

JAPANESE LANGUAGE SCHOOL: SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS OF THREE GENERATIONS OF THE SAME GROUP FROM THE JAPANESE COLONY IN CUIABÁ.

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1. Introduction

Under the focus of Social Psychology, using the Social Representations (SR) by Serge Moscovici as the theoretical framework, the present study aims to identifying the differences in the recurrent SR among the members of three generations of the Japanese colony concerning the role of the local Japanese Language School (JLS). The millions of European and Asian immigrants that arrived in Brazil throughout this century have contributed to the formation of its multicultural characteristics. The Japanese immigration to Brazil will be celebrating its one hundredth anniversary in 2008. According to data provided by JICAⁱ, the Nikkeiⁱⁱ community in this country now has a population of 1,400,000 making Brazil the country with the largest number of Japanese immigrants and their descendants in the world. The Japanese and their descendants have formed relatively closed groups throughout Brazil, thus preserving their culture and identity differently from those Brazilians of other ancestries. In the 1940's the first Japanese immigrants arrived in Cuiabá, the capital city of Mato Grosso. Then, they formed an organized group to maintain their interests and traditions, and opened a JLS and founded the Nipponese-Brazilian Cultural Association (NBCA). Among the phenomena regarding the Japanese colony in Cuiabá, the local JLS calls special attention to, while maintaining proximity, issues regarding education, identity and the Nipponese-Brazilian culture. From the moment it was founded until now, this school has gone through several stages that can reveal the past, the present and the future of the colony as they involve all the generations of the Japanese colony that have lived in Cuiabá. At present, the JLS in Cuiabá is located at the NBCA. Their teaching staff consist of a voluntary Japanese teacher from JICA and another Nikkei teacher. It offers classes to the public in the morning, afternoon and evening, in air-conditioned rooms

and the materials used are imported by JICA. Despite the efforts of some members of the Japanese colony to maintain and improve the school, it is in an apparent process of extinction, due mainly to a lack of students. This research intends to answer the question: “Can the differences in the recurrent SR among the members of the three generations of the Japanese colony in Cuiabá concerning the role of the JLS be one of the reasons for the likely process of extinction of this school?”

2. Method of analysis and results

Aiming to identify the universe of the generations, the search for the subjects started among the members of the NBCA. Firstly, the eldest members – *issei*, the first generation of the colony were contacted. They indicated their children – *nissei*, the second generation, and finally the third generation, their grandchildren – *sansei*. The *issei* were the founders of the institution, while the *nissei* were students but, nowadays, the *nissei* are the ones who are in charge of the school affairs. At the time the research was carried out, some of the *sansei* seemed to be losing interest in studying the Japanese language.

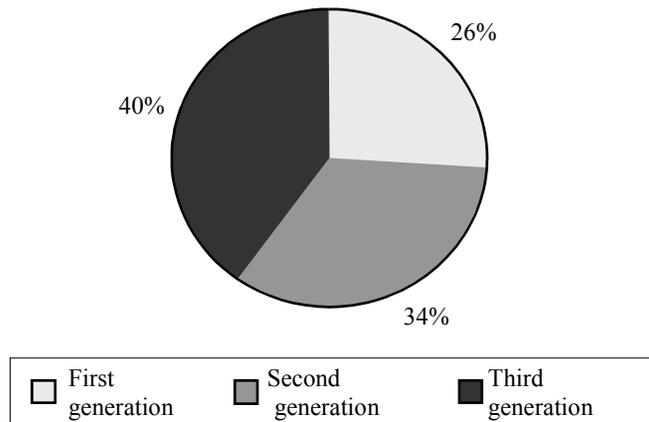
Several tools for collecting data were used, and opinions from the three generations of the Japanese colony were obtained in a transgenerational sampling. The group studied had the following design:

Table 1 - The subjects of the research, by tools and generations

Tools	First generation	Second generation	Third generation	Total
Open interviews	15	-	-	15
Semi framed interviews	13	13	13	39
Questionnaires	12	38	58	108
Complementaries interviews	5	7	-	12
Total	45	58	71	174

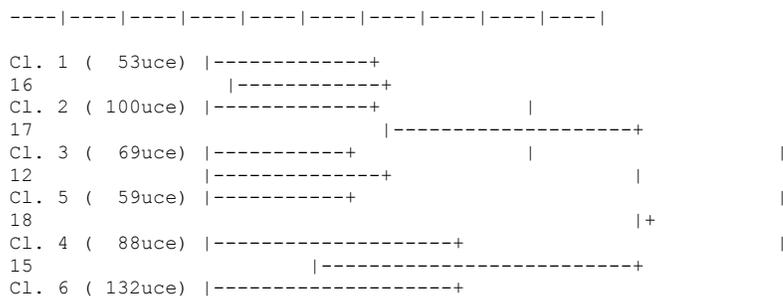
The tools used for data collection were: observations during the monthly meetings of the Nipponese-Brazilian Cultural Association, 15 open interviews, 39 semi-framed interviews, 108 questionnaires, 12 complementary interviews for the historical contextualization of the JLS with a total sampling of 174 subjects.

Figure 1 - Groups' composition percentage



The software ALCESTE was used to analyze the content of the interviews carried out. Through the Descending Hierarchy Classification performed by the software, the interviews were divided into six main distinctive classes. Below are a dendrogramme and the sets of words that typically appeared in each one of the classes. The software provides the first one and the second was designed to synthesize the characteristics of each class.

Figure 2 - Dendrogramme des classes stables

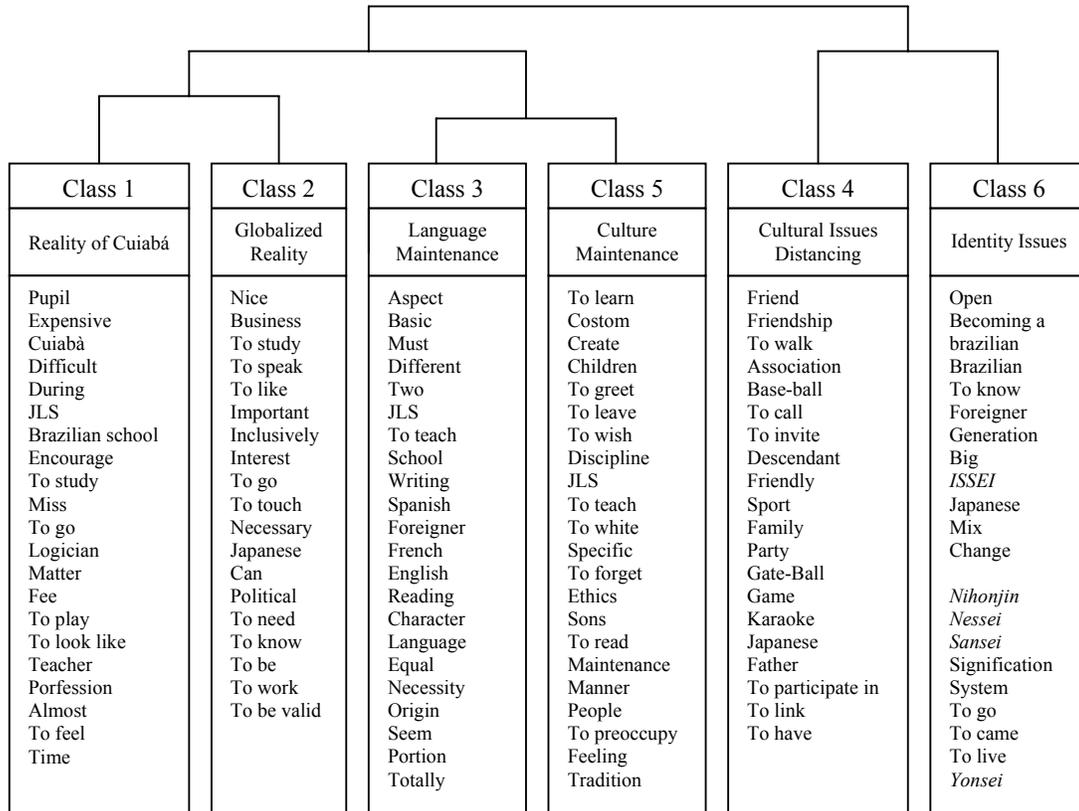


The names given to the classes act as their descriptors. They are below identified below by their most representative age groups.

- Class 1 - Reality of Cuiabá
Age group: over 78 years old, first generation
- Class 2 - Globalized Reality
Age group: 26/38 and 52/64 years old, second and third generations
- Class 3 - Language Maintenance
Age group: 13/25 and 39/51 years old, second and third generations

- Class 5 - Culture Maintenance
Age group: over 78 years old, first generation
- Class 4 - Cultural Issues – Distancing
Age group: 13/25 years old, third generation
- Class 6 – Identity Issues – Becoming a Brazilian
Age group: 65/77 years old, first and second generations

Figure 3 - Dendogramme with typical words



In the first grouping of Classes 1 and 2 it was possible to verify that all the generations are aware of the difficulties and problems that the JLS has been facing. The presence of the words Cuiabá, expensive, difficult, last, evoked by the elderly of Class 1 show that the *issei* are concerned with the continuance of the JLS. To the younger descendants of Class 2, the JLS should teach the Japanese language to those who are interested in going to Japan to work. This role attributed to the school is expressed in the words study, importance, interest, go, Japan, need, work. In the same grouping there is a certain appreciation of the school, as there is for all members of the three generations, although

for very distinctive reasons. The elderly of Class 1 have strong feelings about the continuance of the Japanese school, affection is present in every discourse. However, a rational reason does not exist that can explain the desire for the Japanese spirit to be continued. In Class 2, the descendants of the second and third generations attribute some relevance to the school, since it is an institution that can facilitate the insertion of people into the job market in Japan, which represents a completely rational reason, economical in nature. It can be observed that such considerations are not enough to lead them to enrol in the JLS. The problems that the school faces today are linked to the distancing of the descendants and can be explained by the fact that many of them do not intend to go to Japan so soon, which results in the concern that the elderly very well showed in Class 1.

In the second grouping, Classes 3 and 5 are very close to each other since they regard the Japanese school as a place to acquire linguistic and cultural knowledge. Opposed to this is Class 3, where the members of the second and third generations attribute to the JLS the role of transmitting linguistic knowledge, open to the public, much the same as the language schools of other countries. This is very clear in what one of the subjects in Class 3 said: “The other language schools and the JLS are very much alike, they teach languages”. On the other hand, to the elderly in Class 5, the JLS should transmit and maintain the Nipponese culture and identity to their children and grandchildren, thus surpassing the mere learning of the language. One of the elderly of this class puts it: “The JLS should be a place of peace and quiet, a place where pride is generated, and a place to maintain the tradition. The language schools differ from the JLS because it not only teaches the language, but also the customs”.

Lastly, the grouping of Classes 4 and 6 showed the distancing process, which the members of the Japanese colony have been adopting. These classes approach each other, because as the prototypal subjects of these classes link the JLS to the other activities of the association, they acknowledge them to be the maintenance framework for the Nikkei members’ relationships, culture and identity. They are also of the opinion that these activities (school included) are becoming more and more difficult to be maintained these days. The classes oppose each other when they demonstrate that there is a difference in the way of showing the distancing of the descendants. The older members who represent Class 6 resent watching their children and grandchildren

“become Brazilian”, marry Brazilians who are not descendants, stop using the Japanese language, and become more and more distant from what they consider to be the Japanese system. To the subjects of Class 4, this is a natural process, who by the way, consider the colony’s activities as an extra option, like something that can be included or not in their Brazilian life.

The two groupings comprised of Classes 1,2 and 3,5 refer directly to the role and importance of the JLS, and in this why they converge and diverge from the grouping of Classes 4 and 6. The latter indirectly links the role of the JLS to the activities carried out by the Nipponese-Brazilian Cultural Association.

The set of groupings (Class 1 and 2; 3 and 5; 4 and 6) is organized according to their similar propositions. Within the groupings the classes are different from each other, in that, they relate to distinct representations. The grouping of classes 1 and 2 is based on the closeness in their discourse about JLS problems; both value the school in some way. Yet, they differ for doing so in distinct manners. The same occurs in the other groupings (3 and 5; 4 and 6), which are associated by relating to an aspect of the JLS, but are placed in distinctive classes as they differ in the way they do so.

Thus we can understand that the analysis of the contents carried out by ALCESTE indicated the existence of two distinctive representations. Out of the six classes, 1, 5 and 6 selected by ALCESTE presented the contents of the Immigrants’ SR. The immigrants, that is, the founders of the JLS make it clear that its role should be the transmission of customs and traditions so as to guarantee the perpetuation of the Japanese identity and spirit in their descendants.

On the other hand, the descendants presented a differentiated representation from that of the immigrants. The Japanese people’s children and grandchildren conceived the JLS as a school like any other foreign language schools, a place that should serve the interests of those who must learn the language to fulfill their economical needs. To most descendants, the JLS is a place aimed at facilitating the Dekassegui’sⁱⁱⁱ life or even of those who want to find a job connected with the Japanese companies in Brazil.

However, all members of the three generations were unanimous in considering that the maintenance of the JLS is important as a place where the Japanese culture is continued and spread.

With the purpose of confirming or disproving the results obtained from the analysis of the interviews by ALCESTE, the SPSS – Statistical Package for Social Sciences was used.

To interpret the questionnaire data, which used an ordinal mensuration level, a nonparametric analysis model was used, thus tests by Kruskal Wallis and Jonckheere-Terptra were chosen.

Table 3 - Jonckheere-Terpstra Test. A Grouping Variable: generation

	Today JLS Develops Language Capacity	Today JLS Develops Japanese Culture and Ethics	Today JLS Develops Japanese Identity	Today JLS Satisfies Technical and Professional Objectives
Number of Levels in generation	3	3	3	3
N	108	108	108	108
Observed J-T Statistic	1719.000	1438.500	1424.500	1730.500
Mean J-T Statistic	1678.000	1678.000	1678.000	1678.000
Std. Deviation of J-T Statistic	146.519	148.227	154.599	156.996
Std. J-T Statistic	.280	-1.616	-1.640	.334
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.780	.106	.101	.738

One can see that there is a significant difference in the responses among the three generations to the questions related to identity (sig. = 0.101) and in relation to cultural formation (sig. = 0.106), both present a significance level above 10%.

All members of the three generations present similar representations regarding the role of JLS as a former and transmitter of a foreign language (sig. = 0.7/80) and as a strategy to reach technical and professional objectives (sig. = 0.783).

According to the analysis of interviews conducted by ALCESTE, the difference existing with regard to the responses among generations on the issues concerning maintenance and formation of identity or culture is also marked by the distinct opinions of the Issei (first generation). The elderly of the first generation are the ones responsible for the significant difference among responses, as can be verified in Graph 1.

The result of the Jonckheere-Terpstra test can easily be visualized in graphs 1 and 2 that follow in which the Issei (first generation) failed to mark the item “I disagree” in either of the two questions asked.

It is the Sansei (third generation) who present the greatest discordance with regard to the role of identity development by JLS. There were even those who indicated that they disagreed entirely with the proposition that the school should be able to develop the Japanese identity.

Figure 4 - Today JLS Develops the Japanese Identity

(figure manquante)

In spite of 8% of the elderly being undecided with regard to the role of JLS in developing Japanese culture and ethics, none of them marked a contrary opinion. For the elderly, the school should maintain the Japanese culture and identity.

Figure 5 - Today JLS Develops Japanese Culture and Ethics

(figure manquante)

Next, the Kruskal-Wallis test results are presented, demonstrating the ranks in which the lower the mean rank is, the closer it comes to category 1 “I disagree entirely”.

Table 3 - Kruskal-Wallis Test

Today Jls	Generation	N	Mean Rank
Develops Language Capacity	Issei	12	48,67
	Nissei	38	56,11
	Sansei	58	54,66
	Total	108	
Develops Japanese Culture	Issei	12	58,75
	Nissei	38	59,58
	Sansei	58	50,29
	Total	108	
Develops Japanese Identity	Issei	12	58,58
	Nissei	38	60,14
	Sansei	58	49,96
	Total	108	
Satisfies Technical And	Issei	12	50,25
	Nissei	38	54,95
	Sansei	58	55,09
	Total	108	

The results of the Kruskal-Wallis Test confirm the hypothesis that the first generation possesses differentiated representations from the two later generations.

Concerning the questions regarding the role of the JLS as a place for developing language capacity, the Issei are those who disagree the most (mean rank = 48.67), while the Nissei (mean rank = 56.11) and Sansei (mean rank = 54.66) are quite close in their opinion in favour of this role played by the school. This same result may be verified in relation to the question about technical and professional objectives that the school should satisfy.

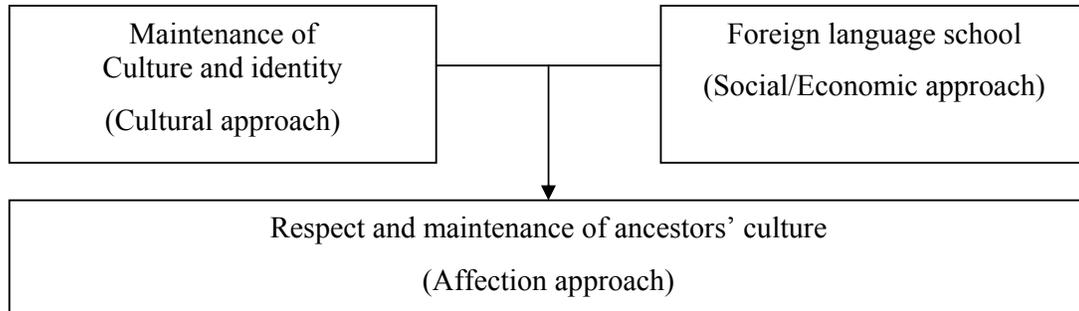
The Sansei (mean rank = 50.29) disagree more than the Nissei (mean rank = 58.75) and the Issei (mean rank = 59.58) on the issue concerning the role of the school as a developer of Japanese culture and ethics. While the Nissei and Issei agree more on the performance of this role by the JLS, it is interesting to point out, in this analysis, that the Nissei (mean rank = 60.14) are the ones who most believe in its function of identity maintenance. That may probably be justified by the fact that it is exactly the Nissei who attended the JLS most.

3. Conclusion

Thus, through the voices of 174 subjects it was possible to verify, by analysing the data collected and presented previously, the existence of two distinct representations among the members of the Japanese colony in Cuiabá. One representation found originated from the Issei (born Japanese) generation group. These demonstrated that they recognize the school as a place of fundamental importance for the maintenance of the Japanese identity and culture in their children and grandchildren, as had been their intention since the creation of Japanese schools at the beginning of the immigration movement. In addition to that, the representation elaborated by the two younger generations in the colony, the Nissei (children of Japanese) and the Sansei (grandchildren of Japanese) identified the JLS as a foreign language school, which could contribute toward the maintenance of their parents and grandparents' culture. The diagram below illustrates the results of the findings.

Figure 5 - Diagram of the two representations found in the studied group





The JLSs, in Brazil, were created during the period in which the members' identification, the identity of Nikkeis, was based upon the mastery of the language. It is therefore not without motive that the elderly remain adherent to a past and an ideology that sustained them, if not still today, as members of a minority group. Beyond that dialogue with the aged is to bring into the conversation the matters that reside in their memory, not only collectively, but also affectionately.

At present the Nikkei community no longer maintains as a reference the mastery of the Japanese idiom as a guarantee of identification and mutual acceptance. The members of the colony identify themselves and relate to each other through sports and cultural activities, as they mentioned, including as a mere item on the JLS roster.

In spite of the function of an idiom transmitter being obvious, one cannot ignore that the school is valued as a place for continued contact with culture which unites and identifies a specific group: the Nikkeis of Cuiabá. One can observe that the social identity of the Japanese colony, while perceived by the members of this reflexive group, is made possible through the notions of a common culture, which sketches the webs through which they relate and recognize each other.

It is exactly the contradictions and heterogeneity of positions found in this transgenerational study that remind us of the polymorphic characteristics of the representations, which can be at the same time: stable and mobile; rigid and flexible; consensual, but also marked by strong individual differences.

Certainly, amid the social changes occurring every day, there will be Nikkeis who possess greater affinity with their more Nipponese characteristics, while many others of them drift away from convivial with the Japanese culture, for little by little they are losing interest in the Japanese culture. On the other hand, Brazilians who are not descendants of Nikkeis will become part of this community, sharing and taking part in

the activities of the Association. And this will be the privileged stage for the phenomena of assimilation and identification, which, as a matter of fact, are constant processes in the historic trajectory of this group.

Thus, the difference in representations among the generations indicates that the JLS in Cuiabá, like other Japanese schools in Brazil, is undergoing a phase of transition. Nowadays, few seek the school with the object of maintaining the Nipponese identity and culture. According to representations from members of the second and third generations, its function is strongly associated to the interest of descendants in utilizing the Japanese idiom to facilitate their entry into the global market. This function throws the JLS into an excessively weakened situation when compared to the need of other idioms. Thus it was possible to verify that the school is seeking to find a form of structure that can guarantee its continued existence as a place where some would look for cultural maintenance, yet sustained by those who seek it for an economic interest.

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ⁱ JICA – Japan International Cooperation Agency, an official Japanese government program for International Technological and Human Development.

ⁱⁱ Descendants of Japanese immigrants, Japanese people's children.

ⁱⁱⁱ Descendants of Japanese and their family members who go to Japan to work