

## **Beyond the Difference in Language:**

### **A Comment**

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I would like to begin my comment with anecdotes from my personal experience. After studying at the Graduate School of Education here at the University of Hiroshima, I studied further in Göttingen, Germany, for two years. I found my main research field in the German tradition of educational thought. So the choice to study in Germany was by no means accidental. During these two years in Göttingen, I discovered many themes and ideas that would be of crucial importance for my entire career as a researcher. One of them was the significance of “media” in education. I was particularly interested in the relationship between film and education in Germany in the first half of the 20th century.

After returning to Japan, I wrote a paper pursuing this idea, in Japanese of course. Based on a detailed reading of the journal *Film und Bild*, published from 1912 to 1915, it attempted to explicate the changing relationship between film and education. I submitted it to a Japanese journal. I will say only that this journal was *not* one published by our society; it was a major journal in the field of history of education. In Japan, it was not unusual to discuss a closely delimited topic in the European or American history of education. But my paper was rejected, and what disturbed me were the comments on it. I found them pointless and too narrow-minded to take a novel issue like “education and media” seriously. I was upset because I was firmly convinced that my paper presented something really innovative. Such conviction is probably typical of arrogant young academics.

Moved by this arrogant conviction, I began to translate my paper into German and submitted it to a German journal, *Bildung und Erziehung*. It became my first essay published in a foreign language. I was deeply impressed by the open-mindedness and fairness of my German colleagues in their professional judgement. This sort of trust in German colleagues remains with me even now. My own interpretation of this experience, however, has changed in the meantime.

My early interpretation had been simple: Japanese narrow-mindedness toward something new vs. German open-mindedness, Japanese unfairness when judging vs. German fairness, Japanese immaturity in terms of academic professionalism vs. German maturity. But gradually, I came to recognize that my paper discussed its theme in more of a German context than a Japanese context, albeit largely unconsciously. I got the theme from my experience in Germany. The idea that the media, especially film, *could* be significant for educational thought as a whole was reasonably convincing in a German context; however, such a shared perception was simply lacking in the Japanese context at that time. Now, I interpret my experience rather as an indication that profound differences in perception exist, even among academic communities, concerning what is worth pursuing and what can be described as persuasive.

Please let me mention one more personal experience that points in the same direction. In my late thirties, I concentrated on Walter Benjamin, a 20th century German philosopher, and attempted to reconstruct his thoughts as an educational theory, focusing on his concept of media. As part of this project, I wrote a paper comparing Benjamin with John Dewey in regard to their concepts of experience. I thought the paper would be interesting for my American colleagues. I translated it into English and submitted it to a famous American journal. The paper was rejected with devastating comments alleging that it was far beneath the level of a scientific contribution. I could not agree with the comments, so I submitted the same paper to a British journal, the *Journal of the Philosophy of Education*. The British comments were slightly encouraging: the ideas presented in the paper were interesting, whereas its English was terrible. After a drastic linguistic improvement, it was published in the British journal.

This second anecdote seems to correspond with what Liz Jackson mentioned as differences in academic culture between the USA and the UK. In fact, my paper did not state a clear-cut position either for or against Dewey. It might have been neither obvious enough nor politically-oriented enough for my American colleagues. Such differences of perception among different academic cultures are expressed through statements (for example “its argumentation is a mess”—more or less the comment I got from the American journal), but the possible origins of such differences should be sought in something other than natural language. We might name it “discourse” in the Foucauldian sense. “Discourse” means, as far as I understand it, a system of organizing statements, which also acts decisively on perception regarding the place value of research. The “translation” Naoko Saito proposed might be productively actualized on the level of discourse.

In Figure 1, I have attempted to illustrate the landscape of academic exchange

relating to the philosophy of education that I observed from my perspective. My perspective is most probably confined and biased; it is a shame that I do not have any experience in international academic societies like the PESA. The figure might not correctly depict the reality of international exchange today, but my anecdotes seem to suggest that there are differences in perception and difficulties in mutual understanding on the level of the discourse on education. By contrast, however, the names of philosophers can serve as our common frame of reference, as I was expecting when I mentioned the name of Foucault above.

Such differences and difficulties should not be understood as obstacles that are simply to be removed. As Naoko Saito convincingly stated, they offer a chance to “learn from different cultures as the other” and to “expose [one’s] framework of thinking and language to the other.” Seen from my perspective, such a chance is desirable largely because it enables us to discover anew what we are already meant to understand: the field of education.

The concepts of “education,” “(教育 *kyôiku*),” “*Bildung/Erziehung*,” etc. are neither identical nor completely separate. They represent a “family resemblance” on the basis of the common human condition (here again, we are referring to a philosopher—Wittgenstein in this case—as our frame of reference). Differences in educational discourse have their reasons in the different configurations of the field of education itself. The “education” diverges according to its cultural, social, and historical context. As a reflection on the diverse field of education, educational discourse shows diverse traits accordingly. Translation offers a chance, through experiencing such differences, to recognize the field of education anew. The experiences of difference enabled by translation become productive for the philosophy of education, as well as for educational inquiry as a whole, if they are directed toward a *re*-cognition of the field of education.

Figure 1

