

CONSUMING ENGLISH: AN EIKAIWA EXPERIENCE OF CULTURAL ‘OTHERNESS’

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Abstract

Language education occupies an important position in Japan. This article reports on cultural *otherness* constructed in the narratives of 24 eikaiwa (English conversation school) students. Learning eikaiwa creates symbolism of *otherness* and *elsewhereness* to achieve *authenticity* for the hedonic consumption experience. The participants provided descriptions of eikaiwa teachers. The constructed image of otherness is in accordance with the idealised images of desirable foreign teachers and their capacity deliver the *real* English language. *Otherness* highlights the imagined space of *elsewhereness* which evoked experiences of more desirable places. Participants equate *elsewhereness* as an *open* and *free* space for the formation of teacher-learner friendships. The elements of fantasy and escapism involved in the hedonic consumption of the eikaiwa experience are discussed and the practical and symbolical implications created by the desire for cultural *otherness* are reflected.

Introduction

English education in school is compulsory from elementary school to university in Japan (Lowe, 2015) and is largely focused on achievement in university entrance exams (Butler & Iino, 2005). This focus results in very few people being able to speak after years of learning the language (Hiramoto, 2013; Hosack, 2013). Furthermore, English-language education is considered as weak in Japan (Wilkinson, 2015) with Japanese English-language teachers themselves perceiving their skills to be deficient (Nishino & Watanabe, 2008). As English proficiency is uncommon within the Japanese population, the ability to converse well in English may be seen as a commodity that confers on its user a certain degree of prestige (Kouritzin, Renaud & Piquemal, 2009; Hiramoto, 2013).

English in Japan has largely been influenced by the United States (Shimizu, 2010), leading to a strong association between English and the West, in particular, American culture (Sullivan & Schatz, 2009). The foreign artefacts in the form of Western-style food, movies, music, theme parks etc., are ubiquitous in Japan. They cater to people who want to experience foreign cultures (Kitamura, 2006) and create an image of a typical ‘foreigner’ as a white, English-speaking North American (Kubota & MacKay, 2009; Kobayashi, 2010). In fact, people from other Asian countries make up more than 80% of the total foreign population in Japan (Statistics Bureau Japan, 2016). Despite these statistics the Japanese idea of internationalism is strongly associated with English

and Westernisation (Matsuura, Chiba & Hildebrandt, 2001). This may be a result of an education system that places English almost exclusively in the context of British and American culture (Wilkinson, 2015). According to Kubota and MacKay (2009) English is often promoted in Japan as the only foreign language worth learning, which is part of a generalised idealisation of Western culture in adult learners of English (Kobayashi, 2010; Bailey, 2006; Kubota, 2011a). European looking people are considered the ideal ‘strangers’ and Western English speakers are the ideal ‘other’ group (Kobayashi, 2010).

Eikaiwa

An *eikaiwa* (英会話) is a type of English school, commonly referred to as an ‘English conversation school’ that focuses on a communicative approach to learning English (Sergeant, 2005). The first character 英 (*ei*) refers to English, the second 会 (*kai*) means ‘meet’, whereas the third character 話 (*wa*) means ‘speak’ (Collins, 2010). Essentially ‘eikaiwa’ means coming together to speak English. Eikaiwa classes normally operate outside the formal education system, and the teaching methods are often about students speaking English in an informal atmosphere. Classes rarely involve the assessment of proficiency using conventional measures such as tests or the enforcement of attendance rules. There are many different types of eikaiwa, some of them being well-known schools with many branches. They commonly occupy small classrooms (Bailey 2006). Also, there are ‘private’ lessons, operating from homes and cafes, for cash in hand. People of all ages and social groups go to eikaiwa (Sergeant, 2005) including students, housewives and retirees (Bailey 2006).

The eikaiwa teachers are typically from countries that commonly referred to as ‘inner-circle countries’, meaning the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and Ireland (Kachru 2006; Butler & Iino, 2005) where English is spoken as a native language. Some organisations employ Japanese bilingual teachers as well. Commonly, a bachelor’s degree in any discipline is the standard qualification for eikaiwa employment, and applicants are expected to be “young, open-minded and adventurous individuals rather than experienced second- or foreign-language teachers” (Nuske, 2014 p.108). Nuske provided an example of AEON’s webpage, which stated that “English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching experiences are very helpful, but not mandatory” (p. 108). Eikaiwa advertisements often present “desirable characteristics of the successful English teacher ... in terms of gender, race, and looks” (Piller & Takahashi, 2006, p. 65).

Official statistics indicate that approximately three quarters of Japanese people engaged in English education are motivated by a need for ‘self-improvement’ (Statistics Bureau Japan, 2016). However, research indicated that the majority of eikaiwa students make limited progress in English-speaking proficiency (Kubota, 2011a) and rarely use English outside the school environment (Tanaka & Ellis, 2003). Progress in English is not the main purpose for the majority of adults who go to eikaiwa. Kubota, (2011a) proposed that learning English as a foreign language can be a form of leisure consumption. Leisure activities are built on consuming goods and services offered for fulfilment, enjoyment, and pleasure.

Eikaiwa is a lucrative industry (Kubota, 2011a; Nagamoto, 2013; Hosack, 2013) with over 30,000 full and part-time teachers. Many of these teachers are foreigners,

yet there is little academic attention paid to eikaiwa teachers and students (Seargeant, 2005; Bailey, 2007). Eikaiwa is a service provider where people are its main asset, especially when eikaiwa is primarily marketed as learning English to make foreign English speaking friends (Bailey, 2006). Eikaiwa is a service and unlike physical products, services cannot be separated from the people that are performing the service (Solomon, Stuart & Marshall, 2012). It is the intangibility of services that make it difficult to understand how the service is perceived. Thus understanding how students perceive their teachers and their classroom environment are critical in maintaining their attractiveness and the market. The objective of this study is to provide qualitative insights into the factors influencing students' consumption experience, specifically the perceptions of the eikaiwa teachers, the teaching environment and teacher-learner relationships. The research questions were as follows:

- What description do eikaiwa adult students use to construct notions of the eikaiwa teachers?
- How the descriptions used in constructing the perceptions of learner-teacher relationships?
- How do these constructions influence practice and subjectivity in the context of the eikaiwa setting in which they operate?

Methods

The sample consisted of 24 eikaiwa students aged between 27 to 73 years. There were 87.5% female and 12.5% male. The participants were selected based on the following criteria: have an intermediate or advanced level of spoken English, are currently enrolled in classes at eikaiwa or have been within the last two years, and are currently being taught or have been taught by a foreign English teacher.

A qualitative in-depth interview strategy was adopted to allow a confidential and comfortable environment for the discussion of teacher-learner relationships. The semi-structured interview schedule consisted of questions centred on three main areas: Descriptions of eikaiwa teachers, social events for students, and teacher-learner relationships. Examples of the main questions included:

- What is an eikaiwa teacher?
- How is an eikaiwa teacher different from a university or school teacher?
- How would an eikaiwa class be different with a Japanese teacher?
- How important are these events outside of the class?

The questions allowed the researchers to understand the socially constructed eikaiwa experience. The second author is a New Zealander who conducted all the interviews in English. The participants were informed that the study was on eikaiwa schools. After the consent and confidentiality agreements have been gained, the interview took place and lasted between 20-60 minutes. The interviews were recorded on an electronic audio recording device. To maintain anonymity, a random letter was assigned to each student, and this letter is used in parenthesis after students' direct quotes.

An inductive thematic analysis approach was employed to identify the themes emerged from the data. For this study, a realist method highlighting the experiences, meanings and realities of the participants was used (Clarke & Braun, 2014). First the researchers familiarized themselves with the data by reading and rereading the transcribed interviews. This was followed by a process of coding where codes were assigned to different recurring ideas mentioned and discussed by the participants. Codes consisting of words and phrases were grouped together to form the basis for different themes. Initial themes were reviewed and modified by checking the transcripts again and modifying some codes and moving them to different themes. The next step was to review the themes against the coded extracts and categories as well as the entire data set to generate a thematic map that visually demonstrated how the themes related to each other. The final step was to define and name each theme for the purposes of identifying the results that followed. Member-checking between the two researchers assisted the robustness of the analysed data findings.

Results

Two central themes of *otherness* and *elsewhereness* emerged from the data. The participants were asked to describe the eikaiwa teachers. They emphasised the differences between Japanese and foreign teachers. Moreover, the participants often referred to these two eikaiwa teachers as having different roles where they do different things in their English lessons: ‘Japanese teachers are good at explaining grammar...’ [H]; ‘English native speakers teach conversation’ [W]. Participant J explained ‘...for people who study English for exams, I think they should learn from Japanese teachers as they know how to pass tests’ [J]. The participants believed that the Japanese eikaiwa teachers were stricter [WA] and more forceful than the foreign teachers [IZ] when encouraging student participation. Japanese teachers tend to follow the rules and guidelines of the institution where they work [WY]. The Japanese teachers were portrayed as boring [C] and they are to be unable to take the lesson out of the textbook [PC]. The participant described Japanese teachers as ‘... not friendly’ [L] and the classroom atmosphere is not fun or relaxing [BA].

Participants uniformly expressed their preference for the foreign teachers as they were perceived to be more interesting [PRTV]. One participant remarked ‘we feel more secure if the English teacher is a native speaker, not Japanese’ [B]. The desire for ‘otherness’ in the foreign teachers was expressed in contrast to the ‘sameness’ of the Japanese teachers and Japanese people. They professed that Japanese people share many similarities, where the lives of individuals do not differ greatly from each other: ‘we Japanese think our lives are very...monotonous...similar, not so different from each other’ [B]. The participants perceived that foreign teachers have the capacity to create an imagined space of ‘elsewhereness’ that is different from their everyday life: ‘...experiences that, how can I explain, not normal situations in daily life in Japan’ [S]. The exotic atmosphere was described as a ‘door to learn foreign languages’ [R]. This gave the participants ‘...a different mood...’ [K] and ‘...speaking with them, my world expands. It’s more valuable for me than just speaking English and having a conversation’ [Q]. Careful analysis of the data revealed that otherness and elsewhereness impacted

on the participants' perceptions of the eikaiwa experience, specifically, the constructed images of the authentic English-speaking foreigner, the English atmosphere and the desire for teacher-learner friendship. These aspects are elucidated next.

The authentic foreigner

According to the participants, there were two types of foreign teachers: the native and non-native English speakers. In describing the foreign eikaiwa teachers, the participants emphasised their idea of what is *real* and that 'Japanese people like the real thing' [V]. The importance of this concept was highlighted as the participants wanted to be taught the real English. They believed that native-English speakers had the authentic English. They elaborated that '...a native-English-speaking teacher is more real' [V] and 'Japanese tend to think English is supposed to be taught by English native speakers' [B]. Interestingly, a foreign teacher is defined as someone who is completely different from a Japanese person. This includes not only the teacher's cultural background but also his or her appearance and name: 'If the teacher looks Japanese, I feel they are just Japanese' [S] and '...if they have a Japanese name and they are a Japanese speaker, it is not good' [X]. Participant B explained that '...of course, if a Japanese person is born in England or the US or somewhere, their English may be perfect. But, if they look Japanese, we don't feel special' [B]. Here the feeling of being 'special' is linked with having foreigners for teachers.

Speaking English to a Japanese teacher in the classroom was seen as unnatural: 'I don't want to talk with Japanese people in English, you know... there's something wrong with that' [X]. Participant Q described this awkwardness as the result of two Japanese people speaking in English where both people think in Japanese but use English words: 'That is not an English conversation because it becomes a Japanese conversation in our mind, speaking in English but thinking in a Japanese way' [Q]. For some participants, it is simply undesirable: 'Sometimes we feel stupid when we talk to Japanese teachers...[R], and the presence of a Japanese teacher was seen as depriving students of 'a chance to listen to natural English' [J]; 'I don't want to speak English with Japanese people' [F].

The nationality of the teachers was perceived to be essential as they to have a good command of the 'real' English. The person who has grown up in English-speaking countries is seen as a legitimate source of English: '...a real English speaker, yeah, that's all, they are real. Not an Asian or an Italian or a Russian eikaiwa teacher' [Q]. As native speakers they were perceived as knowing the natural English thus, students felt that 'a native speaker is best' [Q], '...so, they speak perfect English' [O]. They were seen as capable of correcting and advising students on linguistic details: 'Of course, from the foreign teacher you can learn how to speak, how to pronounce, how to put the stress, phrases that are really natural phrases' [O].

Furthermore, native speakers were seen as possessing the ability to deliver flawless English: 'They would be good with pronunciation: they know much more about English' [C]; 'the precise usage' [I]; 'clean, beautiful English' [F]; and 'real living English' [I]. Thus, participants expressed that there was no need to question their ability or their knowledge of English, which is presumed to exceed that of non-native speakers:

'I always believe native speakers more than Japanese' [W], so there is no reason to judge their English, so they can teach' [J]. When the teacher was a native-English speaker, the students were more motivated and focused in class: 'I feel like it's more real. Because if it feels more real, we can concentrate more in the class. So that thing is very important' [S]. The students believed that they were making progress with their learning: 'I feel more achievement than [when] taking class with a Japanese teacher' [A].

The participants talked about learning about new cultures from around the world and the importance of different teachers introducing their own cultures. Several participants claimed that they do not mind where the teacher is from, provided that they are from an inner-circle country [LF]; 'The teacher should be from the US, or Canada, or New Zealand' [L]. Participants were reluctant in accepting the idea of having a non-native speaker as the teacher. The reason provided was that non-native speakers do not have perfect English, because English is a second language for them [W]. As a participant elaborated, 'Sometimes... of course, they make mistakes, so I cannot believe them' [F]. English speakers from other Asian countries are be seen as different from 'native speakers': 'If a teacher is someone who is from, like, Malaysia or the Philippines... even if they can speak English perfectly, the feeling is a little bit different' [S]; 'If someone is from Singapore, their mother tongue is English but people [Japanese students] wonder if it's ok or not. I don't think it's the same as a native speaker' [F].

To the participants, the importance of a foreign teacher goes beyond English instruction, they recognised that language is associated with culture [UOJQG]: '[When] learning English, we would like to know more than just words' [U]. Participant W explained that 'I can learn new things because they are from different backgrounds' [W]; 'They are people who give us a lot of information' [F]. Participant Q observed that 'my image is the black ship in the Meiji period in Japan; we say *kurofune*. They bring me new things' [Q]. This participant is referring to the arrival of the American navy ships in the middle of the 19th century, demanding that Japan allow international trade. This marked the end of a 250-year period of isolation and the start of dramatic changes and rapid industrialisation that led to an influx of new ideas in Japan. The participants also conveyed a general interest in the teachers' personal lives [GCBT]: 'We want to look into their life before they came to Japan' [B]; 'We want to know what they think and how they think, what they like and how they spend their life, what kind of food they eat' [B]; 'I can't image foreign people's background and culture, so it's more interesting for me' [T]. The expression of 'otherness' is a process in marking out the boundary of the native-English teachers and the English language.

The English atmosphere

In describing about the eikaiwa experience, many participants made references to ideas of 'elsewhereness' in which the classroom space is different from their usual everyday life: 'the eikaiwa school is my different world, another place to live' [Q]. Eikaiwa may be seen as a place separate from everyday worries: 'If we talk to Japanese friends, we sympathise with each other; we tend to be pessimistic. There is no exit... we need a change and, for example, if we talk to foreign teachers, it's a bit different; we could feel a bit easier' [B] and '...we want to have some other environment for our mental health' [B]. Another participant explained that 'I think the classroom is different from the real

world; we can practise, we can do role plays, and we can share our opinions. That's why we can try anything' [H]. Participant K reflected, 'I think language has its own power and atmosphere... I change my personality when I speak English' [K].

The presence of the foreigner teachers enhanced the experience of elsewhere-ness and was regarded as an important part of their eikaiwa experience: 'We think, we feel we are in another country; that's why being taught by a foreigner is important' [B]. For some participants this was only opportunity to be elsewhere: 'I don't have a lot of money so I can't go to many countries [YA]; 'I don't have the experience to go abroad to study English, so when I speak English with a foreign teacher, I can feel like I am in another country' [A]. The elsewhere-ness was maintained by viewing the Japanese language as not belonging in communication with the foreign teachers: 'You can't communicate in Japanese with them [D].

The eikaiwa class is commonly referred to as a place where social interaction happens. However, the participants stated that Japanese people were less inclined to engage in small talk [H]. Thus sharing personal details may be seen as unusual in Japan [HV]: 'With other Japanese, I don't want to let out my private [information] too much. I think that is because of the culture' [V]. The participants believed that the idea of sameness is important in Japanese culture: 'Japanese education teaches us we should be the same. We have to be the same' [J]. The importance of being the same with other people was explained by the participants as influencing how they communicated with other Japanese people [JAHB]: 'Sometimes it's difficult to say our opinion' [H]. Consequently, the participants believed that 'Japanese people never say things directly' [Y] and 'don't talk really deeply' [K].

The participants identified the opportunity to converse with foreigners as one of the benefits of going to eikaiwa: 'I think that for most of the students, the main purpose is conversing with foreign people' [C]. They wanted to express their ideas, wants and feelings in the class [UGN]: 'I'd like to have more conversations, to have more vocabulary and grammar to express my feelings' [G]. Similarly, one participant declared that 'I expect to express my opinion or my idea to the foreign teacher' [N]. The desire for self-expression was linked with the idea that foreigners are in general more open, free and outgoing than Japanese people [RKB]: 'They are free. I don't know if they actually are but that is my image of foreign teachers [B]; 'The atmosphere is very real, real and free' [Q]. Participant R believed that 'we think foreign people tend to be outgoing and open minded' [R]. With these images, the participants hoped that they too could be more outgoing and open: 'Maybe the mind feels open when we talk to foreign people; everything is ok... that's why when we talk to them, maybe we can be more outgoing' [R].

The friendly foreign eikaiwa teacher was identified as an essential element in creating a fun atmosphere for the students' enjoyment [CAHS]. In general, foreign teachers were described as friendly and outgoing [ADRG CZ]: 'Mmm. friendly, cheerful, easy going' [K] and 'most of them are very sociable' [C]. One participant stated that 'I've never met a teacher who is not friendly' [G]. There was a strong emphasis on a fun atmosphere with a foreign teacher: 'It's just my image that it's more fun if the eikaiwa teacher is a foreign English teacher' [S]. The friendly foreign teacher

also helped in creating comfortable and relaxing learning environment: ‘Speaking with the friendly teacher makes me more relaxed and takes me to a happier place, a more open space [Q], ‘They’re friendly to the students. I can feel very comfortable’ [D].

The participants pursued a fun and enjoyable experience with English [EFUC]. Participant I observed that ‘They just don’t like English as a subject to study’ [I]. Likewise, the participants explained that ‘I think most of us would like to enjoy the atmosphere rather than study’ [C] and ‘having fun is an important part of it’ [U]. The participants emphasised the fun component as the condition for continuing with eikaiwa class: ‘If the classes are not fun, maybe I wouldn’t want to go anymore’ [S]. Many participants described eikaiwa experience as a social experience that went beyond the educational context of the classroom. Different reasons were mentioned as to why people go to eikaiwa. These included a desire to meet different people outside of one’s community, to make friends and to socialise with the teachers [BVEY]. School events were seen as extra benefits of eikaiwa and perceived as an opportunity to ‘hang out’ with the teachers as opposed to being students in a classroom: ‘The reason why I like my school is that the students can go out with our teachers, for lunch, or for a drink’ [E], ‘We can communicate more casually. It’s easy to communicate if there is alcohol at the party, it’s easier to communicate’ [S].

The foreign teacher as friend

The participants mostly agreed that the friendship formed with the teachers made the eikaiwa experience enjoyable. Several participants explained that they wanted the foreign teacher to be a friend as well as their teacher [BPHFA]. The participants shared their private stories with teachers in the classroom environment. The teacher-student interaction was not described as a simple exchange of words and ideas but as exchanging feelings between people: ‘We share feelings... so, it’s more like a friend than a teacher’ [G]; ‘I want them to be like a friend’ [A]. The students used English learning as a vehicle to make friends with the foreign teachers. Participant P expressed the nature of friendship that she desired with her teacher: ‘to be friends, like in real life’ [P]. More importantly, they desired a relationship of emotional ‘closeness’ with the foreign teachers [VRHTU]: ‘I feel close with them, I would like to be close... I am interested in them’ [T]. The foreign teachers are also expected to contribute to the discussion by bringing their own personal experiences and stories to the class: ‘I think we – students and instructors – share some information, more personal information... they need to talk about their personal things’ [H]. As participant H implied, in some cases talking about each other can be the main class material: ‘Maybe we can enjoy talking closely. More small talk, being more close and communication – that is the main part of the lesson’ [H].

Several participants reported that they can be more open with foreign teachers [VLJK]. Participant V stated simply ‘I think I can be more open with foreign English teachers’ [V]. The cultural differences have been cited for the openness with foreign teachers [TF] and the lack of similarity was seen as an advantage because comparison between the foreign teachers and Japanese people cannot be made: ‘But foreign friends don’t like to compare, I think. If I talk about my, for example, my salary or my family,

they say...oh it's good' [L]. Similarly, participant B described the separation between the eikaiwa space and his own life: 'It doesn't influence directly our lives, even if we tell them something. They are not related to us and they don't care' [B]. Trust was also identified as an essential part of the teacher-learner communication [UI]: 'Trusting the other person, trusting each other is very important. When we socialise, we can build trust [I]'. Thus in the eikaiwa space, a wider range of conversational topics was possible [LJ]: 'But with my foreign friends, I can talk about anything I think. That's the big difference' [J].

Remarkably, the participants showed different attitudes towards having a Japanese teacher teaching an eikaiwa class [TC]: Participant L declared that 'Foreign teachers and Japanese teachers are different. Usually Japanese teachers are not interesting' [L] and 'I don't wish to have a Japanese teacher' [T]. The participants did not see the need to talk to Japanese teachers about personal things [N]. One participant stated that 'A Japanese teacher is a teacher, not a friend' [P]. They were less inclined to socialise with Japanese teachers: 'After class I don't want to speak English with a Japanese-conversation teacher' [F]. Participants viewed them as performing a work duty: 'For the Japanese teacher it is a job, only for the time until the class finishes. They don't want to think about their students or their classes' [L]. Some participants perceived a sense of remoteness between teachers and the students: 'Japanese teachers have a wall, a distance. I am the teacher, you are the students' [K] and 'I think the distance between Japanese teachers and Japanese students is really big' [R]. While Japanese teachers may understand their students because they are from the same cultural background, the students are reluctant to define the Japanese teacher as anything other than a teacher.

Discussion

Education, like entertainment and sports events, can be a product for consumption (Hopkinson & Pujari, 1999). Products can be broadly differentiated into two overlapping categories of consumption: utilitarian and hedonic. Utilitarian products are used as solutions to practical tasks (Lim & Ang, 2008; Ballantine, Jack & Parsons, 2010). Hedonic consumption is connected to a desired reality where the consumer is involved in the reality that the product creates (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982) and it is more closely related to individual personal needs (Alba & Williams, 2012). Moreover, the consumers look for excitement, pleasure, emotional satisfaction (Wakefield & Blodgett, 1999). Imagery and symbolism are important elements, where the subjective meaning of the product plays a vital role in its consumption experience (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982). In the context of eikaiwa, a utilitarian benefit would be an increased proficiency in English through the consumption of the education service, allowing an individual to perform a task better. The results of this study indicated that studying English for its utilitarian benefits was not a strong attraction as having fun conversation in a relaxed atmosphere with foreign teachers. Thus eikaiwa becomes a casual leisure activity with hedonic rewards (Stebbins, 2001). While the participants hesitated to describe their experiences as purely hedonic in nature, hedonic benefits are essential. They implied that without the hedonic benefits of enjoyable conversation with foreign teachers, many students would not be interested in eikaiwa.

Moreover, events and other social gatherings organised by eikaiwa schools for students are part of the hedonic consumption experience. Events are seen as ‘augmented product’ which add value to the actual product of English instruction (Solomon *et al.* 2012). The hedonic benefits may include extra English practise, conversation with foreigners about different topics, meeting and getting to know the other teachers in a more authentic setting, thus creating a sense of international community. Social events provided an alternative space for enjoyment and pleasure that differed slightly from the hedonic benefits obtained in the classroom. The attendance of foreign teachers was considered essential as the opportunity to speak with them was the most important hedonic benefit for adult learners who may see no reason to attend an ‘English’ event with no foreigners. This is consistent with previous research reporting that ‘English is learned not just for a pragmatic work-oriented purpose—it serves as leisure, socializing, or escape for some learners’ (Kubota, 2011b, p. 258).

Image and symbolism are important elements of hedonic consumption where the subjective meanings of a product are socially constructed for the consumption of certain experiences (Addis & Holbrook, 2001; Lim & Ang, 2008; Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982). Eikaiwa is marketed as a cultural portal to the Western world. The English language is a significant element of Western culture (Kobayashi, 2010) and symbolises internationalization in Japan. Bailey (2006) reported that nearly all eikaiwa have elements of Western ideology in their promotion, highlighting the advantages of learning about a new culture. In Japan the possibility to experience another culture and another language is very limited (Seargeant, 2005). Further Japan is a homogenous society, great differences do not exist between individuals (Martin, 2004). Similarity between individuals is highlighted by a cultural tendency for conformity (Takemura, 2014) and a preference for the familiar (Maeda & Ritchie, 2003). The participants of this study described certain sameness and predictability in the lives of Japanese people. Hence learning about the foreign teachers’ cultures is an important part of their eikaiwa experience. Kubota (2011a) argued that the students have a certain longing for something unattainable, a desire for inclusion in an imagined global community of English speakers. By joining eikaiwa classes and through the practice of English, the students are able to fulfil their fantasy. In reality, the students have little possibility to use English in their everyday lives outside of the classroom or to integrate into a type of English-speaking community (Martin, 2004; Banwell, 2010).

Consumers may attach meanings to the products they consume (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982). Eikaiwa students constructed a sense of otherness in their perception of the native English speakers. The foreign teachers were seen to possess the authentic English. They have an excellent command of the living English language and the capacity to deliver the real, perfect, clean, beautiful and natural English. The concept of otherness was extended by the perception that speaking English with the Japanese teachers was deemed as unnatural. The participants questioned the language ability of Japanese teachers and their ability to take the lesson out of the textbook and out of the classroom. In delivering the English language, Japanese teachers represented familiarity, predictability and confinement while foreign teachers were perceived as novel, interesting and free. The participants removed Japanese teachers from the hedonic benefits of eikaiwa experience that they attributed to foreign teachers. Subsequently, the symbolism of both the teachers and the language are intimately linked in the eikaiwa context.

While 'English instruction' is the basic product, eikaiwa goes further by implying that the foreign teachers themselves are commodities used to meet the needs of Japanese consumers (Bailey 2007; Kubota, 2011a). The results showed a strong preference for Western English teachers. Whereas Westerners were perceived to embody the notion of internationalisation, other cultural groups were not (Kubota & MacKay, 2009). The foreign teachers from inner circle countries are perceived to be a source of knowledge about Western culture which assign authenticity to the consumption experience (Hiramoto, 2013; Kennett & Jackson, 2014). In communication in English with other Asian groups, Japanese people do not view themselves to be global citizens (Kobayashi, 2010). This is consistent with the literature on Japanese people's idealisation and yearning for Western culture (Kobayashi, 2010; Bailey, 2006; Kubota, 1998).

The participants perceived the foreign teachers as being real, free, open, happy, interesting, positive and outgoing. This is consistent with previous research in exhibiting characteristics of physical appearance and personality in keeping with idealised, eroticised and commercialised images of desirable foreign teachers (Appleby, 2013; Takahashi, 2013). Hence the foreign teachers fulfil the students' sought-after image of the 'otherness'. By conversing with the foreign teachers, they hope to actualise their ideal English-speaking selves (Kobayashi, 2010). Like the teachers, they too could be free, positive, out-going, open-minded and interesting. This engagement is largely based on the personal and emotional elements of the hedonic consumption experience (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982; Babin, Darden & Griffin, 1994).

As exotic outsiders, the foreign teachers provided the participants with the milieu of 'elsewhereness' as hedonic products can transport a consumer to a different place during the consumption experience (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982). According to Hopkins (1990), stimulated 'elsewhereness' requires an object or person to pretend or imitate something else. This object or person is a sign that resembles the original on a continuum from reminiscent to duplicate. The sign is a signifier that represents something else which is 'the signified'. The presence of a foreign teacher may make the classroom reminiscent of another place or another country where the foreign teacher becomes a signifier, and Western English culture becomes the signified. When there is resemblance between the signifier and the signified, the sign becomes iconic of a different place. The classroom space evoked experiences of more desirable places. The participants provided different meanings of elsewhereness such as a different world, another place to live, being a different country, a happier place, a more open and free space. In this imaginary space of elsewhereness, the participants can express their thoughts, wants and feelings to the foreign teacher and to each other. Hence the perceived freedom in this atmosphere of openness can be a form of free expression not restrained by the social rules of Japanese society (Bailey, 2007; Kito, 2005; Takemura, 2014). The elsewhereness of the classroom builds on the appeal of fantasy and escapism.

The constructed authentic foreign teacher and the imaginary space of the classroom imbricated the teacher-learner friendship. According to Taniguchi (2014), there are two main types of friendship in Japan: 'shinyuu' and 'tsukiai nakama'. 'Shinyuu' is based on mutual attraction and the friendship itself is the goal. This friendship is close and can last a lifetime. 'Tsukiai nakama' is based on social obligations such as a workplace context where friendship continues as long as the obligation. The definitions are not

exclusive as there is significant overlap. The results indicated that participants desired a friendship of emotional closeness with the foreign teachers. This friendship would be classified as 'foreign friends' which is distinctly different from Japanese friends. This teacher-learner friendship could be based on the understanding that the two individuals concerned are fundamentally different to begin with. Thus friendship formation with foreigners is a process where the Japanese identity is emphasised (Rivers, 2011). Being Japanese is a concept that narrowly defines what is Japanese and what is not (Sullivan & Schatz, 2009). This emphasis contributes further to the 'otherness' of the English language and Western culture (Rivers, 2011). As Western teachers are not expected to fully understand the concept of being Japanese (Bailey, 2007) and a cultural gulf may exist between the foreign teachers and their students that prevent the formation of 'Shinyuu'. Similarly, as friendship in Japan tends to be embedded in social networks, given the high turnover of teachers and students, it is unclear how the teacher-learner friendship can be achieved. The desire of friendship with English speakers may serve to create an image of their own idealised Western lifestyle (Bailey, 2007).

Eikaiwa is seen as part of the leisure industry rather than the education industry where the needs and interests of consumers are identified and the foreign instructors are a commodity used to meet the needs of consumers (Kubota 2011a). The attraction and retention of students is challenging as the eikaiwa industry is very competitive. The continuing commercial success of eikaiwa remains in their ability to maximising the hedonic consumption experience of cultural otherness. Consequently, the hiring of teachers from inner-circle countries may be a manifestation of customers' specific interest in Western culture. Kubota, (2011a) claimed that the primary functions of eikaiwa language learning are 'self-fulfilment, self-actualization, and socializing through an experience in an imagined exotic space removed from daily life' (p 475). In this context, the symbolism of the teacher's nationality may be more important than their actual pedagogical ability.

The desire for teacher-learner friendship is of particular interest because of the complexity of the friendship formation and maintenance in the context of the customer and the service provider. This relationship requires further academic exploration with a larger sample to gain a better understanding of the nature of the teacher-learner friendship as there is great variety in eikaiwa establishments and students. It is noteworthy that English learning with Japanese teachers denotes a different pattern from the foreign teachers. The present study has drawn attention to the ways foreign eikaiwa teachers are perceived and highlighted the intertwining of practical and symbolical implications in the students' desire of cultural otherness. The perceptions of Japanese eikaiwa teachers require more academic attention, especially in the area of social prestige in the eikaiwa workplace.

In summary, the students recognised the ambience of 'foreignness' and 'elsewhereness' as an integral and pleasurable part of their overall eikaiwa consumption experience. Hence, teachers are primarily used as cultural artefacts providing the essential symbolism to achieve 'authenticity'. Eikaiwa is able to extend the experience further by creating the necessary symbolism to provide the students with the imageries of being in foreign countries, learning new cultures and making English friends.

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