

Report

Art-mediation through <language/drawing> from the perspective of nature: Observation of Education/Language/Art as “Image of Life” in Tanzania

Alexander IMIG¹, Kinji ISOBE², Ayaka SASASE³

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1. Introduction: What can be observed and how?

How can nature be observed? Understanding this a trivial question, it could be answered: Just going into nature could do the trick. A walk in the forest would then be an observation of nature. However, it is then not “nature”, which can be seen in the forest or more detailed, trees in the forest can be observed. “Nature” is hard, in fact impossible to observe, because it is not an object, but a class of objects, which is often called a category (philosophical terminology is not in the direct intention of this very article, it can, however, not always avoided, for the concept of category, which was created by Aristoteles and its criticism, see Russel 1996). Although that “nature” is not observable, the concept of observation of nature is making perfect sense to humans in the sphere of human communication, but again, that is not what this article is about. This article is about the observation (of something) from the perspective of nature. The “something”, which should be observed was “life” and the most important starting point of the art-project, which will be explained now, was the creation of an “image of life” (the title of the project). The planned project consisted of three parts: in three parts of the world (Japan, Germany and Tanzania) children should have created art (art objects) related to the title “image of life”, in their time in school. The project was carried out in Japan, during several lessons and in Tanzania, while the sessions planned for Germany could not be realized due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which started in 2020.

The initiator of the project is the artist and educator Kinji Isobe, who is responsible for several international art-projects in the context of art and nature. Needless to say, that the outcome of an art-project is art, but in this project, it was slightly different. While the creation of art was still the purpose the art project (“image of life”), the art this time went along with

language. One might say that language is always a part of (any) art project: language creates the conditions for the creation of art and, also for the observation of art as art. Nevertheless, this is a scientific article with a scientific purpose, there must be a scientific input, and only then art can be described scientifically. Kinji Isobe is Japanese and his art projects are performed in Japanese in addition to some other languages. This language situation, and the language situation in countries with a strong national language will be covered thoroughly in the following paragraph. An exhaustive description of the whole project will follow. Before coming to the concluding remarks, which deal with observation issues some loosely introduced concepts (observation, art or nature) have to be described from in a broader theoretical perspective, using the Niklas Luhmann System theory approach. “Observation” is only possible by media, but using media and describing media simultaneously is impossible in a sequential media, such as written texts. An observation of language appears to be a linguistic question, but that is not reaching the full potential of language. Very important in the field of language is, that there are in fact languages to observe, and the plurality of languages, which is paradoxical “language” is normally hidden. Nevertheless, this hidden character of language must be made visible through a method, which is called “mediation” and that method will be introduced in the next chapter.

2. Why mediation: National language-regimes in education

It is no coincidence that this text is available in two language versions. Indeed, more than two language versions are involved. The text is written in English and a translation edited by the author also exists. This would make English the original and Japanese a translation. However, the situation is

¹ School of International Liberal Studies, Chukyo University, ² School of Education, Sugiyama Jogakuen University, ³ Kiyosu Municipal Kiyosu Elementary School

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more complicated than the text level alone, because most of the research was conducted in Japanese. All researchers related to this research-project are based in Japan (see affiliations), and the descriptions of this art project are originally in Japanese. Therefore, the question of why an English version of this article exists is not trivial. It could be just for practical reasons, this author is writing faster in English, but this is only part of the explanation. Additionally, in this case the article could have been translated and only a Japanese version would be necessary. These questions will be answered later, and the hidden perspective of language must be unveiled at least to a certain extent. Accordingly, resuming the discussion of the concept of nature is useful, which is much more than an analogy. Because of the merely unobservable nature of the concept nature, how this very abstract concept came into existence, especially in Japanese, can be asked because of alleged aversion to highly abstract terms, as Maruyama (in “*nihon no shisô*” 1961, the title translates as “thinking of Japan”) notes. Ducarme/Couvet (2020) introduced the history of the concept of nature, going back to Latin (“*natura*”) and Greek roots (“*physis*” in English transliteration). The Japanese concept of nature, called *Shizen* was translated from English into Japanese, while the word *Shizen*, with another meaning was already in use before (Yanabu 1991: 127–148). This process of translation, especially its results is important for the present research, because it created a monolingual sphere (for the concept of “monolingualism”, Gramling 2016, but education is not his focus) inside (most of) the national states, which is often seen a prerequisite for a functioning educational system. While in some countries multiple languages are forming the educational systems, the educational systems in this research are functioning (more or less) in one national language, which had a strong impact on the research, which will be explained in the following chapter.

3. (Thick) description of the project

It is commonplace that educational (functional) systems consist of persons, but persons as a whole cannot be observed, only their data, which could be their artistic products. However, mediation is not a product, but a process. Because of the procedural nature of mediation, it is challenging to define this concept, mediation is always something in between two things, and only a duality causes the need for a mediation. Procedures that translate (spoken or written) languages are a paradigmatic case for mediation, and these procedures are holding a central place in this text. For an understanding of

the art-project “image(s) of life,” the involved languages have been mentioned, Nonetheless, languages are only a prerequisite for communication, Without languages, there would be no communication, but they are not communication itself. In this case, communication had to solve a problem of instruction: how to explain to children, that they are supposed to draw an image of life. In this respect, the procedures and conditions of these explanations are revealing a lot about the whole project. Before the description of the project is explained in some detail a brief outline of the project and its data is given, which is a basic part of the description. The dataset of this project consists of three parts compiled in two different locations. The first location was Lusanga Primary School, where two parts of the dataset were compiled, and the second location was Ru Center Nursery & Primary School in Zanzibar. The dataset comprises of 184 images and descriptions of these images. The images were drawn with a (wax) crayon on thick paper, which is used for postcards. Moreover, the size of the paper is like postcards. The children were asked to explain their drawings in language, which was also part of the explanation of the whole project, which will be introduced. The whole project took place in schools, and the children were in the sixth grade, which means that they were approximately 12 years old. The whole project could be performed during school time. The project could only be conducted with the help of happenstance (for happenstance and the creation of international networks see Byram/Parmenter 2012). Ayaka Sasase, is a trained teacher and worked as a Japanese teacher at Lusanga Primary school. She contacted the school administration, which made the whole project possible. And because of this background at the 25. and 26 of February at the art project “image of life” could start. The whole preparations were made for this moment, the moment, the children had to draw their pictures of an image of life. The children needed to be drawing their image of life, thus, the background of the project had to be explained to the children, but they had also been made aware that it is their personal perception of life, which should lead to their image. In this respect the introduction to the whole project was crucial. The introduction to the drawing of the pictures and the subsequent reactions of the children were documented. Furthermore, the children were asked to reflect on the drawing in a brief questionnaire, which was also used to give some additional insights into the creative process. Kinji Isobe has already done these kinds of projects around the world and because he is taking some of the material (the postcards) as evidence with him, he could just show postcards of former projects. On February 25 and 26, Ayaka Sasase did

the translation from Japanese into Swahili, which was the most eminent part of the mediation in the process of data-collection (for these processes of linguistic mediation see Piller 2017). The main explanation was also conducted as a translation, but on the 26th some additional communication could also be performed in Swahili with another teacher, who was translating from English. There was a lot of data created, too much to give all the details in this article. For a thick description of the whole communication process the software MAXQDA was used. This software integrates pictures, videos (with audio) and texts for a multilayered description of the whole project. For a more thorough representation of the various mediation processes, three projects are supposed to create a more nuanced picture, and these projects were planned in Tanzania, Germany and Japan. The Japanese part of the project is the basis, because the project is coming from Japan, Kinji Isobe and Ayaka Sasase are Japanese and several projects about art and education have been conducted in Japan. In Germany some art projects were carried out at a school, but language data (as such) have not been collected. It was planned to collect data in Germany, but because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the data-collection had to be cancelled. This article gives now an introduction to the language data collected in Tanzania, with the prospect to create broader and deeper descriptions in the future. A second location in Tanzania was also used to create data for the backgrounds of the “image of life”. The second location was the island of Zanzibar, and the name of the school was Ru Centre Nursery & Primary School, which is a private school at Zanzibar. While there was no electricity in the classrooms in Lusanga, in Zanzibar a Power Point presentation could be used by Kinji Isobe to give details of his art projects. Here also Ayaka Sasase (mainly) did the translations, but the framing was nevertheless totally different. In Lusanga, the whole project was framed as an art project, where pictures were drawn and an installation Japanese paper was also commonly created. Both was also done in Zanzibar, but before the art projects a performance of the young students was done. They spoke (in English) about their dreams for the future and staged some professions (Pilot, Doctor, Nurse, Teacher). All in all the command of the English language in Zanzibar was much better. While there were some teachers in Lusanga, with knowledge of English a communication in English with most of the people wasn’t possible. That was different in Zanzibar, the default language there was also Swahili, but English could be used more as a medium of communication and mediation. This is clearly mirrored in the data, the students were more writing in English. Unfortunately,

the timeframe in Zanzibar was tighter and therefore the descriptions of the students were shorter. Here also some additional audio data were created, which also show a stronger position of English. It would be an overstatement to frame Zanzibar as an English language project, the art project was still more dominant, but the English emphasis was more pronounced in Zanzibar. But why is the attribution of the project is so important? The next chapter will give a systematic introduction to the important background of the frameworks of art, education and research, in relation to language(s).

4. Functional systems/Mediation

While Mediation between languages is a new, but undisputed perspective of mediation, mediation between functional systems is an approach, which is new. But it has an important relation to language (use) and can outline some of the important backgrounds of the whole project. The central question of the whole project might be: what did the students create during the project “image of life”? Because the projects were taking place at educational institutions, it could be said, that knowledge about environments are in the center of the whole projects, in Germany, Japan and Tanzania. In Japan this environmental knowledge could even be transmitted during the lesson time, the art project was conducted during the lesson time of a school subject, which can be translated as arts and crafts (Japanese *Zuga Kousak*). In Tanzania such a school subject does not exist, at least at the Lusanga Primary School, the whole material (the crayon, and the paper) had to be imported from Japan. However, for an acknowledgment of the work of the teachers in Lusanga the background has to be considered: One of the most central tasks of the teachers is language acquisition in Swahili and alphabetization (for the language situation in Tanzania see: Tibategeza/du Plessis 2018). The teachers said that many children did not speak sufficient Swahili in the beginning, and photos of pictures of body parts, flowers and animals in Swahili are witnessing the language tasks in the school. The written material (Swahili translated into English for analysis) showed the results of instructions in the school language. The translator made comments on the mistake of the children, which proved that there were quite a lot of them. But the explanations of the drawings could be translated, which means that it was understandable. If one asks, what the function of education in society is, then the language development of the children in the schooling language is a very important part of it (see Qvortrup 2005, Baraldi/Corsi 2017). The use of the schooling language

(Swahili for Tanzania) was of course not the intention of the project. The authors' intention was a data collection and a multilayered comparison, which was only partly possible. The intentions of Kinji Isobe were possibly an advancement of his 2001 started project with postcards called "never-ending life" (my translation of the Japanese Owari no nai E), even if he never explicitly talked about that connection. My knowledge of his projects results from an interview with Kinji Isobe done in Germany after a school project there (June 2. 2017). He also stated that addressing global environmental problems are one of the purposes of never ending life, which was also seen in the image of life project. The next chapter offers an outlook for framing future projects.

5. Outlook: Potentials for Multilingualism: ELF & Art

In spite of the ecological goals of the whole project, the project in itself was not sustainable at all, especially since the miles of air travel have some impact. However, this project has clear ecological focus and a simple action plan, which can only be outlined here, the project would be more clearly visible as an important contribution to a stronger ecological awareness of mankind. Especially the online accessibility should be stronger. A video-channel with basic information about the project would be useful, not everything has to be in English and it is indeed one of the goals of the project to promote multilingualism, but the English as Lingua franca (see Mackenzie 2014 also with more references, for ELF and Mediation, see Leung/Jenkins 2020) perspective should be strengthened. In art life has no ending, but the dire ecological situation on this planet (for an overview: Raworth 2017) makes an urgent call for effective projects promoting ecological awareness. Raising awareness is the main reason this article is in English.

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実践報告

自然を視点とした〈言語／造形〉によるアート・メディアーション
—教育・言語・芸術による“生命のイメージ”タンザニア—

イミック アレクサンダー¹・磯部錦司²・笹瀬綾香³

キーワード：言語，教育，アート，メディアーション，生命，自然

¹ 中京大学, ² 相山女学園大学教育学部, ³ 清須市立清洲小学校

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