

## Chapter 3

# ***A Passion for English: Desire and the Language Market***

INGRID PILLER and KIMIE TAKAHASHI<sup>1</sup>

### **Introduction**

In this chapter we explore the discursive construction of the desire to learn another language, specifically Japanese women's desire to learn English. We aim to make a sociolinguistic contribution to the literature on motivation and language learning, which all too often continues to consider 'motivation' as a trait learners have (or do not have). However, motivation, or the 'desire to learn', as we see it, is a complex multifaceted construction that is both internal and external to language learners, and is not linked to success in a straightforward fashion – as we will show in this chapter, the link may even be negative. In our ethnographic study of five highly motivated Japanese learners of English-as-a-second-language (ESL) in Sydney, Australia, we try to provide a detailed description of (1) what it means to 'desire English', (2) how that desire for English is situated within wider discourses about Japanese women on the one hand, and English on the other, and (3) how that desire for English was played out in the lives of the participants – particularly their emotional lives and their love lives – during their overseas experience in Sydney.

The chapter is organised as follows: in the next section we introduce our theoretical framework, which views desire as dialectically constituted in the relationship between the macro-domains of public discourses and the micro-domains of individual experience. We will then introduce our participants in the methodology section, before presenting a brief review of the construction of *akogare* [desire] in Japanese media discourses, particularly promotional materials for English-language schools and overseas study programmes. Then we will move on to describe how five young Japanese women living in Sydney, Australia, position themselves vis-à-vis the *akogare* discourse, and how their romantic and sexual choices inflect their language-learning opportunities and vice versa.

## Theoretical Framework

In our understanding of 'desire' we follow Cameron and Kulick's (2003a,b) call to move the study of language and desire beyond theories of 'inner states' to investigations of the ways in which a variety of desires are discursively accomplished. If desire is discursively accomplished, it is obviously context-specific, and in this paper we focus on the *akogare* or 'desire' that Japanese women sometimes feel for the West and Western men. Japanese women's desire for the West and Western masculinity is 'common-sense knowledge' in Japan, and has been widely discussed in sociology, anthropology, and in popular media (e.g. Dower, 1999; Igata, 1993; Kelsky, 1999, 2001; Kimura & Yamana, 1999; Ma, 1996; Miyazaki, 1997). The 1980s and 1990s, in particular, saw a significant level of public anxiety about Japanese women's occidental longings and their sexual explorations with *gaijin* [foreigner] men, both domestically and internationally (Toyoda, 1994). Japanese women who actively sought the company of *gaijin* men, in locations such as Yokosuka, Hawaii, and New York, were given the notorious nickname of 'yellow cabs', suggesting that they were as (sexually) available as taxis. While the 'yellow cab' discourse has somewhat faded, other discourses of *akogare* for the West and Western men remain.

However, researchers in English Language Learning (ELL) and English Language Teaching (ELT), or second language acquisition (SLA) more generally, have paid scant attention to Japanese women's romanticization and eroticization of the West. Conversely, ELL has, if at all, only been treated as a marginal aspect of sociological and anthropological investigations of the occidental longings of Japanese women. By contrast, we will argue in the following that *akogare* for three discursive spaces – the West, Western men, and ELL – inextricably links these. By doing so, we also hope to make a contribution to the understanding of the continued spread of English.

Critical linguists have produced incisive analyses of the macro-societal power relationships within which the spread of English-as-an-international-language (EIL) occurs (e.g. Pennycook, 1998, 2001; Phillipson, 1992; or, specifically with reference to Japan, Kubota, 1998, 2002; Tsuda, 1990, 1993). However, while we have a good understanding why and how English is promoted, that is, 'the supply side', there is still a lack of analysis of 'the demand side' of ELT as Robert Phillipson, one of the foremost scholars in the field, admitted in a recent interview (Karmani, 2003). In other words, analyses of why and how people around the world desire to learn English are largely lacking to date (but see, e.g. Bailey, 2003; Piller, 2002, forthcoming; regarding the desire to learn languages other than English see, e.g. Kinginger, 2004; Piller, 2001).

This is a serious omission if we follow Foucault (1977, 1980) in assuming that the mechanisms of power operate at every level of social life, including the level of individual life. The workings of power include the inculcation of desires that lead individuals to modify their own bodies and personalities. This means that individuals' desires may work against themselves, or, as Lukes (1974: 34) puts it, individuals' 'wants may themselves be a product of a system which works against their interests'. Thus, we see our paper as a contribution to critical linguistic approaches to ELT and EIL. As such, it goes significantly beyond earlier work by Piller (2002), where the term 'language desire' was coined to describe the attraction for speakers of English, and, in a few cases, German, that the participants in her study on bilingual couples reported. In that work, the term 'language desire' was used descriptively and no link between 'desire' and 'power' was made. An analysis of the interplay between power and desire in the data reported in Piller (2002) has been undertaken in Piller (forthcoming).

Given our assumption that power and desire must be conceptualized jointly, structures of desire must be constitutive of the ways in which desire is enacted in the micro-domain. Such an understanding of the relationship between language and desire is similar to the Bakhtinian (1981, 1986) concept of heteroglossia. Bakhtin and his collaborators use the concept of heteroglossia to model the interrelationship between the macro-level of ideologies and the micro-level of conversation. For them, language use in the micro-domain cannot be understood without reference to larger discourses. In this view, individuals' desires and expressions thereof are structured by the discourses of desire, the values, beliefs, and practices circulating in a given social context. Therefore, and in keeping with our view that desire is constituted in public and private discourses, this research combines a discourse-analytic approach to public data with a critical ethnography of private data (see also Piller, 2002).

## Methodology

Both micro-domain and macro-domain data were gathered between 2001 and 2004 from a variety of sources, as part of an ongoing ethnographic project.<sup>2</sup> The micro-domain data were collected from five main participants – Japanese women living in Sydney: Ichi (21 years old), Yoko (29 years old), Yuka (22 years old), Eika (30 years old), and Chizuru (39 years old). These are pseudonyms and the participants are listed in the order in which they joined the study. These participants were approached by Takahashi through their then educational provider (Ichi), her social networks in Sydney's Japanese community (Yoko,

Yuka, and Chizu), or her personal connection from Japan (Eika). We will now briefly introduce each woman.

At the age of 20, Ichi arrived in Sydney in 2000 for her tertiary education. She chose to study in Australia because she had a positive image of Australia through her handsome Australian high-school teacher of English, and had previously visited Australia for a month during her high-school years. After a year in an English language intensive course for overseas students (ELICOS) programme, she became an arts student with a sociology major. Her university education was to be funded by her parents until graduation in early 2005. She lives in a university dormitory and has gone back to Japan for visits on a yearly basis. After graduation, she plans to go to the United States, to join her American boyfriend, with whom she has an online relationship.

Yoko arrived in Sydney in 2002 at the age of 29. She had recently been divorced from her Japanese husband and felt that she wanted to change her life, and finally act on her life-long desire for the West. In Sydney, she initially attended a language school and then pursued a hospitality degree. Throughout her stay she had to support herself financially, and worked in various roles in the hospitality industry. In late 2004 she had to leave Sydney for visa reasons and, at the time of writing (12/2004) is back in Japan to pursue a visa to a French Polynesian island where she has been offered a job in the tourism sector.

Yuka was a *hikikomori* [a recluse who avoids interacting with others] in her junior high school years and came to Australia in 1996 at the age of 17 to start a new life. She completed high school in Sydney and then enrolled in an arts degree with a combined major in gender studies and Chinese and was due to graduate in early 2005. Throughout her time in Australia she has been financially supported by her family in Japan. For visa reasons she will have to leave Australia after graduation. As she does not want to return to Japan and has become increasingly invested in learning Chinese, she is currently pursuing job opportunities in China.

Eika was a successful career woman in Japan and arrived in Australia in 2003 on a working-holiday visa just before she turned 30. The timing of her overseas stay was dictated by visa restrictions, which limit working-holiday visas to under-30-year-olds. Eika had previously spent time in the United States and the purpose of her stay was to reacquaint herself with the English language and to consider her future. Eika's stay was possible because of the savings she had accumulated during her career. None of her pursuits in Sydney, including an English language course and a human resources degree, proved satisfactory, and she left Australia in late 2004 for a round-the-world trip, which has since taken her to the United States.

Chizu arrived in Australia in 1999 at the age of 36. Since her early childhood in a remote rural area, she had a strong *akogare* for English and the West. In Japan she had an Australian boyfriend and their break-up led to her decision to come to Australia for three months. Since then, she has studied at various institutions in Sydney including, most recently, a diploma course on natural therapy. Chizu has lived with a Japanese family most of her time in Australia and has become a key family member. She has no intention of returning to Japan on a permanent basis and has been exploring different visa options for staying in Sydney other than as a permanent student, with little success.

All participants arrived in Sydney with the express purpose of improving their English, and all of them started out as ESL students. Although that changed over the duration of their stay and they became involved in other forms of education, they maintained that their main purpose of living and studying in Sydney was to improve their English and their tertiary courses were seen as a chance to practise English, particularly to master academic English.

Data are also drawn from secondary participants; these included individuals both in Australia and Japan. The largest group of secondary participants is similar to the primary participants in that they, too, are Japanese women aged between 20 and 40 years, who are either studying at an English-language school (either in Japan or overseas), or studying in Australia, at institutions such as private colleges, Technical and Further Education (TAFE) colleges, or at university. Some have entered Australia on a working-holiday visa, which permits holders to remain in Australia for up to one year and pursue part-time work during that period. Only people below 30 years of age from a selected group of countries (mostly developed nations such as Germany, Japan, United States) are eligible for a working-holiday visa.

The micro-domain data comprised more than 40 formal and informal interviews, field-notes from direct observations of their daily social interaction with others, and records of telephone conversations, e-mails, and MSN messenger exchanges. Having a similar background (a single Japanese woman in her thirties living overseas) enabled Takahashi to establish rapport with the participants and allowed relatively easy access to their communities of friends and partners, their private spaces and narratives. From these data, we focused on the participants' personal accounts of their attempts to learn and use English across various contexts; for example, what was their goal or ideal method in ELL? With whom did they want to socialise and why and how were they doing so?

The macro-domain data consisted of discourses of *akogare* for the West and for Western sexual and romantic partners, and of ELT and ELL,

circulating in Japanese media during the period of data collection (2001–2004). The media in question are mainly magazines, particularly women's magazines and ELL magazines, ELT and ELL websites, and advertisements and other promotional materials for English-language schools. All the participants were familiar with these discourses.

For this chapter, we identified two types of references from these data: (1) *akogare* references and narratives; and (2) comments about ELL, including learning strategies, opportunities to practise and use English, and social interactions in English. These references were analysed thematically to model the relationship between desire(s), power, and ELL.

### The Glamour of ELL and *ryugaku* 'Studying Overseas'

'*Daredatte nanimonoka ni nareru*' [you can become who you want to be] (*Yappari Kaigaie Ikou*, December 2000); '*isshuukan no jibun hakken ryugaku in Australia*' [one week *ryugaku* to find yourself in Australia] (*Natsu no Ryugaku*, Summer 2003); '*naze nyuuyooku wa yume ni kikuno ka? Naritai jibun ni naru tame no ryugaku*' [why is New York good for dreams? *ryugaku* that enables me to become who I want to be] (*Ryugaku Journal*, May 2003) blare the headlines. Another one says '*kaigai seikatsu de mitsukeru atarashii jibun: ryugaku de jinsei wo kaeyou in Australia*' [Finding a new self overseas: Change your life through *ryugaku* in Australia] (*Ryugaku Journal* May 2002); and the slogan of *Wish* (2002, no. 8), one of the major *ryugaku* magazines [note the title], reads '*oosutoraria & nyuujirando: atarashi ikikata hajimeyou*' [Australia and New Zealand: Let's start a new life]. As in these examples, women's magazines and other media texts, routinely connect ELL and *ryugaku* with *ikikata* [life-style]. English is portrayed as a glamorous means of reinventing and empowering one's womanhood, as a woman's indispensable weapon to cope in chauvinistic Japan (see also Bailey, 2003; Kelsky, 2001).

Indeed, English-related topics are an indispensable feature of Japanese women's magazines, and as many as 80% of Japanese women in their twenties profess an interest in learning English ('*Baggu ya akusesarii to issho kana? eigo bijin*' [The same as bags and accessories? English beauty], *Asahi Evening*, 23 February 2004: 5). This focus piece on ELL in Japanese women's media published in *Asahi*, one of the major broadsheets in Japan, also cites Kimura, a media development manager with ALC, a leading language-study publishing house based in Tokyo, as saying that a special feature on an English-related topic often leads to an increase in sales. ALC is trying to capitalize even further on this demand with its recent introduction of a glossy English-study magazine for women (see Figure 3.1).

English Language Learning and *ryugaku* features serve to define the meaning of ELL for Japanese women by stating and disseminating

what is proper, successful, and desirable. Desirable characteristics of the successful English teacher are consistently presented in terms of gender, race, and looks. Figure 3.1, for instance, shows an excerpt from a portrait feature about English teachers from four major private English-language schools (*eikaiwa*) in Japan. All of the teachers photographed are good-looking (as marked by their suits and ‘clean’ smiles) white men, presumably native speakers of English. The accompanying text claims that female students’ English will improve faster with teachers such as these because the female student will be anxious to see her good-looking, white, male teacher again soon. The social relationship expressed between the teachers in the photographs and their viewers is close personal, that is, head and shoulders (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996), in all cases. This focus on the personal relationship with the teacher is reinforced in the texts, which provide ample information about the teachers’ personal lives, rather than, say, their educational backgrounds or teaching careers. Indeed, the texts resemble personal ads for a romantic partner much more than professional bio statements. Kevin Black of the GABA English conversation school, for instance, is introduced as follows:

Teacher Kevin Black. He loves Japanese history and hot springs. He frequently visits Hakone. ‘My policy is to change my teaching method depending on my students. I try to get rid of their fear of using English’. He likes going to karaoke, and what’s more, he likes singing Japanese pop songs like those of *Chemistry* [*Chemistry* is a popular male duo and their fans are mainly women in their teens and twenties; <http://www.chemistryclub.net/pc/top.jsp>, last accessed on 16 April 2004]. It’s a real surprise.

The portrayal of these English teachers constructs and reinforces the myth of white men as lady-first gentlemen that is prevalent in Japanese women’s magazines (Russell, 1998). White men are often associated



Figure 3.1 Images of English teachers in Japan (Source: *an-an*, 19 July 2002: 37)

with sophistication, sensitivity, and refinement. They are portrayed as handsome, often with blond hair and blue eyes, well-educated, well-dressed, understated and kind, not so different from the ways in which Hollywood stars and Western musicians are represented in the same media.

The romantic and sexual innuendo, expressed in the statement that women will learn English faster with teachers such as these because they will be keen to return to the teacher, is pervasive in media discourses (see also Ma, 1996). A recently launched English-study magazine for women, published by ALC, for instance, is entitled *Virgin English*. It is the unique selling proposition of *Virgin English* that women can beautify themselves through English. Their philosophy is expressed by the marketing manager as follows: '*eigo to iu tsuuru ga minituskku to naimen ni jishin ga waku. Sorega "utsukushisa" to naru*' [When she acquires English as a tool, she becomes more confident inside. That creates 'beauty'] (*Asahi Evening*, 23 February 2004: 5). Furthermore, success in ELL is consistently linked with relationships with Western men. For instance, one section of the magazine offers several linguistic strategies for developing relationships with *ikemen gaijin* [good-looking, desirable foreigners] and for rejecting *damenzu gaijin* [bad, ugly foreigners] (*Virgin English*, March 2004: 48–51).

*Virgin English* also features ways to 'learn love and sex through [Hollywood] movies'. Learners are advised to memorise romantic and provocative phrases such as 'I will have poetry in my life, and adventure, and love. Love above all' (Gwyneth Paltrow in *Shakespeare in Love*, 1998), 'You know what's going to happen? I'm gonna fall in love with you. Because I always, always do' (Marilyn Monroe in *The Prince and the Showgirl*, 1957), 'Oh, yeah, right there' (Meg Ryan in *When Harry Met Sally*, 1989), 'To hell with Brett, you know? I've got a vibrator' (Cameron Diaz in *There Is Something About Mary*, 1998), and 'We had a great weekend, Leo. And that's that. Now, it's Sunday. And that's over.' (Meg Ryan in *Kate and Leopold*, 2001). These are printed in pink, presented as effective and sexy, and each phrase is recommended differently depending on the outcome desired. Desired outcomes include seduction as in the Marilyn Monroe phrase, which is described as irresistible because of the force of 'gonna'. Other learning objectives are the ability to talk sexy, and the ability to end a relationship without causing bad blood (*Virgin English*, March 2004: 52–57). Indeed, Hollywood movies have widely become new ELL 'textbooks', teaching not only English, but also providing guidance in matters of love and sex. It is the implication of Hollywood movies in the girlhood and adolescence dreams of the participants to which we will turn in the next section.

In sum, women's magazines consistently make a link between learning English and changing one's life, including in matters of romance and sex.



Indeed, all the primary participants found *ryugaku* articles in women's magazines such as *an-an* and *Cosmopolitan* inspirational for learning English and going overseas. Yoko, for instance, says:

**Yoko:** nihon de yoku koo iu zassi karate ta n desu yo ne [pointing at Japanese women's magazines in my office]. yoku sono ki ni natte masita yo. kekkoo soo iu jyosei, josei zassi de ryugaku toka eigo no seikoo zyutu tokatte yonde te atasi mo dekiru n zya nai katte omottari site masita mon. tatoeba *an-an* tokatte yoku eigo no yatte ru zya nai desu ka? kosumoporitan toka kinzyo no tosyokan kara karite mite masita mon @@

**Yoko:** in Japan, I used to read magazines like these [pointing at Japanese women's magazines in KT's office]. they often inspired me. I used to read these articles on *ryugaku* for women and strategies for successful English study, and I used to think, 'I can do this, too!' *an-an*, for example, often features English related topics, don't they? in Japan, I used to borrow *Cosmopolitan* magazines from the local library @@ (f14may03yoko)<sup>3</sup>

### Dreaming of Tom Cruise and Brad Pitt

All the primary participants and most of the secondary participants report a fascination with Hollywood stars and Western musicians during their girlhood and adolescence. Whereas this seems to have been a general admiration for the West in their childhood, it became rapidly gendered and romanticised as they entered adolescence. For instance, Eika had a romantic obsession with Tom Cruise, particularly as the star of *Top Gun* (1985), in her secondary school years. Chizu fell in love with Christopher Atkins from the *Blue Lagoons* (1980), and Yoko has been obsessed with Brad Pitt for a number of years. Whereas the specific object of their *akogare* (i.e. a specific star) differs, all these movie stars and musicians are white Western men, from or based in the United States, and acting or singing predominantly in English.

During the participants' adolescence, their romantic *akogare* for Western stars was increasingly conflated with a desire for learning English, resulting in an immediate or future increase in their contact with English. For example, in order to express their admiration, some of the women in our study wrote a fan letter in English to the stars they were obsessed with, as Eika and her classmate did. After seeing *Top Gun*, they decided to send a fan letter to Tom Cruise. However, their English was not advanced enough to compose such a letter. This did not diminish their enthusiasm. On the contrary, they used a number of resources to achieve their goal: a template letter provided in the teenage magazine *Screen* formed the basis of their composition. Further, they

sought help from their high-school English teacher, who proofread and edited the letter. Eika recalls that, as they continued to work on the letter, they began to imagine the possibility of receiving a personal invitation from Tom Cruise:

**Eika:** ano toki are datta yo~, bikku doriimaa datta yo ne @ atasitai kaite ru toki sa~ ukkiuki zya nai, de kare [Tom Cruise] ga sa~ nihon no zyosi koosei no zyoonetu wo sittara hyotto site hariuddo ni gosyootai toka ne ~ kangaete te sa ~ !@@@

**Eika:** you see, we were big dreamers at that time@ when we were writing the letter, we were so excited about the whole thing, and we thought if he [Tom Cruise] found out about our passion for him ... from Japanese high school girls ... we thought that we might get invited to Hollywood!@@@ (i4june03eika)

Although neither a personal response nor an invitation was likely, fantasizing about meeting him as a young woman in love was powerful enough to make them work on their English. They rehearsed their self-introduction in English in preparation for this imaginary occasion:

**Eika:** de sa~, mosi hontoo ni soo iu koto ni nacchattara doo suru ~ toka itte te. sonna toki ni zyaa tomu ni doo yatte zikosyookai suru mitai na? kanozyo to atasi sa~ @

**Eika:** we were talking about what if it really happened. how should we introduce ourselves to Tom? she and I @

**Kimie:** @@

**Kimie:** @@

**Eika:** issyo ni rensyuu site ta yo @

**Eika:** we were practising together@

**Kimie:** e, eigo?

**Kimie:** what, English?

**Eika:** un, eigo no rensyuu

**Eika:** yeah, practising English.

**Kimie:** @zyoodan desyo?@

**Kimie:** @are you kidding me?@

**Eika:** kare ga me no mae ni iru sootei de sa~, 'how do you do?', 'my name is Eika' [with deliberate intonation and higher pitch of her voice] @@@. hontoo ni baka datta yo ne~. atasitai sa~ @@@

**Eika:** imagining him in front of us, 'how do you do?', 'my name is Eika' @@@. we were so stupid then, really. we were @@@(i4june03eika)

The participants' romantic desire for Western stars thus was the first in a series of links created between ELL and romantic attraction. In practising how to introduce themselves in English to Tom Cruise, Eika and her friend created an imaginary relationship between the Western actor as their object of *akogare* and themselves. English emerges as a powerful tool to construct a gendered identity and to gain access to the romanticized West. Surrounded by the multiple discourses of English as a desirable and powerful language, most of the informants report having had *akogare* for the English language and Western culture since their childhood. However, during their adolescence, this *akogare* for the English language and the West became increasingly gendered and romanticised.

### Following One's Dreams: *ryugaku* in Sydney

Ichi and Yuka followed their adolescent *akogare* straight out of their teens to Australia. Eika, Chizu, and Yoko resurrected their youthful dreams when they became increasingly disillusioned with life in Japan, after Yoko's divorce, and when Eika and Chizu felt trapped in a job that seemed to lack direction. All of the primary participants spent a minimum of 21 months in Sydney. After the original period they had planned to stay (a few months to a year in most cases) had expired, they had decided to stay on because they felt their progress in English was nowhere near enough. They also began to fear that they would forget their English back in Japan. They either lived off their savings or were supported by their parents.

In order to make sense of their interactional and emotional experiences in Sydney, it is imperative to begin by looking at the ways in which their *akogare* discourses shaped their personal measures of success. Such measures are multiple, changeable, and contextual, with some being more foregrounded than others depending on the context in which the participants found themselves. For most informants, however, the ultimate personal measure of success was socially based. The acquisition of grammar or vocabulary, even as expressed in test scores, did not matter as much as their access to and social acceptance by Australian native speakers in the forms of friendship or romance. '*Gaijin ni kakomareta mainichi no seikatsu*' [Everyday life surrounded by *gaijins*] was what they had typically imagined for themselves before arriving in Sydney and that sort of life was thought of as a 'natural' means and ends to learning English, as *ryugaku* magazines had led them to believe prior to departure.

Yoko's reflection on her imagination prior to her arrival in Sydney is a case in point:

**Yoko:** oosutoraria ni kuru mae, yoku koo sidonii no dokka no kafe de~ suteki na hakuzin tomodati ni kakomarete @@, RYUUTYOO koo eigo de tyatto site waratte ru zibun wo soozou sitari site masita yo @@

**Yoko:** before coming to Australia, I used to imagine myself surrounded by many beautiful white friends in a café, somewhere in Sydney @@, chatting and chuckling with them in my FLUENT English @@ (i30april 02yoko)

However, once in Sydney, the 'everyday life surrounded by *gaijins*' image quickly lost its validity. All of the participants felt unable to either understand native speakers or make themselves understood by them in social encounters, finding it impossible to move beyond the initial greeting level. In a matter of weeks, the forming of friendships and intimacy with Australians proved to be extremely hard and challenging, if not impossible, without an excellent command of English. Hence, relationships with native speakers became a signifier of their symbolic success in ELL and successful identity transformation from a monolingual Japanese to a bilingual cosmopolitan.

Shortly after their arrival, all participants experienced a deeply felt disappointment because of their inability to interact in English. They spoke about their lack of grammar, which they felt made speaking difficult, if not impossible, and their 'untrained ear', which prevented them from understanding what had been said, particularly in *oojii* [Aussie] English. However, they diligently worked at overcoming those shortcomings with the means they could access – they bought additional monolingual English textbooks in Sydney, or had bilingual textbooks sent from Japan; they dutifully spent hours and hours watching TV and listening to the radio in order to 'train their ear' to the sound of (Australian) English. Despite their efforts, these conventional learning strategies did not only prove ineffective, but also dull. Many cried over their excruciatingly slow progress and the gap between their earlier dreams of *ryugaku* life and their realities. In contrast to their dreams of becoming fluent easily and 'naturally' in interactions with native speakers, they found that they had very few opportunities to meet non-Japanese people or other (Asian) ESL students. At the same time that their dreams of 'picking up' English easily were shattered, the participants were increasingly exposed to success stories that linked fluency with a romantic relationship. At school and in their social circle of ESL friends, everyone spoke with admiration of women who had become fluent rapidly once they had secured a native speaker boyfriend. In the next section, we will

turn to the ways in which a Western boyfriend came to be seen as a 'master strategy' for successful ELL.


### 'I Need a Man': *akogare* for Western Men


The intensity of the participants' *akogare* for Western men varies (across participants but also over time) from an unachievable dream, a sheer fantasy, to one of their explicit goals, or even an absolute necessity for their success in ELL. However, what emerges as a common theme is the assumption that a Western romantic partner is the ultimate 'method' to improve one's English. After months of diligent 'conventional' ESL study, Eika reached the following conclusion:

**Eika:** [...] de, omotta n da yo ne~, mosi koo konsutanto ni eigo wo ne tyanto syabereru kikai wo tukuru to sitara ... otoko da! tte. neitjibu no kare ga hituyoo ka na tte sa.

**Eika:** [...] then I thought, if I need to create a more constant opportunity to actually speak English ... a man! I need a native speaker boyfriend. (f22oct03eika)

A native speaker partner is seen as good for ELL because romance creates a relaxed atmosphere for the use of English on a regular basis. Furthermore, while their self-esteem suffered as a result of their perceived failure at achieving English fluency, the power dynamics of a relationship, where they knew themselves to be desired and loved could restore their self-confidence:

**Eika:** yappari kono kare ga zibun wo suki datte sitte ru to yuuri da yo ne. nanka uwate ni dereru tte iu no. aite ga sa~ zibun ni tokubetu na kanzyoo ga aru tte sitte ru to motto zibun no koto hanasitaku naru yo ne. de eigo de yaru no mo sonna ni kowaku nai mitai na ... 

**Eika:** I think it's really advantageous when you know that this man wants you. you kind of have the upper hand. when you know that he has a special interest in you, you kind of feel like talking more about yourself. taking risks in English doesn't seem so threatening ...  (7mar03eika)

However, Western men are much more than just a linguistic resource. They are also a symbol of romance and chivalry. English terms of endearment are seen as a particular expression of Western heterosexual relationships. Many participants confessed their desire to be called 'darling', 'honey', or 'sweetheart':

**Ichi:** seiyo no hito wa yoku 'darling' toka 'sweetie' toka 'babe' toka iu yan [...] mukasi kara soo iu no yowai n yo @@@ de ne, nikaime no

deito no toki ni, Sean ga *dinner* tukutte kureta n yo. de kaimon itta toki, ano kare wo yonda n yo~ 'hey Sean' tte, sositara kare, 'yes, darling?' tte. Soo iu no suggoi akogarete ta kara. nanka aa, kare no onna ni natta n ya na tte kanzi sita wa @@@

**Ichi:** Westerners often say 'darling', 'sweetie' and 'babe' [...] I have a soft spot for these words @@@ well, on the second date, Sean cooked dinner for me. when we went shopping, and I called out to him, like, 'hey Sean', he said to me, 'yes, darling?' I had so much *akogare* for it. it really made me feel like I was his girl @@@ (i30sep03ichi)

These terms of endearment allow the participants a transformational experience from their Japanese world to the Western world because they feel that romantic nuances and Prince-Charming-associations of Japanese terms of endearment are non-existent. Eika recalls feeling drawn into another world when she was called 'honey' by her Australian boyfriend:

**Eika:** saisyo wa, bikkuri sita yo ... kore ka ~ [redacted] utan no sekai! mitai na kanzi de ne. hazime wa bikkuri site [redacted] otto muzukayukatta to omou yo, de tyotto hitogoto datta kanzi ga suru. demo uresikatta yo tasika ni ne, aa, aziazin zya nai hito to renai site ru n da na tte. nihongo de wa nai nyuansu de syo, dakara tigau sekai ni kityatta na ~ [redacted] motta shi. uresikatta no wa hibiki da yo. daarin no kotoba no h [redacted] i ...

**Eika:** at first, I was surprised ... I thought 'wow, this is the Western world!' in the beginning, it was ticklish and felt like it was happening to someone else. but, I was happy, and it made me feel that I was really with a non-Asian man. the Japanese language does not have the same nuance and so it made me feel like I had been drawn into a different world. what made me happy about it most really was the sound ... the sound of 'honey, darling' ... (m28mar04eika) [redacted]

Conversely, attempts by English-speaking boyfriends to use Japanese terms of endearment or expressions of love are considered a real turn-off. Ichi, for instance, reports how disgusted she felt when her Australian boyfriend, who knew some Japanese, tried to use Japanese during sexual intercourse:

**Ichi:** yatu ga beddo de nihongo tukatta n yo [redacted] moo sinziren gurai iya yatta wa~. 'suggoku nurete ru ne!' tte n [redacted] ngo de itta n yo [with a frown on her face and frustration in her voice]. moo saitei yatta wa!

**Ichi:** you know he was using Japanese in bed and it was a major turn-off! he said to me, 'wow you are so wet!' in Japanese [with

a frown on her face and frustration in her voice]. it was so disgusting! (f31july02ichi)

It is clear from Ichi's statement, and the fact that she stopped seeing this man soon after, that the participants exert a number of choices in relation to native-speaker boyfriends. Whereas it may seem from our discussion so far that the participants would take any native-speaking man they could get, nothing could be further from the truth. Two themes emerge in the choices they exerted with regard to potential partners, namely race and knowledge of Japanese.

### Akogare and Race

As discussed in the sections on 'The Glamour of ELL' and 'Dreaming of Tom Cruise and Brad Pitt', media discourses present the desirable English-speaking man as White. Not surprisingly then, Whiteness in potential partners is highly prized by the participants, as for instance in this statement from Chizu:

**Chizu:** yappari hakuzin da yo. datte kodomo no koro kara no akogare dakara hakuzin igai kangaerarenai yo ne. @mou sonna koto itte ru tosi zyaa nai n da kedo, imada ni hakuzin to hanasu to koofun sityau mon @@, nanka zibun de kawaiku syabettyattari, koe ga takaku nattyattari suru no wakarun da yo ne @@@!

**Chizu:** I like white men. well, it's my childhood *akogare*, so I can't think of any other option but white. @ I know that I am too old to fancy them like this, but I still tend to get excited when I talk with white men @@, and I find myself speaking more cutely and using a higher-pitched voice @@@! (t15mar04chi)

Similarly, the race of one of Ichi's boyfriends, and his British nationality, were a cause of celebration even for her mother:

**Ichi:** okaasan kare no koto yorokonde ru n da yo ne @@@

**Ichi:** my mother is really happy with him @@@

**Kimie:** @@@

**Kimie:** @@@

**Ichi:** dokkara kita no~ tte. yuukei kara da yo tte ittara, suggoi yorokonzatte, 'wa ~ zyaa, igirisuzin zya nai!' toka itte @@

**Ichi:** she asked me where he came from. I told her that he was from the UK, and she was so excited, like, 'wow, he is ENGLISH!' @@

**Kimie:** @@@

**Kimie:** @@@

**Ichi:** maa, tenkeiteki na hakuzin igirisuzin da yo tte ittara yokatta ne tte itte kurete sa @@

**Ichi:** she was excited for me when I told her that he is a classic white English man @@ (i21nov03ichi)

Their *akogare* for White men often had a positive effect on their agency and led them to seek out interactional opportunities, as in the case of Ichi, who frequently went out ‘man-hunting’ with an Australian girlfriend on weekends. In some cases, the desire to meet a White man was stronger than the desire to meet a native-speaking partner; in other cases, and at other points in time, the desire for a native-speaking partner, proved stronger than race considerations. Yoko’s story provides a case in point. When she first came to Australia, she did not even consider Asian-Australian men as potential romantic partners, or even as linguistic resources. She regarded a party where she had an opportunity to mix with Asian-Australian men, who were all native speakers of English, as a waste of time:

**Kimie:** paatjii doo datta no?

**Kimie:** so, how was the party?

**Yoko:** tyotto kii te kudasai yo~, baabekyuu paatjii ni wa ippai oosutoriazin kuru tte tomodati ga itte ta tte itta zya nai desu ka? de, suggoku tanosimi ni site ta n desu yo. demo, ano, maa takusan hito wa, aa, hotondo wa, atasi no tomodati no furattomeito no tomodati datta n desu kedo, moo, minna azian oosutorarian datta n desu yo! maa minna neitjibu ka eigo perapera na hitotati bakkari datta n desu kedo, iya ~ kimie-san, atasi wa koo iu otoko tati to asonde iru hima wa nai na tte. hontoo ni, yooku wakari masita yo, aa atasi wa hakuzin no kare ga hosii n date.

**Yoko:** listen, I told you that my friend told me that there would be many Australians at the BBQ party? so I was really looking forward to it. but, well, there were a lot of people, mostly my friend’s flatmate’s friends, and they were all Asian-Australian! they were all native speakers or spoke English really well. but I felt, ‘they aren’t my type of men’. Kimie, I am not here to waste my time mixing with men like these guys. once again I had this self-confirmation that what I want is a white boyfriend. (f25july02yoko)

However, gradually Yoko’s reasoning changed and she considered it more important to find any native-speaker partner to practise her English rather than to waste time pursuing a native-speaker partner



who might also be White. Eventually, John, a Chinese-Australian, became her first *gaijin* boyfriend in Australia:

**Yoko:** maa hakuzin otoko ga doono koono to zutto itte masita kedo, kek-kyoku aziazin tukamae tyai masita. tyotto keisan tigail desita yo ne. demo, kare neitjibu nande, doonika naru to omoi masu @@

**Yoko:** I was going on and on about white men for a long time, but in the end, I got an Asian. it's a bit of a miscalculation, but really he is a native speaker, so I will survive @@ (f21dec03yoko)

His native-speaker identity was what encouraged Yoko to get romantically involved with him in the first place, and to remain in their rocky relationship for longer than she would otherwise have. As her ambivalent comment 'I will survive' implies, however, John's racial background remained at the forefront of her experience of him, and did so as a problem. During their relationship, she stressed any aspect of John that enhanced his legitimacy as an Australian whenever possible:

**Yoko:** kare wa aziazin nan desu kedo, neitjibu zya nai desu ka. kare no hii oziisan ga oosutoraria ni kite, kare no otoosan mo okaasan mo tyainiizu syaberenai n desu yo. John mo tyainiizu zenzen syaberenai si. dakara, hontoo ni nakami wa oojii na n desu yo ne ... [...] aruhi, kare ga sigotoba no koriigu ni 'G'day mate' tte itte ru no kiita n desu yo. atasi sorede kandoo sityatte, aa, kare tte hontoo ni oojii nanda ~ tte omoi masita ...

**Yoko:** he is Asian, but, he is a native speaker of English. his great grandfather came to Australia, so neither his father nor his mother can speak Chinese. John can't speak Chinese at all either. so he is really an Aussie inside ... [...] the other day, I heard him say, 'G'day mate' to his colleagues at work. that really impressed me and got me to realize again that he was a real Aussie ... (f21dec03yoko)

Even despite the fact that White men dominated the participants' desires, not all White men were automatically desired as potential partners, or even as linguistic resources.

### 'Sleazy Japanese Speakers'

Whereas there can be no doubt that Whiteness is treated as the norm, and the most desirable racial identity of their interlocutors, White men who speak Japanese were rejected by all the participants. Such men are often referred to as 'sleazy Japanese speakers' or simply *ruuzaa* [loser].


When they first arrived in Australia, most participants had easier access to people with connections to Japan, and their bilingualism and

associated interest in befriending Japanese people, especially women, were considered an advantage. For Eika, the bilingualism of White people who had studied Japanese meant a window of opportunity for friendship and romance. Despite this positive assessment of bilingual Western men, Eika's relationship with such a man in the first few months of her stay in Sydney was a constant struggle over language choice. According to Eika, Andrew paid very little attention when she talked in English, but became much more attentive when she spoke in Japanese. Consequently, Eika often felt she had no choice but to speak Japanese, which in turn made her feel guilty because the main objective of her life in Sydney was to master English. Using Japanese on a daily basis seemed like an act of betraying her determination to improve her English. Despite her protests, Japanese remained the main language in the relationship, and Eika felt doubly betrayed as she had dreamt of a chivalrous Westerner who would take her needs and concerns seriously. So, even before their romance ended, Eika started to long for a monolingual *gaijin* boyfriend:

**Eika:** moo, tugi no kare wa zettai ni nihongo siranai hito ni suru!

**Eika:** for my next boyfriend, I am going to choose someone who doesn't know Japanese language! (f19june03eika)

Language choice is not the only problem that bilingual Western men present for the participants. Much more crucially, White men with any level of fluency in Japanese are assumed to be interested in Japanese women mainly for their supposed sexual 'easiness'. As we pointed out in the introduction, there is a pervasive sexist and nationalist stereotype of Japanese women as 'yellow cabs', as having blind *akogare* for Western men and sleeping with anyone who is White and English-speaking. Given the pervasiveness of this discourse in Japan, anyone who has any knowledge of Japan can be expected to be familiar with statements such as these, from a Japanese travel website:

.] In sum, the reason why Japanese women are so willing to have sex with *gaijin* men is their abhorrence of Japanese society and their desire to escape. This easily explains contemporary Japanese women's passion for learning English, popularity of English schools, and English teachers' unlimited access to sex. Sex with *gaijins* is the same as speaking English with *gaijins*, and is one step towards escaping from Japan. What is more, sex is not as difficult as studying English. It is in fact so easy. (<http://member.nifty.ne.jp/worldtraveller/enjo/gaijin.htm>; last accessed on 26 March 2004; KT's translation).

Consequently, *gaijin* men who have more than high-school fluency in Japanese<sup>4</sup> immediately raise alarm bells with the participants. They suspect that they are sexual predators who are after easy sex with


'stupid' Japanese women, who would be so dazzled by their Whiteness as not to see through their real intentions. Yoko provides an example:

**Yoko:** nihongo hanaseru gaizin ni auto suguni, 'iyaa, kono hito zyapaniizu kiraa dakara ki wo tukenai to' tte omoi masu mon. nihonzin zyosei suki de ite kureru no wa ii n desu kedo ne. demo, nanka, kantan ni sekkusu yattiau toka iu imeezi motarete ru to omou to iya ni nattyau n desu yo ne. dakara, soo iu hito to auto, moo furaatte inaku nattyai masu. wazawaza soo iu hitotati to aitai to omoi masen ne ... soo iu hitotati to tomodati ni naru no tte kantan da to wa omoi masu kedo.

**Yoko:** when I meet *gaijin* men who can speak Japanese, I immediately think, 'ok, this guy must be a Japanese killer' and that I have to be careful. I guess it's kind of nice that they like Japanese women. but it is their image of Japanese women as sexually easy which turns me off. so when I meet one, I just walk away; I don't go out of my way to go find guys like them ... even though it may be easier to be friends with them. (t17mar04yoko)

Bilingual men are also assumed to be interested in Japanese women because they consider them as passive, submissive, feminine, and obedient – stereotypes about Japanese women that all participants reject. Yuka, for instance, complained of a bilingual Westerner in her social circle:

**Yuka:** zibun ga itumo asonde ru nihonzin no onnanokotati tte baka bakkari da si eigo syaberenai kara, atasi ga eigo SYABERERU TTE sinzirarenai n desu yo. dakara kare atasi no koto iya na n desu yo datte eigo SYABERERU si iitai koto datte IETYAU kara. saisyo ni atta toki nante, hontoo ni baka de eigo no syaberenai nihonzin no onna mitai na kanzi de. atasi ga eigo syabereru tte wakatta ra bikkuri site sinzirarenai tte kanzi @@

**Yuka:** he can't believe that I CAN speak English because most of the girls he goes out with are stupid and can't speak English. that's why he can't stand me because I CAN speak English and CAN express my opinions. when we first met, his attitude to me was obvious; he treated me as if I was a dumb Japanese girl who can't speak a word of English. when he found out that I was able to speak English, he ked stunned and could not believe it @@ (t15mar04yuka)

Lastly, bilingual men are not even considered as a way into Australian society as they often exclusively socialize with Japanese (women):

**Yoko:** anoo soo iu hitotati tte nihonzin to bakkari turumu zya nai desu ka. soo iu hito no paatji toka iku to nihonzin bakkari na n de nani kore tte kanzi de. daitai mukasi no onna wa nihonzin dattari mo

suru n desu yo. dakara ne eigo ga mokuteki da si soo iu nihongo hanasu gaizin to turundemo syooga nai tte omoi masen?

**Yoko:** you know, these guys only hang out with Japanese people. you go to their party and it will be full of Japanese people, and I feel like, what the hell? most of their ex-girlfriends are Japanese, too. so what's the point in getting to know Japanese speaking *gaijins* when my goal is to improve my English? (t17mar04yoko)

Avoiding Japanese-speaking *gaijins* can be seen as a refusal to be positioned in any of the stereotypes that circulate about Japanese women: sexually easy, submissive, or linguistically deficient English speakers. At the same time, the participants position these men as cheap, unintelligent, and unworthy of their attention. In a related development, a women-only English study agent, *Go-Girls*, has rapidly gained popularity in Japan's competitive EFL industry in recent years, and this may be so because it provides an environment where female English learners can feel 'safe' and do not have to concern themselves with the sexual and power politics inevitably involved in interactions with Western male teachers (see McMahill, 2001, for a similar description of feminist English classes in Japan).

## Conclusion

*Akogare* refers to a bundle of desires – for a 'Western' emancipated lifestyle, for a 'Western' prince charming and ladies' man, for mastery of English – all of which entail and inflect each other. Media discourses paint a black-and-white picture of the world in which these desires matter; on the one hand, there is the *ryugaku* illusion of finding oneself and one's *ikikata* in Sydney, New York, or some other mythical place in the West, that is promoted in women's magazines, *ryugaku* magazines, and the like. On the other hand, there is the misogynist and nationalist scare discourse of Japanese women as unthinking slaves of their fantasies. The participants in this study are well aware of both discourses, and try to find a way to realize their dreams without falling victim to them – even if not always successfully. Their stories are full of contradictions, disappointments, and rejections. The same women who idealize the West and idolize Western men ridicule some of them as losers. Yoko, for instance, who sees it as her life's mission to turn herself into a 'White' native speaker like Cameron Diaz and to find a White native-speaker boyfriend like Brad Pitt, has rejected several romantic and sexual invitations by White native-speaker men. On the one hand, the practices of the participants reflect and reproduce the hegemonic *akogare* discourse for English and the West. On the other hand, they also challenge the essentialist dichotomy between White native speakers as desired and powerful,

and non-native speakers as desiring and powerless. The participants exercise tremendous agency in fulfilling their *akogare*, with the structures of *akogare* in turn constraining their agency, which we take as their 'socioculturally mediated capacity to act' (Ahearn, 2001: 112).

For instance, in order to establish and maintain a relationship with a male native speaker, the informants dynamically drew on their gendered and sometimes sexual attraction. The most explicit example comes from a secondary participant, 34-year-old Miri. A decade earlier, Miri had studied English in the United States, and she reported having had no shortage of interactional opportunities in English at her dormitory as her racial and sexual identity magnetized post-adolescent college males:

**Miri:** dame na kotati wo tukatte eigo rensyuu site ta no omoi dasu to nanka mune ga itamu no yo ne~. ippai deeto wa sita kedo~ eigo zyootatu sitakatta dake nan de tukatte ta ne. ima wa warui na tte omou kedo @@

**Miri:** my heart aches with guilt when I remember how I used to use these poor guys to practice English. I went on many dates, but I was just taking advantage of them to improve my English. I feel really bad about it now @@ (f15aug02miri)

She considered male residents in her dormitory as 'free practice partners' and while she was happy to chat with them, she never let down her guard as she knew their 'real' intentions:

**Miri:** nani yaritai ka nante hontoo moro bare. yaritai dake. sekkusu sitai dake nan da yo ne. nanka koo odeko ni 'yarasete!' tte kaite atte, 'onegaisimasu' ttsuu no ga koo tjiisyatu no mune no tokoro ni kaite atta ri @ hotondo no kotati wa busaiku datta kara maa, hana-sita kedo hyoomen teki na koto dake ne.

**Miri:** what they wanted was sooo obvious; they just wanted to get laid. sex was all they were after. It said 'yarasete (let me do you)!' on their forehead or 'I am begging you' on their T-shirt across their chest @ most of them were fairly ugly, so I would chat with them to practice English, but only on artificial levels (f15aug02miri)

Miri understood the racial and sexual politics in her dormitory and capitalized on them. There are numerous cases where the informants draw on their identity as the desired Asian Other to get access to linguistic resources. In countless social contexts, they report feeling utterly deficient and powerless due to their limited linguistic and social capital. Nevertheless, it is also possible for them to position themselves as the desired Other and to negotiate the power balance to their advantage.

However, it would be misleading to end with the suggestion that the participants are successfully renegotiating the power imbalance inherent in the emotional relationship that sets up the West as object of desire and Japanese women as the desirers. For the women in this study, the lives they aspire to are powerfully associated with English. There can be no doubt that this relationship is constructed and maintained in media discourses that serve powerful market interests – be it the language school and *ryugaku* market, or, on a broader level, the consumption of all the branded goods and services associated with *ikikata*. As they have stayed on in Sydney beyond the originally intended period, the women are financially less secure than they were before they came here: Chizu, Eika, and Yoko gave up their careers in Japan and their life-savings are dwindling away, and Ichi and Yuka continue to rely on financial assistance from their parents. As the expected rewards of these sacrifices – fluency in English, full participation in Sydney’s fashionable society, an *ikemen* [handsome, desirable] boyfriend – have not been forthcoming, desire may even give way to depression.

A striking example comes from Eika. In April 2004, it emerged that Eika had been harassed by one of her TAFE lecturers, and all this former competent career woman, who was confident in her English before she came to Australia, could do was to keep it to herself for a long time. Eventually, she experienced a series of nervous breakdowns. When she finally talked about it to Kimie Takahashi, she said:

**Eika:** toozen nanda yo ne hontoo datte atasi no eigo dame da si kare no iu toori. soreni sa~ zenzen eigo nobasu doryoku toka mo site kite nakatta si . . . demo hontoo moo nannimo dekinai tte omottyau si kore izyoo wa muri kana tte ne koo doonika genzyoo wo yoku suru ni attate sa nannimo dekinai tte kanzi.

**Eika:** I deserve it, you know, because my English is not very good, and he is right about me. besides I haven’t been trying hard to improve my English either . . . but it’s just that I feel so hopeless and helpless myself that I can’t begin to do anything to get better. (t14april 04eika)

Thus, the Lukes’ (1974) quote cited in the ‘Theoretical Framework’ section fully applies to the participants. While *akogare* does turn on their agency and makes them pursue the object/s of their desires, the failure that is built into the system – that is, it is impossible to become a White native speaker – also makes them turn themselves into victims: silenced, incompetent, and depressed. In terms of the often-made connection between desire – or ‘motivation’ as it is called in most research papers – and success in second language learning, it is important to point out

that the most fluent participant, Yuka, was also the one who had the least amount of *akogare*.

## Notes

1. Our names appear in alphabetical order. The research reported in this chapter is part of Kimie Takahashi's Ph.D. project, conducted under the supervision of Ingrid Piller. We would like to record our thanks to the co-supervisor, Gerard Sullivan. Special thanks are to Nerida Jarkey for her help with the Romanization of the Japanese.
2. The study received ethics clearance from the University of Sydney Human Ethics Commission.
3. The following transcription conventions are used:

.	short pause
...	long pause
~	extended ending typical of Japanese
CAPS	emphatic stress
@	laughter
@laughter@	the statement between the two @s is made laughingly
[...]	omission
'yarasete!'	change in voice quality when another voice is imitated or quoted
(sitting down)	research notes

Type of data and date of data collection can be found in the brackets at the end of each quote. For instance, (f17april04eika) indicates that the specific quote is drawn from the field-note written on 17 April 2004, about Eika. Other types of data are represented as follows: e = e-mails; i = interview; m = MSN messenger; and t = telephone conversation.

Data are provided in the Japanese original first, followed by a translation into English. The 99 style recommended by the Society for the Romanization of the Japanese Alphabet is used (<http://www.roomazi.org/top.html>, last accessed on 19 April 2004).

4. Japanese is the most frequently learned foreign language at school level in New South Wales (Department of Education and Training NSW, 1998).

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