimes English.*

Hiro had a clearer definition, although he, like other students, only mentioned Japanese and English. He also pointedly identified the discrepancy between the ideal and the reality of the SALC.

### Dialogue

**Isra** The students, even the PAs, didn't really have a concept of [a multilingual space]. Maybe they haven't thought about it, or they don't really know the reason for having it.

**Yuri** Especially Kumi, she didn't know much about the new SALC. Maybe she wasn't aware of the multilingual language policy.

**Isra** Akina just said, "The multilingual space is for all languages," but that's just kind of the literal meaning of multilingual, right? They don't really have an image of what that means. It's just *mojidōri* / 文字通り [the literal meaning].

**Yuri** *Tagengo ne. Ippai gengo.* / 多言語ね。いっぱい言語。[Multiple languages, right? Many languages.] [laughs] But Kumi's answer is quite interesting: [reading aloud] "People can enjoy language study, any language, and hearing their culture."

**Isra** So she did make the connection with language and culture.

The idea of this language–culture connection surfaced again later and became a key part of our further dialogues below. We next discussed Ken's opinions on language use in the space, which perhaps reflected a biased understanding of multilingualism. He had said, "If we are allowed to speak Japanese, of course, we are Japanese, so we tend to depend on speaking Japanese.... So as for multilingual spaces, we have to try not to use our mother language."

**Isra** We saw this idea in the students' understanding of multilingualism: how Ken believes we *can* use Japanese [on the first floor of the SALC], but we should speak English as much as possible. He was really against using Japanese at all.

**Yuri** That might come from his high school experience: He said his teacher only used English, and he thought it was pretty good, right? So, maybe he thinks when you speak English, or in English classes, you should use English only.

**Isra** Right. Ken said about his teacher, "He speaks English well, like [a] native speaker.... He's so cool, I want to become like him." We see that in schools and how they position those kinds of teachers, right? When I worked in [secondary] schools, sometimes the idea was, "*Daredare* [so-and-so] *Sensei* is a good teacher because their class is all in English, or because their English is so good."

I used to think like that when I started teaching. If any teachers taught classes entirely in English, it was impressive, and I'd think, "Maybe they're really innovative English teachers." That's not the reason that they were good teachers. Often they *were*, but it wasn't *because* of that.

**Yuri** Yeah. Also that's not multilingual.

**Isra** I think Ken's understanding of multilingualism is kind of like how the university or [the PR department] positions the first floor, and that affects what students believe multilingualism means. In promotional materials or on-campus tours, it's not,

“Practice using any language here,” it’s a reassurance: “Don’t worry, Japanese is okay here.” [To them] multilingualism means “you can use Japanese,” so when you compare it—Ah, so that’s it! If you think of multilingualism as “you can use Japanese,” and you believe “English only” is the best, then multilingualism becomes a step down from “English only,” right? It’s like you’re using Japanese as a crutch. It really *should* be like, “English only” is fine, but multilingualism is another option. It’s not that one is better than the other. But that’s how students have been taught to look at it.

**Yuri** Maybe. That’s how the university attracts students. Unlike other students, open campus events at KUIS had a big impact on me. When I set foot in the SALC for the first time, it made me feel like it was a perfect place to acquire English.

**Isra** That kind of presentation has an impact. Even we do it sometimes. When I show [first-year] classes around the SALC, I’ll say, “Okay, ready? We’re going to the second floor, so now it’s English only.” We’ve made that separation explicit. But it’s not that one is better, right?

**Yuri** Right. In open campus events for high school students, I normally introduce myself by saying, “I’m Japanese, so of course I can use Japanese, but on the second floor, let’s challenge ourselves.” So all of this made me think that we need to show our students a basic definition of multilingualism. But at the same time, maybe we need to create our own new definition in our center: What multilingualism means in our context.

**Isra** That’s a good point. Maybe that’s one reason why the first floor is just kind of undefined, because we don’t have a clear definition. If the policy is *chuutohanpa* / 中途半端 [half-baked], people will just think, “Okay, it means we can speak Japanese.”

**Yuri** Yeah! Suddenly, I just came up with one idea: Maybe we can show a brief definition of multilingualism in the ESPA. *De* [then], we can say “*Tagengo area to wa* [a multilingual area means] the space where you can do so-and-so ... so let’s experience it in the ESPA.”

It’s kind of like *fureai hiroba* / ふれあい広場 at the zoo, where you can actually interact with some small animals. So, the ESPA would be kind of a *fureai hiroba*, where students can try a multilingual setting.

**Isra** I understand what you mean. But we don’t want people to feel like, “I’m an animal on display.” [laughs] But we can think about what that definition is, and why they would want to experience that multilingual environment. Maybe we could raise awareness of translanguaging. Maybe they’re not aware how much they already use it in real life, or they need to see examples of a true multilingual environment.

**Yuri** Do you think we can say translanguaging practice is a communicative strategy? Baker (2006) says that, right? He and others argue that the use of L1 is effective in language learning.

**Isra** Right. When we talk about “translanguaging,” it’s related to the culture and identity of multilinguals (García & Wei, 2014)—people who grew up using multiple languages or use them in their everyday lives. That might be hard for students to internalize. But if we introduce it as a communicative strategy, maybe they’ll identify with it more. Maybe for some, multilingualism is so far removed that they haven’t thought about it. Ken used Hawaii as an example of a foreign language environment [where his teacher immersed himself]. But actually, Hawaii is really multilingual. So maybe showing examples of real multilingual people or environments.

**Yuri** Right. We need to raise awareness of multilingual settings. I think we can try two different approaches to introduce a multilingual policy: deductive and inductive. One is deciding the definition of the multilingual policy and providing some examples or

activities. The other might be providing some activities first, then elicit in learners an awareness of the multilingual policy. Maybe we can try the second one.

**Isra** Hiro mentioned these kind of things, like awareness-raising events and advertising what the ESPA is. I think it's a good idea because it goes well with these ideas, like the question of how we make the environment.

Through our dialogue, we had found that some of the difficulties in promoting multilingual use in the SALC were connected to users' understanding of the multilingual area. We realized our participants' understandings, in turn, were tied to how the dual language policies were presented, as well as by larger-scale beliefs supporting a monolingual, all-English ideal.

### **Countering Potential Biases**

In this second theme, we moved on to other inadvertent effects of the language policies on our participants' perception of SALC spaces and how we might counter such biases.

The PA Hiro realized the potential pressure that a language policy could cause in the ESPA: "[Students] may feel pressure..., so we have to emphasize that ESPA is not an English-only space, [but an] English and Japanese bilingual space." These risks of causing anxiety or violating students' autonomy are ideas we have struggled with in our SALC (e.g., in determining our non-directive stance on enforcing the language policy).

Akina was less concerned with the languages used by other students than with the kind of environment she sought for using English:

**Akina** Atmosphere is very important ... if the area is more strict, I couldn't get something in English.... Friendly is important.

**Yuri** How about the language use? You don't mind if they use Japanese or their first language?

**Akina** Yeah, it doesn't matter.

This belief may clarify Akina's unfavorable perceptions about the atmosphere in TACO Tuesday events: "The topic was a little difficult for me because I have to think more deeply." Serious discussion topics may have hampered her from feeling that the atmosphere was friendly.

### **Dialogue**

While discussing what environment might make students want to use English more, Yuri mentioned Akina's preferences for a welcoming environment, which prompted us to consider how attempts to support all users could affect perceptions of the area. Hiro had suggested that one possible way to attract users was to "set a Yellow Sofa at ESPA.... [English lecturers] can be in ESPA." We reacted to this idea by sharing our experiences of how native-speakerism can sometimes be manifested inconspicuously:

**Yuri** One of Hiro's ideas was to move one of the Yellow Sofas to the ESPA. But that's what we're concerned about: Students might think, "Oh, this is a 'beginner space,' and if you get some confidence, then you can go upstairs." It might send out that kind of message.

**Isra** We don't want there to be a hierarchy, right?



- Yuri** No, because that creates the idea that “only English” is better than translanguaging. It’s not like that. They are two different things. That kind of “English-only” ideology or belief creates, to an extent, a mindset like, “I can acquire English when I go abroad. If I’m fully in the English environment, I’ll be able to speak perfectly.”
- Isra** But that’s kind of the message that the university gives: If you’re in all-English classes and in this environment, you’re going to learn English better. In my first year here, I was talking with [a colleague] who was really disappointed that the English lecturers were almost all American or British. I didn’t totally agree then, because my views were influenced by a former professor of mine. The professor didn’t explicitly say teachers should be native speakers, but it was more like, “If the goal is for students to speak and communicate accurately, you want them to learn accurate English. And if the teacher doesn’t speak comprehensibly, then ...” I think you can fill in the blank. I had also just left my ALT job, where there was definitely that kind of native-speakerist bias, and I was still working through how I felt. But now I think [the colleague] had the right idea.
- Yuri** I totally agree with you. As a learner of English, I think the all-English environment is not a bad thing. But students, stakeholders, or even teachers, we need to accept more diversity. The all-English environment does not mean you can only communicate with native speakers of English, and we shouldn’t make a power balance between native and non-native speakers. When I was a student, sometimes my friends envied me because I often hung out with American friends. For me, if I can practice talking in English, anyone is fine, but some people have a strong preference for who they want to talk to. So, when they learn a language, they want to learn from a native speaker of their target language. I think many people believe in the notion of “one people, one language, one nation” (Kaplan & Baldauf, 1997, p. 201). People also judge whether they themselves are multilingual speakers or not based on how many languages they feel confident using.

Realizing the extent to which English-only beliefs could affect their perception of SALC spaces, we wanted to avoid inadvertently representing the multilingual space as a location for those who were not “good enough” for the English-only space. Thus, we again considered how to make the ESPA a supportive space without it feeling like a remedial space. We continue contemplating that environment in the following section.

### ***A Multilingual Environment***

The above ideas, improving the space and the features of a multilingual space or English-encouraging environment, brought us to our next theme, the multilingual environment. We reflected on what such an environment might actually look like, what its culture might be, and what our roles might be in its establishment. Some elements from the interviews, included below, identified some features of the environment and inspired our dialogues on the theme.

Ken appreciated the ESPA as a venue for collaboration with others and pursuing the camaraderie that he perceived among students from other departments: “I want [to] study with the people who are high [abilities] like English department ... they are making groups regardless of gender, so I’m so [envious]” (His allusion to gender may refer to the low number of male students in his department). Ken saw events such as TACO Tuesday as opportunities to interact, as “trying ... to participate in the group, more with fun.... Of course

we have to speak English, but ... for me it's more like practice for attend the group." The SALC was a place where Ken could not only use English, but also hone skills that he valued.

Hinako appreciated that the ESPA allowed her to interact with faculty. Although she actively communicated with peers in our ESPA conversation sessions, she asserted that a major reason for her attendance was to communicate with us. Compared to the 15-minute sessions at the conversation desk, she said, "In the ESPA, I can use English a lot. And it is not limited.... It's very ... *kichou na jikan* /貴重な時間 [a precious time]." The presence of people (us) with whom she wanted to talk was apparently predominant in her image of the ESPA environment.

In contrast with Ken and Hinako's desire to interact in English, in Akina's case, the atmosphere was crucial when using English. She preferred to continue using the ESPA for events "because [it] is a quite relaxing space," and she had highly valued "friendly environment[s]."

The students had described various features which they appreciated in the ESPA environment, and these ideas inspired our discussions. In particular, we considered their implications for the multilingual space and our role in creating and maintaining it.

### *Dialogue: Multilingual Culture*

Entering this excerpt, we had been pondering the culture of the MULC, the university's other multilingual center. This led Yuri to reflect on her initial concept behind the ESPA.

**Yuri** In the interview data, the image of ESPA came up. In Ken's interview, he talked about his image of multilingual cultures, including things like gender or age. I didn't really think about that when I created the ESPA. All I thought of then was only the language, but of course, languages have their own culture. That means a multilingual space also needs to have a multilingual culture.

**Isra** So when you first thought of the ESPA, you were trying to create a space just for facilitating language production?

**Yuri** Yeah, because all the data I got (Imamura, 2018) was about language use, and also anxiety. It was more about psychological factors that prevented students from using English on the first floor. So my focus was more on language use.

But Ken mentioned gender and races. You've told me before about the Thai space [in the MULC] and how the relationship between [the Thai professor] and her students is like family. So I thought maybe the Thai space creates that kind of environment, and it helps the students to feel safe, relaxed, or welcomed. So maybe, for the ESPA, we can also look at the kind of culture we create. That's also connected to what Akina mentioned: For her, whether or not a space is friendly is more important than the language used there. And that's a part of the space's culture, right? But I don't know how that kind of welcoming environment relates to the multilingual space.

**Isra** It does relate to anxiety, and therefore to language, right? When you say your original idea was making the ESPA for production, it reminds me of what you've told me before: When you were a student, basically it was the atmosphere of the old SALC which motivated you to use it?

**Yuri** Yeah. When I was a student, the SALC was a kind of space to challenge myself as a language learner. For some students, the environment was not really comfortable, but

I liked it. So thinking about the culture in the multilingual space, that made me think: What kind of culture is there in the English-only space?

**Isra** Because we can establish the ESPA's culture by contrasting with it, right? Do we have that kind of environment that represents a challenge for students now? The Yellow Sofas might.

**Yuri** It depends. Some students appreciate that challenging environment.

**Isra** Is that the kind of multilingual environment we want? One that's *not* challenging, but more like a welcoming space?

**Yuri** Yeah. Also, as you mentioned, in contrast with the English-only environment, maybe the multilingual space can accept more diversity?

**Isra** That would be ideal.

I like that you were thinking about the original concept behind the ESPA, because I was also wondering: Have our thoughts about it changed since we started? For me, when ESPA started, my idea was similar to yours, not necessarily a multilingual space, but an environment where students can go if they want to use English but they're not ready to go to the second floor. But as we've continued talking about this, I think it can be *more* than just a speaking area. Now we're thinking about how it can affect their thinking about language or multilingualism, or even native-speakerism, right?

This excerpt represented a significant realization for both of us. By considering the culture we preferred, we began actively discussing the potential for the ESPA beyond providing a space for speaking practice.

### *Dialogue: Making a Multilingual Environment*

**Yuri** So my question is, how can we make a multilingual environment in the ESPA?

**Isra** It could be something visual to set it apart, like signs or posters, without being superficial. But look at the MULC. It might seem superficial at first, but Wright (2019) wrote about this idea: The visual atmosphere of the Thai area sets the *initial* environment. It gets people in, but really what keeps them there is the community and the person-to-person interaction.

**Yuri** I thought about how one of the self-access centers we've visited displayed lots of student voices on the wall. Maybe we can get some student voices or messages about using different languages or the space itself, and we can display their messages in the ESPA, maybe in different languages. That might create the ESPA's culture or identity.

**Isra** Right. That's one thing we both noticed about [other centers], is that you can see students' voices and personalities.

Previously, you mentioned that when you were a student, the look of the SALC represented a challenge for you.

**Yuri** A challenge in a good way. Not only people, but also the space itself motivated me. The furniture was kind of Western-style, not like a typical classroom in Japan, and also many resources were imported from other countries. That kind of environment motivated me to use English, as well. Also, I could meet different people, like teachers, learning advisors, and my friends whenever I went there. I used the SALC to interact with people in English, and that was my motivation to continue learning English and using the SALC.

**Isra** So actually, it *was* people, also! People *were* important.

These dialogues, along with Yuri's reflection, helped us realize that addressing physical features was not the only measure we had to consider. Our reflections on both the interview data and Yuri's experiences showed that people were also a necessary factor in establishing the environment we sought.

## Discussion and Conclusion

In this narrative, we have examined these issues: how our students saw multilingualism and the multilingual spaces, what kind of multilingual learning environment was desirable, and our roles in establishing this environment. Evincing the benefits of duoethnography, the dialogic process of co-constructing this narrative revealed several themes, which provided each of us new understandings about the issues we had pondered. We first each present especially revelations, before moving on to general discussion of our themes and next steps.

### *Isra*

Something particularly compelling to me was our realization that within our SALC and also the university, there is no one clear definition of "multilingualism." SALC practitioners, students, administration, and stakeholders draw from different definitions or lack one at all. In turn, although our hybrid policy was intended to be more inclusive, this vagueness may have contributed to an inadvertent hierarchy between the spaces in the SALC and actually discouraged multilingual use among students. Also meaningful was how through contrasting my experiences with Yuri's, I noticed the change in my perceptions of the ESPA. Before this inquiry, my beliefs mirrored the way in which our language policy had reinforced monolingual biases: Using the all-English space was something students should strive for, and if they could not, the first floor was a preliminary step. Now, though, I see the potential of the ESPA as its own unique space, not just as an elementary version of other ones.

### *Yuri*

Throughout this duoethnographic account, I noticed my thoughts towards multilingualism in the SALC have evolved greatly. My original purpose for creating the ESPA was to support students who lacked the confidence to use the English-only area. However, I started questioning the unexpected and complex power balance between English-only and multilingual spaces and believing that the multilingual space should be free from such hierarchy between languages. Besides, the Japanese term 多言語主義 / *tagengoshugi* [multilingualism] might convey the message that the knowledge of multiple languages is superior because of the meaning of *-shugi* [-ism] in Japanese. It might encourage another type of monolingualism in multiple languages. Perhaps we should stop using the terms "multilingualism" and "*tangegoshugi*" to avoid confusion and find other ways to encourage multilingual practices in our SALC.

## *Realizations and Implications*

In writing this account, we each came to personally meaningful realizations and noticed individual changes in ourselves. Other shared discoveries, however, also arose. Through this duoethnography, we discovered an identity for the ESPA, beyond being a place for students lacking the confidence to use the English-only area. It can be a venue for actual multilingual use and collaboration between the space's users—among students, but also between students and faculty. Similarly, in our discussions and attempts to improve the ESPA as a multilingual space, we initially focused on physical aspects such as furniture layout, decor, or



conversation-starting tools. We realized, however, that what mattered more was a welcoming culture spread through human support. Our participants valued various factors in a learning environment: language (Hinako), collaboration (Ken), and friendliness (Akina). Such factors are all key in creating the kind of culture we are seeking. As we each realized, our definitions (and those used in our center) of “multilingualism” and a multilingual culture should account for more than just named languages as sociopolitical or linguistic constructs. This evolution in our understandings will help us as we continue improving the ESPA and the SALC environment.

The coronavirus pandemic disrupted face-to-face interactions in the SALC during the 2020–21 academic year, but the ESPA events continued online, through Zoom. While we only address the physical SALC space in this account, we continued our reflective discussions in order to compare our experiences and perceptions of the online environment. Although we lack the space to present these later dialogues, they allowed us to contrast our perspectives with those on the physical SALC and in doing so, provided valuable deeper insight. We hope to continue developing our duoethnography, covering both the virtual and physical spaces.

Our themes here are merely the understandings which we took away from our dialogues and are not meant to be prescriptive conclusions. Norris and Sawyer (2012) stress that duoethnographies’ readers are “future partner[s] in inquiry, not [recipients] of newfound wisdom” (p. 22). While our reflections stem from our specific context, we hope that readers have gained their own insights, which are just as meaningful as ours.

Still, we offer some recommendations for practice in similar contexts. First, as we realized, any language policy and its presentation should include clear definitions and rationale, in order to ensure that all parties understand the situation. We also hope that we have demonstrated the benefits of examining the effects of language policy on learning environments or user perceptions. Next, those interested in supporting multilingual development in learners can also benefit from reflection on the culture necessary for such development in a particular context. Finally, as duoethnography is still developing as a means of inquiry, we did not know of many other similar inquiries using the methodology in this way. We hope that readers are inspired by duoethnography’s potential for engaging in reflective practice while incorporating qualitative data.

Although much remains uncertain as we return after the pandemic, we will continue investigating the issues discussed here. We may have unresolved questions, but the gradual reopening of facilities can provide opportunities to open our discussions to others and consider meaningful measures we can take. While there are lingering issues about the recognition of the multilingual turn in our context, our inquiry helped us envision the potential position of the SALC and ESPA in affecting learners’ multilingual practice and consequently the part we can play. We conclude with this attempt to encapsulate our roles in the multilingual space:

**Yuri** Do you think we can call ourselves “curators”?

**Isra** Are we curators of the multilingual space? Or are we managing it?

**Yuri** For me, “managing” implies a power relationship.

**Isra** So it’s not what you want. If you think of “curating” a museum or exhibit, then we would be picking and choosing what goes in there, right? Is it like being a gardener? [*laughing*] Like we’re cultivating a multilingual environment? Like we’re watering—

**Yuri** I like the word “gardener.” *Niwashi-tte koto desho* / 庭師ってことでしょ?  
[A gardener, right?] I like it!

**Isra** And the multilingual users are like our flowers. Until they bloom—

**Yuri** We never know what kind of flowers that we’re raising.

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## Review Process

This paper was open-reviewed by Donna Fujimoto, Tanya McCarthy, and Stacey Vye. (Contributors have the option of open or blind review.)

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