# Memorization and Performance Watching: Practicing Welfare Linguistics in Performed Culture Approach

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## Introduction

Performed Culture Approach (PCA) makes use of contextualized script rehearsals by having language learners memorize and perform assigned scripts as part of language instruction. While memorization is essential to any learning process, rote memorization in language learning has a reputation for shallow learning, a lack of understanding, and a tendency to induce anxiety. Further, memorization often emphasizes rote retention of scripts, phrases, or vocabulary without fostering a deeper understanding or practical application of the language. Conversely, learning involves engaging with the material in a way that builds transferable skills and long-term competence. This difference is aptly highlighted in a reflection from a student who stated that he "basically learned nothing" after going through his language program which, in his opinion, put "so much emphasis on memorizing in order to get a good grade" (Tsuchiya, 2020). This critique underscores the limitations of an overreliance on memorization in language education, which can hinder the development of genuine language proficiency.

In response, various strategies have been implemented at Brigham Young University to support and empower language learners in the classroom. These approaches include teaching at a slower pace, implementing structured pair work, and conducting oral interviews with open-ended elements (Tsuchiya, 2020); narrative rehearsals in the second year (Tsuchiya, 2022); and outlets for students to share their achievements as well as any concerns, including mental health challenges (Tsuchiya & Fisher, 2024). The aim of this paper is to improve the quality of learning in language programs by discussing ways to fill the gap between rote memorization and meaningful learning. By using welfare linguistics and PCA as a framework, this paper will discuss how the implementation of performance watching (Noda et al., 2017) can help learners develop critical thinking skills in language education through critical observation and analysis of the contextual elements that define the linguistic and nonlinguistic behavior.

The following will provide a brief review of welfare linguistics and PCA in relation to memorization as part of language learning with pedagogical implications on how to effectively implement memorizations into language curriculum. Then, it will introduce the basics of the practice called performance watching along with two examples of how it can be implemented in language education. The conclusion will suggest that performance watching fosters critical thinking, thus enhancing learning and benefiting society.

## Theoretical Frameworks

### Critical Approach: Memorization and Welfare Linguistics

While learning is still an important aspect in language education, there is a movement in framing language education to cultivate meaningful connections and critical awareness, which lead to the betterment of the society. Drawing from theories such as critical literacy, critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970), and critical applied linguistics (Janks et al., 2013), language educators

have a means to empower learners to challenge systems of inequality from diverse perspectives. The implementation of critical content-based instruction (Sato et al., 2017) exemplifies this by embedding critical thinking within language curricula. Further, the development of intercultural competence (Byram, 1997), as well as effective translanguaging skills (Garcia & Wei, 2014), can promote mutual understanding, skills to negotiate cultural identities, and foster a sense of shared humanity in the "third space" where different cultures coexist (Zhang & Xiaobin, 2021). Welfare linguistics (Heinrich, 2021; Otsuji et al., 2021; Tokugawa, 1999) supports this movement by addressing social inequities in communication and enhancing sociolinguistic welfare. These movements support that—when integrated with a critical approach—language education can play a pivotal role in creating and fostering peace as defined by Galtung (1990)—creating a societal state where basic human needs such as survival, well-being, identity, and freedom are fulfilled.

Welfare linguistics is a framework that connects language teaching to social change. It aims to promote approaches to maximize sociolinguistic welfare and personal well-being by identifying oppressive social structures and empowering marginalized groups in ways that can benefit everyone. Welfare linguistics emphasizes empowering those who are traditionally marginalized in communication, such as non-native speakers or language learners. Moving beyond memorization to methods that promote meaningful interactions can help such individuals actively participate in conversations, build confidence, and challenge hierarchical power structures in communication. Further, to combat exclusion, welfare linguistics encourages methods that integrate personal relevance and practical application into language learning. This aligns with the critique of memorization-centered courses where learners report feeling disconnected from real language use. Memorization-heavy strategies can create stress and a sense of failure when learners struggle to retain information or achieve communicative goals. In contrast, welfare linguistics advocates for practices that promote well-being by emphasizing collaboration, creativity, and adaptability, fostering environments where learners thrive both socially and personally, through which they can develop skills that support their sociolinguistic agency. Rather than heavily relying on memorized interactions, educators can incorporate activities that engage learners in diverse communicative scenarios, enabling them to navigate real-life contexts and challenges. Such practices align with the principles of welfare linguistics by ensuring that language learning contributes to individual empowerment and broader societal change.

**Memorization and Performed Culture Approach**

As part of the language learning process, PCA (Walker & Noda, 2010) uses memorization as a steppingstone toward culturally appropriate language performance and proficiency. Oftentimes, language students in PCA are required to memorize and perform a dialogue in class. While useful in building self-study and foundational skills in the target language, the practice of requiring students to memorize and perform assigned scripts may be perceived as oppressive, especially when there is a rigid focus on memorization and a repeated reproduction of static scripts. If implemented ineffectively, without the emphasis on contextualization and application in a classroom, it can feel like a rote recitation rather than a meaningful performance. Such practice favors measurable but shallow outcomes rather than fostering critical language skills and sociolinguistic competence. It also disregards the diversity of different learning styles, leaving some students to feel that the requirement of rote memorization is daunting and unproductive. To implement memorizations as an integral part of

the language curriculum, language educators need to address these concerns to maximize the learning outcomes, which will positively impact sociolinguistic welfare and the personal well-being of language learners.

## Pedagogical implications

### Memorization in ACT Classes

In ACT types of classes, where speaking and listening skills in the target language are emphasized, speaking practice activities such as script rehearsals, drills, and application exercises should be contextualized in real-life contexts. Such emphasis on contextualized activities helps learners connect the language to their lived experiences in realistic situations. To accomplish this, language educators need to accompany their students' performances with feedback and guidance on their linguistic accuracy *and* appropriate behavior, which includes ensuring that those speaking are facing their interlocutors with appropriate physical distance, eye contact, and body language. When linguistic accuracy is overemphasized, these behavioral aspects of language performance are often overlooked in language classrooms.

Providing daily grades can motivate learners to prepare for class in advance, but it can also create a high level of performance anxiety if there is too much emphasis on the linguistic accuracy of what was memorized. Teachers can help reduce performance anxiety by emphasizing growth over grades while still holding expectations for language learners to reach a level where they can perform successfully in given contexts. One way to do so is to allow learners ample chances to experiment with the language without penalizing their efforts, especially at the beginning of practice activities. To the extent possible, individualized feedback—based on students' performance—should be given at appropriate times inside and outside of class. Daily grades should be given based on learners' ability to demonstrate successful communication skills in the target language within each given context. When learners struggle to perform successfully in class, guidance on how to study and prepare well for performance-based language practice should be provided.

Finally, collaborative learning can be implemented by encouraging group work where language students from different backgrounds can learn from and support each other after they are given sufficient guidance from the instructor in class. See Tsuchiya (2020) for a discussion on how to effectively implement structured pair work in PCA classes.

### Providing Support in FACT Classes

Abundant support should be provided in FACT type of classes where the students' base language can be used to discuss complex matters.

As part of a FACT class, it is important to remind students that memorizations are a necessary part of any learning, since an adequate amount of vocabulary and expressions—along with cultural proficiency—needs to be acquired to successfully navigate interactions in the target language. FACT teachers can review the scripts practiced in ACT classes to ensure that students are taking the time necessary to learn the materials, rather than just memorizing them mechanically. As part of learning, they should emphasize cultural elements associated with the learning materials by taking the time to discuss how the scripts or dialogues that learners are studying are influenced by the roles of the speakers, audience, place, time, or situations (Walker & Noda, 2010).

FACT teachers can also help equip learners with strategies to learn the materials well so that they can develop the ability to perform successfully in the target culture. They can do so by providing previews of upcoming scripts and encouraging them to come up with questions about the new materials. In response to learners' questions, FACT teachers can point out what they have already been introduced to as well as highlight new concepts in the upcoming lessons. FACT teachers can also provide and show how to use resources, such as media contents (including AI) that support language learning, so learners can effectively practice speaking, listening, reading, writing, and conjugating outside of the classroom. They can also provide individualized feedback on study habits. Oftentimes, learners need ample reminders and demonstrations on how to locate and utilize existing learning resources effectively.

Finally, FACT teachers can strive to create a supportive learning community where diverse learning styles and multicultural perspectives are valued, and where both learners and teachers receive strong mental and emotional support. Language learners often feel frustrated and overwhelmed when they struggle to master course material. When such feelings arise, it is important to remind them that mastery is not achieved in a single study or practice session but through repeated exposure in various contexts, such as participating in ACT classes, completing textbook activities, and preparing for quizzes. Teachers should also encourage learners to seek opportunities to practice the target language outside of coursework. Additionally, fostering a sense of community where learners feel comfortable discussing their needs with peers can help support their mental and emotional well-being. Teachers can guide students in recognizing their strengths and weaknesses by introducing and experimenting with different learning strategies. Encouraging students to form study groups can also be beneficial. Furthermore, teachers can build rapport by sharing their own struggles as language learners, helping students relate to them and to feel understood. When challenges arise, it is crucial for teachers to reach out for support and accept help as needed, reinforcing a culture of growth and resilience.

**Performance Watching in FACT classes**

Performance watching can be incorporated into FACT classes to nurture critical thinking skills as a complement to the suggestions discussed above. Performance watching (Noda et al., 2017) consists of observing and analyzing a verbal and nonverbal script in a given performance or a situated event that occurs in a particular context. It provides an opportunity for language teachers and learners to describe and analyze the (1) *time* (timing or situation), (2) *place*, (3) *roles of the actors*, and (4) *audience* of a given performance that is present or assumed. See Table 1 below for definitions and examples of each cultural element.

**Table 1**

*Cultural Elements to Observe and Analyze During Performance Watching*

| Cultural Elements | Definitions | Examples |
|---|---|---|
| *Time* | Time may refer to what happened (either in reality or in the imagination of one of the performers) preceding the interaction or what is expected to happen. | • before, during, or after work or school<br>• meeting someone for the first time<br>• declining, apologizing, or making a request |
| *Place* | Place specifically defines the performance by providing locational information. | • *Ogaki Shokai*<br>• Clinton University |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | | • *Shirai* household |
| *Roles* | Roles refer to the interactional positions that the actors take. | • work colleagues<br>• classmates or friends<br>• family members |
| *Audience* | Audience refers to a person or persons other than the actors of the performance that are in a position to witness the performance and may shape the performance because of their presence. In some instances, the audience may be present only in the mind(s) of the actor(s). | • colleagues<br>• teachers or supervisors<br>• parents<br>• friends |

As part of a FACT class, language teachers can incorporate performance watching by taking the time to watch or listen to a short performance in a media file with students in class. This could be a dialogue that students practice in class.[1] As necessary, they can pause and lead a discussion on relevant contextual elements and their influence on observed verbal and nonverbal performances. As appropriate, they can challenge students to think critically about the performance by providing hypothetical situations with a change in time, place, roles, and audience and ask how it might change the course of the performance. This type of discussion is preferably done in the students' base or familiar language (i.e., English). As appropriate, these cultural elements can be analyzed further to nurture critical thinking skills. For instance, FACT teachers can discuss factors—such as gender, race, nationality, age, disability, cultural backgrounds, and sexual orientation—that can subconsciously influence interactions, potentially manifesting as microaggressions (Takeuchi, 2023). Having these types of discussions can validate the identities and experiences of marginalized groups.

As part of performance watching, a title can be given to performance from the perspectives of one of the participants, the audience, or the observer. Two samples featuring dialogues from *NihonGO NOW!* (Noda et al., 2020) will be provided in the following.

**Words for Self and Others in Japanese**

Words for self and others in Japanese are introduced in almost any language textbooks. In *NihonGO NOW!,* a behind-the-scenes explanation is provided about the words for self and others in ACT 1–7, where Brian, a college student from the U.S., meets his host brother for the first time.[2]

Table 2 provides a summary of the script, time, place, roles, and audience for this interaction. Figure 1 provides one of the accompanying behind the scenes for this script with an explanation on words for self and others.

**Table 2**

*Boku Ichiro "I'm Ichiro" from ACT 1–7 of NihonGO NOW!*

[1] Note that while interactions between humans and AI can also be analyzed using performance watching, this paper will not explore this aspect due to space limitations. However, the principles of performance watching can be applied when prompting AI to practice Japanese by setting various conditions—such as relationships, contexts, and timing—essential for effective communication (Piccardo et al., 2021), along with specific interaction goals.

[2] Note that while there are similarities, Japanese words for self and others are not identical to English pronouns, as they are more complex and require careful consideration in usage.

| Title | Scene 1–7 *Boku, Ichiroo* “I’m Ichiro.” |
|---|---|
| *Script* |   **The script** |

| 一郎(いちろう) | ブライアン(ぶらいあん) |
|---|---|
| あ、ブライアン(ぶらいあん)? | はい。ブライアン(ぶらいあん)です。 |
| どうも!僕(ぼく)、一郎(いちろう)。 | 一郎君(いちろうくん)?どうぞよろしく。 |

| ***Ichiroo*** | ***Buraian*** |
|---|---|
| *A, Buˈraiˈan?* | *Haˈi, Buˈraiˈan desu.* |
| *Doˈomo! Boˈku, Iˈchiroo.* | *Iˈchiroo, kun? Doˈozo yoroshiku.* |

| **Ichiro** | **Brian** |
|---|---|
| Oh, Brian? | Yes, I’m Brian. |
| Hello! I’m Ichiro. | Nice to meet you. |

| *Time* | The Shirai family’s teenage son, Ichiro, comes into the room to greet Brian |
|---|---|
| *Place* | Brian’s room |
| *Roles* | Host family members |
| *Audience* | (Possibly) other members of the Shirai family |

**Figure 1**
*Behind the Scenes: 15 Words for Self and Others (ACT 1–7)*

**BTS 15 Words for self and others**

Direct reference to people, including oneself, in Japanese is much more complex than it is in English. The noun *watashi* ‘I’ is introduced here, but it is only one of many forms that people can use in referring to themselves. Others include:

*watakushi*—more formal than *watashi*
*atashi*—an informal form used primarily by women
*boku*—a form used primarily by boys and men; it can also be used to refer to little boys (meaning “you”)
*ore*—a rougher form used by older boys and men

It is therefore a matter of sometimes delicate maneuvering to decide how to refer to yourself. It depends on your relationship with the other(s) in the context as well as the circumstances you find yourself in. In this Scene you also see a good example of the stylistic difference between the host, Ichiro, who is less formal (*Boku, Ichiroo*) and the visitor, Brian, who maintains formal style (*Buraian desu*).

When introducing words for self and others, a critical discussion can take place by considering when alternative words instead of the word *boku* (a form used primarily by boys and men) may be used. For instance, how would Brian react if Ichiro were to use *watakushi* (more formal than *watashi*), *ore* (a rougher form used by older boys and men), or *atashi* (an informal form used primarily by women) in this situation? Is this an appropriate timing or situation to use

these alternative forms? Which aspect of his identity is Ichiro willing to disclose with his word choice for himself? How would the presence of other family members, like his mother, impact his word choice for himself? Responding to these questions can seem sensitive, but using a fictional character, such as Ichiro, as a point of reference provides a neutral and safe space for the class to handle sensitive topics *without* pressuring participants to disclose their own sensitive information.

While there may be no visible reactions on a surface level, a certain set of assumptions—regarding Ichiro's identity—may be formed, which can have a significant impact on future interactions. There may also be some visible reactions that require Ichiro to explain the word choice for himself, which may be a difficult task to do in the target language (especially for beginning-level students). Yet, such discussion can be beneficial, even for beginning-level students, in the sense that students can be purposeful in selecting words for introducing themselves. It can also equip them to start performance watching for words for themselves in any interactions they might see in person or in the media.

In this manner, performance watching can elicit fruitful discussions as well as critical thinking skills, encouraging language users to critically analyze social inequalities (Janks et al., 2013). As they develop their skills, learners can purposefully and selectively express and negotiate their desired, or ideal, identities in Japanese for appropriate situations (Sato et al., 2017), or they can choose not to disclose their identities.

**Pronouncing the Alphabet**

As part of performance watching discussions, language teachers guide students to critically analyze everyday habits and practices—often taken for granted—from multiple perspectives and to develop new values when necessary (Byram, 1997). One example is the pronunciation of the English alphabet in Japanese, as introduced in ACT 3–1 of *NihonGO NOW!*.

Table 3 summarizes the script, time, place, roles, and audience for this interaction, while Figure 2 presents a behind-the-scenes explanation of the alphabet's pronunciation.

**Table 3**

*Nihongo de nanto iimasu ka? 'What's It Called in Japanese?' From ACT 3–1 of NihonGO NOW!*

| | |
|---|---|
| Title | Scene 3–1 *Nihongo de nan to iimasu ka?* 'What's it called in Japanese?' |

<table>
<tr><td>Script</td><td>


The script
<table>
<tr><th>エイミー</th><th>孝</th></tr>
<tr><td>ＪＬＣのジョンソンです。どうぞよろしくお願いします。</td><td>あ、福沢大学の松浦です。どうぞよろしくお願いします。</td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td>あの、ＪＬＣって……。</td></tr>
<tr><td>ジャパニーズ・ランゲージ・クラブのことです。学生のサークルですね。</td><td>ああ、なるほど。</td></tr>
</table>
<table>
<tr><th>Eimii</th><th>Takashi</th></tr>
<tr><td>Je⌜e-eru-shi⌝i no Jo⌝nson desu. Do⌝ozo yo⌜roshiku onegai-shima⌝su.</td><td>A, Fu⌜kuzawa Da⌝igaku no Ma⌜tsu⌝ura desu. Do⌝ozo yo⌜roshiku onegai-shima⌝su.</td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td>Ano, je⌜e-eru-shi⌝i tte. . . .</td></tr>
<tr><td>Ja⌜paniizu rangeeji ku⌝rabu no ko⌜to⌝ desu. Ga⌜kuseei no sa⌝akuru desu ne.</td><td>Aa, na⌜ruhodo.</td></tr>
</table>
<table>
<tr><th>Amy</th><th>Takashi</th></tr>
<tr><td>I’m Johnson from JLC. Nice to meet you.</td><td>Oh, I’m Matsuura from Fukuzawa University. Nice to meet you.</td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td>Uhh . . . JLC?</td></tr>
<tr><td>It means ‘Japanese Language Club.’ It’s a student club.</td><td>Oh, I see.</td></tr>
</table>
</td></tr>
<tr><td>Time</td><td>Amy Johnson, President of the Japanese Language Club at her university, welcomes a new student from Japan and introduces herself.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Place</td><td>Clinton University in the U.S.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Roles</td><td>University students; President and a new club member</td></tr>
<tr><td>Audience</td><td>Other club members</td></tr>
</table>

**Figure 2**
*Behind the Scene 1 Pronouncing the Alphabet (ACT 3–1)*

## BTS 1 Pronouncing the alphabet

You should learn what the Roman alphabet sounds like in Japanese, since you may have to spell your name or provide other kinds of alphabetic information (email addresses, ticket confirmations, etc.). Listen to the accompanying sound file to help you learn the letters. All of these have the accent on the first mora.

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| えい a | *ei* | えいち h | *eichi* | おお o | *oo* | ヴぃい v | *vii* |
| びい b | *bii* | あい i | *ai* | ぴい p | *pii* | だぶりゅう w | *daburyuu* |
| しい c | *shii* | じぇえ j | *jee* | きゅう q | *kyuu* | えっくす x | *ekkusu* |
| でぃい d | *dii* | けい k | *kei* | あある r | *aaru* | わい y | *wai* |
| いい e | *ii* | える l | *eru* | えす s | *esu* | ぜっと z | *zetto* |
| えふ f | *efu* | えむ m | *emu* | てぃい t | *tii* | | |
| じい g | *jii* | えぬ n | *enu* | ゆう u | *yuu* | | |

When discussing the pronunciation of the alphabet within the Japanese sound system, a critical discussion can emerge by considering when and how these letters are pronounced in American English. For example, how might Amy perceive Takashi's English proficiency if he pronounces the acronym *JLC* as *jay-el-see* in American English instead of *jee-eru-shii*, as modeled in the dialogue? Based on his pronunciation, Amy might make assumptions about his English ability, which could influence her choice of language in their subsequent interactions.

The insertion of American English pronunciation into a Japanese sentence can be described as either *codeswitching* (alternating between languages) or *translanguaging* (the purposeful use of multiple languages in communication) (García & Li Wei, 2014). On the one hand, multilingual speakers often use these strategies to build rapport, enhance clarity, or facilitate smoother communication. On the other hand, second language (L2) learners of Japanese may benefit from mastering the Japanized pronunciation of the alphabet, particularly when interacting with Japanese speakers who have limited English proficiency. Additionally, using the Japanese pronunciation can serve as a strategic way to emphasize one's Japanese ability or to signal a preference for communicating in Japanese in certain contexts.

Having this type of discussion can be empowering for L2 users of Japanese; they can confidently recognize themselves as multilingual speakers. It can also help them recognize the fluidity and diversity of Japanese people and Japanese culture and society, which can be useful in critically questioning the fixed frameworks established by modern concepts of nation, ethnicity, and language (e.g., Japan = Japanese = Japanese language) (Sato et al., 2017). It can also equip L2 users of Japanese to start performance watching on ways the alphabet is pronounced in interactions they might see in person or in the media.

In summary, performance watching can empower L2 learners by enabling them to critically analyze their studies, including dialogues they are tasked with memorizing and performing. Gaining a deeper understanding of what they practice in class helps reduce anxiety in the language-learning process. With effective study habits and deliberate practice, L2 learners can adapt their performances to succeed in real-world contexts within the target culture.

Cultivating sensitivity to relevant contextual cues, social structures, and cultural practices enhances communication, leading to more successful interactions. This aligns with the broader goals of welfare linguistics, which aims to offer language instruction that benefits society.

## Conclusion

This paper aimed to bridge the gap between rote memorization and meaningful learning through performance watching, using welfare linguistics and the PCA as a framework. Performance watching can help learners develop critical thinking skills in language education by enabling them to analyze the contextual elements that define both linguistic and nonlinguistic behaviors. These elements include (1) *time* (timing or situation), (2) *place*, (3) *roles of the actors*, and (4) *the audience* involved in a given performance, with examples of performance watching discussions provided to illustrate this.

Performance watching encourages discussions that can benefit weaker groups—such as subordinate speakers, language learners, and minority populations—by deepening their understanding of why specific linguistic and nonlinguistic forms are used in the scripts they memorize and practice in class. Developing critical awareness is essential to bridging the gap between rote memorization and genuine learning. Guidance on self-referential words and pronunciation within the Japanese sound system can empower L2 learners by helping them intentionally choose the most suited words for self and decide when to pronounce the English alphabet using the Japanese phonetic system, all while considering relevant cultural factors.

By cultivating the ability to focus on these cultural elements through performance watching, L2 learners can better navigate the linguistic and cultural complexities in their future interactions. The development of critical awareness can have broader societal benefits, even for those in positions of power (Heinrich, 2021), by fostering genuine connections and enhancing successful communication that bridges cultural divides.

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