

**Performing “the Other” or Constructing Agency of Speech? :
Effects of Code-Switching (English/Japanese) and Style-Shifting
on Actors, Audience, and the Plot**

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We all learn second languages through observation, mimicry, and repetition. Actors also memorise lines and movements through practice. Through this seemingly un-creative and sometimes painful process of repetition language learners/actors can experience the growth (or loss) of a sense of agency in the roles they perform. This can be an empowering experience: an eye- (or “I”-) opening realisation that the language of “others” has become their own.

Based on my personal experience of participating in intercultural (bilingual) experimental theatre projects as a Japanese language advisor, I would like to examine the process through which speaking agency is constructed (or breaks down) through shifting between languages (English/Japanese) and styles (stylised archaism/modern colloquialism), and the audience’s reactions to these shifts. I will also explore how this newly constructed agency in its turn can impact on the development of open-ended plots.

The main material for this study comes from *Opium*, a play developed through a workshop at a small Kaitaisha studio in Tokyo in 1996. The play was subsequently performed in theatres in Seattle, Tokyo, and Kanazawa over the next year, with changes to various theatrical components, including to the proportion of English to Japanese language, to the plot, and to the cast. One of the three main actors in the play was a native English speaker who was studying Japanese as a second language.

Theatre can be an ideal medium for learners/actors to test their linguistic and cultural knowledge and eventually incorporate that knowledge as a new element of their selfhood. I hope this study will develop materials that will enable theatre to be used in Japanese as a second language classes.