

Speech Contests and Identities: Dialogic Exchanges in Identity Formation of Filipino High School Students in Osaka, Japan

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According to the 2022 Japan Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) preliminary report about the acceptance status of children who need Japanese instruction, there are about 58,353 children and students nationwide who need Japanese language instruction. Some schools in Osaka Prefecture offer mother tongue instruction because it was found out that some children use their native language for thinking and it is necessary to enhance their native language for learning.

This paper examines the participation of Filipinos with multicultural background in Japan in an Osaka-wide speech contest wherein presentations are conducted in the mother tongue and heritage language of the student. The contest is held twice yearly and participated by schools in Osaka that accept students in need of Japanese language support. This paper has three objectives. First, to identify the themes presented in the contest. Second, to look at the topics in relation to life events of the participants. And lastly, to identify the actors involved in defining “Filipino roots.”

To fulfill the objectives, I examined the speech scripts of contestants with “Filipino roots” from 2018 to 2020. I conducted interviews with students who joined. I watched the contest as a guest in 2018 and 2019. In 2021, I was appointed to be in-charge of a sophomore class in Mother Tongue and Heritage Language in one of the prefectural high schools. I sat on the preliminary auditions and my opinions were sought by other teachers on my choice of students to send to the contest and later, I conducted speech training to Filipinos with mixed roots who were chosen by the school committee to represent the high school.

Results of the study show that individuals with Filipino roots in Japan weave their own experiences with people around them and these individuals’ experiences. The speech contest can be viewed as a dialogic exchange, therefore it is “multi-voiced.” While each contestant has their own framing about being an individual with “roots from outside of Japan,” their speech scripts and performance are produced in relation to other individuals.