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Karate-Talk in a Canadian Dojo

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ABSTRACT

Karate-*do* is one of many *budo*, or martial ways, that originated during the Kamakura Shogunate of Japan. The original *dojos* (training halls), used the Japanese language to indoctrinate karate students into the moral code of the *dojo* community. Over the last century karate has spread across the world, and other languages have been combined with Japanese to teach the art and sport. In this article, the discursive practice of combining English and Japanese in Canadian *dojos* is called Karate-Talk. Using identity frameworks from linguistic anthropology and sociolinguistics, I illustrate and interpret how Karate-Talk teaches students the moral and ethical codes that are embedded in karate training, and in doing so helps students develop their black belt identity. *Dojos* want their students to develop black belt identities because it helps to pass on the traditions of karate-*do* and contributes to the preservation and continuation of the art form. This article describes Karate-Talk in a socio-historic context, and establishes the ways it is used to create black belt identities in karate students through the use of a case study.

Keywords: karate, discursive practices, identity construction, linguistic anthropology

Karate-*do* is a Japanese martial art that originated with the combat training and techniques of the feudal Japanese samurai and became a codified art form and sport in 1921. Over time, this combat training style has been passed from teachers (*sensei*) to students (*karate-ka*) in Japan using the Japanese language to command, instruct, and explain in the *dojo*. As karate spread through the world, other languages needed to be used in the *dojo* in order to attract new students who did not know Japanese. Despite this shift, many terms and phrases in Japanese have been maintained alongside these new languages. In this article, I analyze the discursive practices, including the combination of English and Japanese, in Canadian *dojos*, which I call Karate-Talk.

There are two aspects to all karate training; it is both physical and mental. As most know, *karate-kas* learn a plethora of punching, blocking, fighting, and defending techniques to be used in sport, in self-defence, and against imaginary opponents as a form of training. To this end, karate can be physically demanding for students. Karate-do training is also mentally demanding. The *dojo* sets out to indoctrinate its practitioners into a specific moral code of discipline and loyalty. Similar to the values Samurai held sacred in early Japanese history, *karate-kas* learn the importance of courage and respect inside and outside of the *dojo*.

Teaching both the physical and mental aspects of karate is of the utmost importance to *dojos* around the world. Part of doing so is teaching *karate-kas* to have the mentality and identity of a black belt. There are thousands of quotes on karate blogs and posters on the practitioners' walls that say things like "A black belt is not something you wear, it is something you become," or "It's not about getting a black belt, it's about being one." In the karate community, a black belt is an identity, and it is not one that develops the day a *karate-ka* receives their black belt, but is one the begins to form on their first day of training. The language practices in the *dojo* – such as Karate-Talk – are some of the ways this identity is forged. Following from these observations, this paper has two goals. It will first describe the discursive practices of Karate-Talk as it is found in one particular karate *dojo* in Halifax, Nova Scotia. Then, it will analyze how Karate-Talk is used to promote and instill black belt identities in *karate-kas*.

Socio-Cultural History of Karate-Do

Budo (martial ways) is the overarching name of all the martial arts that originated in Japan, of which karate-*do* is one. *Budo* integrates "physical training, mental discipline, and philosophical insight" (Donohue 1991, 5) with the goal of developing faculties of personal character and spirituality, which are known as *do* (ways). *Budo* are arts, beliefs, and customs, that are best understood through the continuity of historical practice and tradition and are heavily influenced by the socio-cultural history of Japan (Donohue 1991).

There are several socio-cultural practices from throughout Japanese history that prosper in the culture and tradition of *dojos*. There are three examples that are of particular interest when examining Karate-Talk. First are the pseudo-family communities of Ancient Japan social organizations, specifically from the Kofun Period. As early as the fourth century, social organizations began to develop to reflect socio-economic relations in Japan. Groups known as *uji* (loosely translates to clan) were communities of people who shared patrilineal descent and social, political, and economic ties. Political and religious authority was held by elders, the chief, and the priest. These types of large extended family communities originate in the early Japanese experience and their structural influence can be found into the nineteenth century when karate styles began to be formalized and codified (Donohue 1991). This emphasis on respecting lineage is important in karate today.

The second feature is closely related to the first and is from the same time period; it is the importance of the group and its hierarchy. Within an *uji* there is a "*be*." A *be* is the group of workers, who mostly worked in agriculture but also specialized in other industries such as pottery or fishing. The *be's* purpose was to serve the *uji* and provide economic security for all (Donohue 1991). When we fast-forward to the samurai of the tenth and eleventh century (Varley, Morris, and Morris 1970) a similar mindset prevailed. They lived their lives dedicated to the good of the society as a whole, and very rarely sought independence (Maynard 1997). Dedication to a leader is a strong feature of karate-*do* today. *Karate-kas* are expected to be dedicated to their *sensei*; to do as they say immediately and with intent.

The final traditional feature of Japanese culture found in karate to discuss is the importance and influence of moral and personal development through spiritual grounding. John Donohue (1991) described the relationship of combat and spiritual development in the following way:

> That the Japanese have elevated techniques (Jutsu) of combat into ways (do), and have invested these do with mystical properties is a striking example of how social development and history interact with ideology, forming a synthesis of formerly disparate cultural elements. (50).

These ideologies and mystical properties that are mixed with the combat techniques are from diverse belief systems. Much of the code of honour and morals within karate-*do* developed from Taoism and Buddhism, which had been imported to Japan from China during the Tokugawa Era (Donohue 1991). There are also teachings of Japan's Shinto belief system present in karate-*do*. A great example of this is the *kiai*. A *kiai* is a loud shout that has the purpose of harnessing all the energy of the *ki*. The *ki* holds the promise that hard work will help one harness the power inherent in creation. This concept has origins in Tao. Tao also teaches the importance of correct breathing techniques which *karate-kas* practice. Breathing in to the stomach (*hara*) is considered the best way to harness *ki's* power because that is where the *ki* exists in each person (Donohue 1991). In Karate-Talk, many of the Japanese words used are terms for items or concepts that originate in the spiritual development in karate-*do*, and using Japanese, instead of English translations, helps to maintain their importance to the social history of karate's origins.

These three features and more can be seen in the typical Canadian karate *dojo* today. Donohue (1991) notes that it is "possible to find a dojo composed of non-Japanese members whose cultural orthodoxy exceeds that of similar dojos in Japan," (34). Many international *dojos* work hard to maintain their Japanese roots in non-Japanese environments because those roots are so important to the practice. Their importance and maintenance manifest through the language used in the *dojo*.

The Muromachi period (1392-1573) was a particularly violent time in Japan and it saw the systemization and codification of combat techniques (Linhart and Frühstück 1998). The *kata* (forms; sequences) scales were created to teach and perfect the techniques samurai needed to survive. They were considered a sort of textbook or encyclopedia of *budo* knowledge. Knowledge was therefore passed on to new students through endless repetition of the physical movements of the *kata* (Donohue 1991). In 1889, verbal commands were added to the practice of *kata* to give students further opportunity to explore and comprehend the techniques (Linhart and Frühstück 1998).

The growth of karate in the 19th and 20th centuries is often attributed to Gichin Funakoshi, who gave the first public demonstrations of karate and popularized it throughout Japan. The American occupation of Japan in the 1940s helped further spread the sport and tradition internationally (Tan 2004). *Kumite* (sparring), considered the practical application of *kata*, became more popular after Funakoshi's death, as his students throughout the world began participating in kumite competitions and karate slowly took on the characteristics of a sport, rather than solely a "martial way." Today, *karateka* worldwide debate whether karate should be considered a sport or a traditionally martial way (Shintani and Reid 1998). As karate has become less of a

combat tool and more of a sport, changes have occurred in the way techniques are taught in the *dojo*, however, there is still extensive evidence of the elements of Japanese culture and language that I have argued are important. Modern karate-*do* emphasises the importance of peace and self discipline. Eriguichi Eiichi, the spokesman for Federation of All-Japan Karate-Do Organizations, said, "The ultimate goal in karate-do, in the sense of the word, is to build peace… Karate-do begins with curtesy and ends with curtesy… The fists are not meant for killing but for protecting life," (Draeger 1983, 136). This goal is modelled by and passed from *sensei* to *karate-ka* in actions and in words. Students are still taught that the most important part of karate-*do* is the bow at the beginning and the end of every class and every competition because it reifies the respect that is expected from and for all *karate-kas*.

Creating and Reinforcing Identity through Language

The mode of speech within the *dojo* helps to develop the identity that is so important to becoming a black belt. This is because being or becoming a black belt is not a solitary activity; it happens within a community of people who develop and share traits, beliefs and values. There are several theories that will be presented in this section that explain the ways identity is formed through language. Most of these fit together within the framework of symbolic interactionism, which states that interactions need to be situated within a socio-cultural context, meanings come from such interactions, and those meanings are continuously being created and recreated as people interact within a society (Blumer 1969). In this paper, one's identity is the social and subjective meaning that symbolic interactionism helps describe.

Conversations – what people talk about with who, how and when – in the *dojo* are constrained and structured by the cultural basis of the *dojo* itself. What may seem like a natural or normal conversation to someone within the community only seems that way "because it conforms to their habitus, the practices, norms, and expectations that constitute customary lived experience," (Gaudio 2003, 660). In a language community, many of the discursive practices people use to communicate are culturally informed. In order to be considered as such the practice must be deeply felt, commonly intelligible, and widely accepted in the community (Carbaugh 1988), thereby making them part of the community members' habitus. If the practice does not meet these criteria, then it is not of cultural significance.

An example of such a culturally informed discursive practice is the study of "Coffeetalk" (Gaudio 2003). In the middle class United States, a conversation with a friend over coffee at Starbucks seems causal or naturally occurring to the participants. However, such a conversation is constrained by space, time and society, and as such this type of conversation may not be universally considered casual. Coffeetalk meets the three criteria for cultural communication listed above; it evokes particular feeling patterns in members of the community; meeting someone for coffee is accepted and understood across the community as a particular kind of communication event that will entail particular kinds of conversations; and members of the community are able to recognize and replicate the pattern of communication. It is a norm. Outside of the American middle class, such an interaction may not be recognizable in the same way.

A karate *dojo* speech community also have their own discursive practices that meet the criteria for cultural communication. The use of Japanese terms integrated into English is deeply felt, in that it "evokes a complex pattern of feeling that goes beyond itself" (Carbaugh 1988, 38). The mixture of the two languages signals to the *karate-kas* that they are included in the *dojo* community and using the language contributes to their identity as *karate-kas*. The language used is commonly intelligible, in that it is taught to everyone as soon as they begin attending classes and used across the karate community. Finally, it is widely accessible; those in the community have the discursive practices available to them to use when needed.

As stated, interactions are context dependent and therefore constrained by space, time and society (Gaudio 2003), and this applies to both Coffeetalk and Karate-Talk. The

participants must occupy the same communicative space (Starbucks, or the *dojo*), at the same time (30-minute coffee break or two-hour karate class), and all must be willing to be part of what the interaction entails (go out to drink coffee or spending the time and energy to train in the *dojo*). These discursive practices perform and stand for certain social meanings and cultural values that are central to the formation of identity.

There are several ways meaning and identity are constructed through language. A framework for analysis of five principles has been developed for understanding identity in a sociolinguistic perspective. The five principles are emergence, positionality, indexicality, relationality and partialness (Bucholtz and Hall 2005). For now, a focus on emergence and relationality helps to define the relationship of discursive practices and identity in the context of Karate-Talk. The emergence principle states that "identity is best viewed as the emergent product rather than the pre-existing source of linguistic…practices," (588). In karate, the more a *karate-ka* uses Karate-Talk the more they build their black belt identity. Further, identity creation has a reciprocal relationship with discursive practices (Tracy and Robles 2013). Therefore, using Karate-Talk will lead to a strong sense of a black belt identity, and a stronger black belt identity leads to more confidence communicating with Karate-Talk.

The relationality principle states that "identities are never autonomous or independent but always require social meaning in relation to other available identity positions and social actions," (Bucholtz and Hall 2005, 598). This is not to say that identities are dichotomous, rather, they work in relation to each other. The first relationship is adequation and distinction. In groups of people who share discursive practices, such as all the *karate-kas* being part of the karate or *dojo* community, similarities are emphasised while differences are downplayed. For example, a *karate-ka* may differentiate their sport from other martial arts like tae kwon do (from Korea) by using Karate-Talk. On the other hand, the opposite happens to differentiate groups or individuals. Within a *dojo*, advanced *karate-kas* might use more Japanese terms in their speech without then using the English translation to demonstrate their level of karate knowledge as higher than someone else.

Another relation is authorization and illegitimation. These take into account the power of structural and institutional forces in identity formation. Bucholtz and Hall (2005) state that, "Authorization involves the affirmation or imposition of an identity through structures of institutionalized power and ideology," (603). In karate, a coloured belt ranking system is used as a means of measuring and awarding karate knowledge and skill. *Karate-kas* of lower ranks are expected to respect those of higher ranks, in action and speech. Instructors are addressed with formality and most lower level belts are expected to not speak out of turn. The relationality of identity is important to understand the ways *karate-kas* are developing their karate identities through the language they use and in comparison to other people with whom they interact.

This framework can be used as a lens of analysis to make sense of the discursive practices of speaker and listener interactions. Everyone present in the interaction is a) asserting their own identity and b) assuming the identity of the others. The ways they speak to each other provide information about their identity and their assumptions about others (Tracy and Robles 2013). Tracy and Robles (2013) offer the example of a person asking for directions on a university campus. They give two possible responses; in the first, the person says, "Go the UMC on the fountain side, across from the door where all the student organization tables are." In the other the person says, "Follow this path… until you come to the University Memorial Center… Go the northwest side of the building…go in the door on the ground floor," (27). In the first example, the speaker assumes the lost person has knowledge of the campus, perhaps a student looking for an office; in the second the speaker assumes the lost person has never been on campus before and gives more detailed directions. In Tracy and Robles' (2013) second example the speaker takes on the passive role of assuming another's identity. In a similar speech event, a speaker may take the active

role of projecting an identity onto another. Weinstein and Deutschberger (1963) call this phenomenon altercasting. They define it as "projecting an identity, to be assumed by other(s) with whom one is in interaction, which is congruent with one's own goals" (Weinstein and Deutschberger 1963, 454). Speakers have the ability, in a conversation, to influence and alter the way the listener perceives themselves.

Both active and passive speech events which project an identity onto someone else contribute information about whether that person belongs to a particular social group. Central to identity construction "is the ascriptions and reception of social category belonging by others," (Madsen 2015, 24). This is to say that, in karate, not only do students internalize their identity as a *karate-ka*, but, for their identity to have legitimacy, others need to begin to accept them as such, as well. Through the lens of symbolic interactionism, the identity of a *karate-ka* is being created and recreated each time they use (or don't use) Karate-Talk to interact with others in the *dojo*. Therefore, social interactionism, along with Bucholtz and Hall's (2005) five principles of sociolinguistic identity formation and Weinstein and Deutschberger's work on altercasting, help reveal how meaning is constructed in contemporary non-Japanese karate *dojos*. They form a theoretical framework that will be used to analysis ethnographic data from a *dojo* in Nova Scotia, Canada. The goal of the research is to first identify the discursive practices that make up Karate-Talk in the *dojo*, and second to interpret how these practices are used and become part of the black belt identity that develops over time within the *karate-kas*.

Case Study: The CASK Dojo

At the Canadian Associated Schools of Karate (CASK) Halifax *dojo* (see figure 1), the transmission of karate-*do* as a Japanese art form is taken seriously. The school prides itself on teaching the art of karate-*do* before the sport, and uses traditional-style training to develop mind, body, and spirit (CASK Karate Halifax, 2018). The importance of tradition is emphasized by the use the term karate-*do*, thereby recognizing the practice as a martial "way." *Karate-kas* at CASK train in the style of *Wado Ryu* which combines classical karate techniques with self defense borrowed from Japanese jujitsu. The word *Wado* translates loosely as the "Way to/of Peace" and *Ryu* directly translates as "stream," but in this context carries "connotations of a unified body of technique and tradition passed on from generation to generation" (Donohue 1991, 42). *Ryu, Kai,* and *Kan* are all words that are used to describe various styles of *budo*. *Ryu* is often considered the most traditional descriptor because it is found in most classical martial and weapon techniques, whereas *Kai* and *Kan* carry connotations of less unified traditions (Donohue 1991).

The *dojo* itself is a multipurpose room in a community center in the North End of Halifax. Before each class, the CASK Halifax *dojo* is prepped in a minimalist style. The floor is first swept and framed pictures of Grand Master Hironori Otsuka, the founder of *Wado*, and Top Master Masaru Shintani, the Supreme Instructor of *Wado* Canada, are placed on display at the front. When students arrive at the *dojo*, they remove their shoes and socks, leaving them outside in the hallway. When they enter the *dojo*, they bow to the photos and announce, *Ossu*.

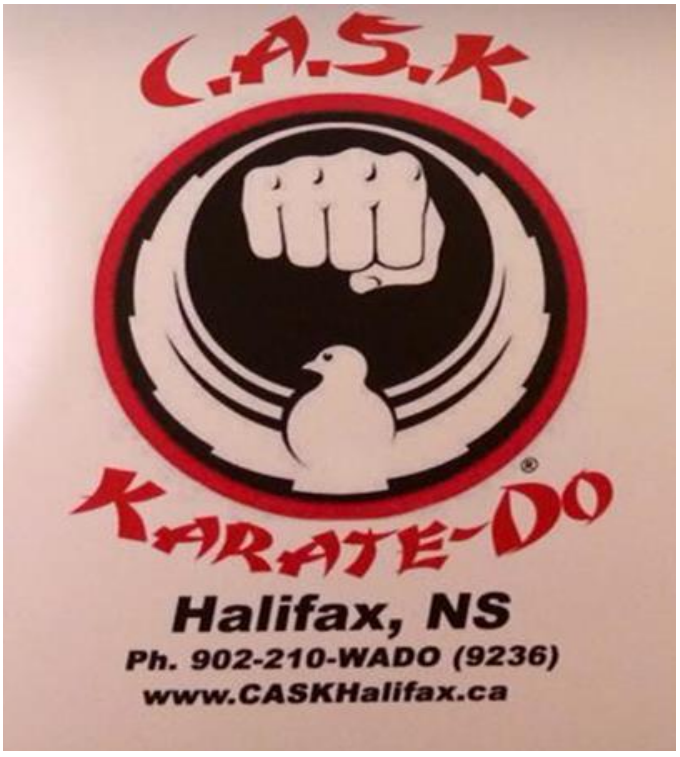

Figure 1: CASK Karate Halifax Logo. Photo used with permission from CASK Karate Halifax.

There are about 25 students who currently train at CASK, all from differing socio-cultural and economic backgrounds. Most of the students who attend are native English speakers; others are from families of recent immigrants who speak Arabic, Spanish, and Russian, but all have a strong foundation of English knowledge and ability. All students wear the same basic white uniform, with a Wado Canada patch sown on over the heart. Every student also wears a belt representing their rank. The belt ranks in Wado are as follows, from lowest to highest: white, yellow, orange, green, blue, brown, black. After reaching their black belt *karate-ka* transfer to the *dan* ranking system, known as "degrees" in English (the *sensei* at CASK Halifax is a 4th degree black belt). Students of lower rank are expected to listen to and respect those who have a higher rank, regardless of actual age.

Classes happen twice a week, on Thursday nights and Saturday mornings. Adults train with the youth, but also have their own class after the youth on Thursday nights. The *sensei* encourages the adults to come to the youth classes as frequently as possible. The reason he does so is three-fold. First, it is extra training for the adults, as once a week is not considered to be enough training. Second, adult role models in class help the youth learn *kime* (focus) and discipline. Third, being able to lead a class is a requirement of the black belt curriculum (Wado Canada, 2002) and so being present in the youth classes allows more opportunity to observe and practice teaching. Teaching a portion of a class is often a student's first opportunity to practice their Karate-Talk in front of the class.

CASK Halifax was chosen as a research site because it is an ideal *dojo* in which to study Karate-Talk. Karate-Talk is the result of the blending of the contextual modern and traditional discursive practices in a *dojo*. Wado Karate, as stated, places great emphasis on the traditional aspects of the art of karate and the cultural diversity present at CASK is representative of a multicultural modern Halifax. When put together, these factors create an environment that presents ample opportunity to observe Karate-Talk in practice. I spent three months training with the *karate-kas* at CASK, using participant observation to collect data. The participant observation method was used because it allows for data collection within the context of the *dojo* which "enables claims to be made about symbol use in context, interactional meanings, and forms of action," (Carbaugh 1998, 139) which is essential for identifying cultural patterns of communication. During my research, I attended both youth and adult classes as a means to better understand the context of the *dojo* and the ways *karate-kas* speak to each other and their *sensei* during class. Classes were also audio recorded and transcribed for analysis.

I used a thematic analysis, as described by Braun and Clarke (2006) to analyze my data and draw my conclusions. From the data collected, I created two data sets; one of data used to define Karate-Talk, and a second of data related to identity creation. Within and across data sets I identified patterns of meaning and themes, such as Karate-Talk comprehension or use of repetition in class. I then used these themes to develop a critical analysis of underlying concepts and ideologies of language use in this *dojo*. I drew on the theories and frameworks presented above to inform and support my conclusions. The following two sections detail my findings and conclusions about what exactly Karate-Talk is and how its discursive practices help form black belt identities among the *karate-kas*.

Language Use in Class: Karate-Talk

There are several ways languages are used in karate class that form the discursive practices of Karate-Talk. First is the specific ways English and Japanese are combined during class.

We can begin with an example from a class as students practice their kicking techniques:

> Sensei: Right hand on the wall, left guard up for *Mae geri, Mae geri*.
>
> So we all know what *Mae geri* is… I hope. Right? *Mae geri*. Front kick.
>
> So we want to kick with, *koshi*, the ball of the foot.
>
> LIFT. Ankle pointed, toes pulled back.

KICK. Point your ankle, pull the toes back. RETRACT. Pull the leg in tight. And DOWN. (Students perform actions on command).

Mawatta! Switch.

Now get into your *yoko geri* position. What's *yoko geri* Liam-san?

Liam: Side kick?

Sensei: Exactly. *Yoko geri*, Side kick. Everybody ready? *Yoko geri*. Slooowly. LIFT. KICK.

Itchi, Ni, San, Shi, Go (counting one to five in Japanese. Students hold out their leg mid-kick).

RETRACT. An::d DOWN.

There are two ways that Japanese is used here: vocabulary and commands. Words like the numbers and *koshi* (ball of the foot) are vocabulary words new *karate-kas* learn from their very first class. When a new student arrives at the *dojo*, he/she will be paired up with a more senior student who will teach them how to stretch and to count to five in Japanese. Learning and memorizing numbers and body parts is emphasised in every class. The second category of words are the commands, things like *mawatta*, and the names of the kicks. While in this example the kicks are being practiced slowly, the Japanese words are later used as commands to teach students to react quickly and accurately. Outside of vocabulary and commands, English is used for nearly everything else in class. It is used to repeat Japanese words for learning purposes, and it is used for explanations of technique during class.

Both English and Japanese have a communicative function in a karate class. Students do not need to be fluent Japanese speakers in order to attend or follow a CASK Karate class, however they do develop a certain fluency in the commands given. After only a year, *karate-kas* are able to understand and perform combinations when commands are given in Japanese only. For example, high ranking students are able to perform the following without hesitation: "San-bon, uchi udi uki, gadan bari uki, mae geri, mawatta gadan bari," (three outside forearm blocks, downward sweeping block, front kick, turning downward sweeping block). Students become fluent in Karate-Talk as they progress in their training. They recognize the Japanese terms they have learned and are able to comprehend them when placed in an otherwise English sentence. We will return to Karate-Talk fluency in the next section on black belt identity.

Furthermore, Karate-Talk is more than just adding Japanese terms into English oral practices. We also see many features of traditional *dojo* practices carried into Canadian *dojo* language. Traditional karate-*do* is taught through the repetition of technique until perfection. *Karate-kas* may do the same technique 50 times in a single class, and a *karate-ka* will have practiced the first *kata* more than 1000 times by the time they get their black belt. This repetition is a feature that has carried through into the language used in class. The following is one example; students at CASK are encouraged to arrive early to class so they can start to warm up. The following are excerpts of what *Sensei* said in the fifteen minutes before class on one particular day.

Sensei: Hello, get dressed quickly please so you can get stretched out.

You can do a couple laps to warm up but then I want you stretching.

Toby-*san*, are you stretching on task?

Stretching, stretching, stretching. I want to see everyone stretching on task.

Lots of stretching.

You want to be flexible, so you can kick high; start stretching

I hope everyone spent time stretching at home this week!

In these fifteen minutes alone, *Sensei* talked about stretching more than eight times. He used very little Japanese, but there are still elements of a traditional Japanese *dojo* that have carried into how he speaks. He repeats himself frequently, just like the repetition of technique in classes. We can return to the kicking dialog above to see a similar repetition in both languages. The names of each kick were said multiple times in the span of a couple minutes in Japanese and English. As well, the commands "Lift. Kick. Retract. Down." were

repeated a couple times that class, as they are in every class. In nearly every class at CASK *Sensei* uses the same phrases. He regularly says things like, "Heels and toes together, slowly, *tasho, tatami"* (palms to the floor); "Everybody check your stance. Four fists in between your knee and your toes;" "Bend your knees." Advanced *karate-kas* are likely able to recite a class by heart, and this predictability is part of Karate-Talk. Repetition is the traditional way karate is taught and we see that pedagogy reflected in the discursive practices of Karate-Talk. The repetitiveness of Karate-Talk creates, ingrains, and maintains the habits of the *dojo* community. Karate-Talk normalizes the values and morals it teaches for its students. The longer a *karate-ka* trains and uses Karate-Talk, the more they become part of the karate community, and its culture becomes their own. Thus, Karate-Talk forms the habitus of the *dojo* and helps to reinforce the shared culture of karate to create black belt identities.

Both the English and Japanese languages perform communicative functions in a karate class that contribute to the construction of a *karate-ka's* identity, and the choice of language reflects the socio-historic patterns of karate *dojos*. Japanese also has a symbolic function in class as well. It would be fairly easy to drop the Japanese from a karate class. It is possible to give commands in English, and students would already know how to count and could name their body parts in their native languages. Yet, Japanese has remained a central part of karate classes. Martial arts defeat sociolinguistic expectations of translocation. When traditions and practices are used outside of their original socio-cultural context, they are usually recontextualized to fit the needs of the new community. For example, Hip-Hop originated in African American communities, but when the style is used by Swahili artists, they use language and sing about concepts that are socially more powerful or meaningful to their cultural context (Pennycook 2007). In karate, we do not see this happen as much, because Karate's practices are rooted in Japanese traditions that are taught through understanding and continuing the past (Donohue 1991). Therefore, the Japanese language is also a symbol of the continuity of socio-historic traditions in the *dojo*.

All of the aforementioned discursive practices constitute Karate-Talk. Karate-Talk teaches *karate-kas* many of the ideological features of karate that they need to know to one day become a fully informed and proficient black belt. They, like those before them, will be able to pass the knowledge onto new karate students with authority and confidence.

Creating Black Belt Identities

Dojo interactions naturally include language use. As stated above, language practices contribute to and have a reciprocal relationship with identity formation. Karate-Talk, as it has been described, contributes to the formation of the black belt identity. One major influencer is the use of Japanese in the *dojo*. The values of traditional Japanese culture that are extremely important in the *dojo* – those being respect, discipline, and community – are embodied in Karate-Talk. The Japanese language connects these traditional *dojo* values to modern practices and instills them in the *karate-ka*. These values become the core of the black belt identity through the use of Japanese in Karate-Talk in the *dojo*.

This is not to say that *karate-kas* develop identities that are purely reflective of traditional modern Japanese culture. Rather, they take on traits and characteristics of a deracialized Japanese ethnicity. A deracialized ethnicity is one which has been removed from its initial culture and environment and is typically a reduction of the original, contextualized ethnicity. It is usually used for symbolisms and tokens of the original culture and alignment with it is voluntary, unlike alignment with one's own ethnic identity (Rampton 2012). In the *dojo* a deracialized version of Japanese identity is being disseminated partly through the language practices of Karate-Talk.

The black belt identity develops within *karate-kas* as they begin connecting and aligning with the karate community. Traits of the black belt identity include discipline, respect, and eagerness to learn more and perfect their technique. A Black Belt is someone who has extensive training in the art and sport of karate in body, mind, and spirit. Someone with a black belt identity does not necessarily have to hold a black belt rank, but they are certainly on their

way to having one. This is not a complete set of traits for a black belt identity. Like any identity, it is flexible and always changing; the black belt identity is maintained and altered through the interactions of the *dojo*.

As students at CASK work their way through the ranks, their black belt identities begin to grow as they begin to have more opportunities to practice their Karate-Talk fluency. This first comes in improving listening skills. Let's consider once again the commands from above.

> "San-bon, uchi udi uki, gadan bari uki, mi geri, mawata gadan bari," (three outside forearm blocks, downward sweeping block, front kick, turning downward sweeping block)

In a typical class, these would first be performed slowly, one at a time with English translations. Typically, a high-ranking *karate-ka* is positioned in the front of the class as a visual reference as well. Following this, *Sensei* creates a "High Performance Team" for higher ranks to practice more intensely. He asks the lower level belts to sit down and higher-ranking students have to perform those actions without the extra help and at a faster speed. In doing so they develop a fluency for Karate-Talk and simultaneously develop their black belt identity.

In addition to internalizing their identities as they can comprehend more of the Japanese commands, when the *sensei* allows them to stay on the floor and gives tougher commands more quickly, he is altercasting (Weinstein and Deutschberger, 1963) an identity onto them. By telling them to be part of the High Performance Team, he is saying that he believes their training has progressed enough that they are able to handle such a challenge, thereby telling them that he is accepting the development of their identity. He altercasts the black belt identity onto them and they begin to accept that role. This can be a continuous cycle of *sensei* raising expectations and students meeting them. Meeting higher expectations means a more developed black belt identity.

The act of listening and comprehending is one way black belt identities grow at CASK; another is through speaking and using Karate-Talk in front of the class. As students progress through the ranks, they are given more opportunities to lead classes and teach the younger students. When doing this, older students try to use their Karate-Talk, announcing commands in Japanese and repeating commonly used expressions. As with learning any language it is not perfect at first. *Karate-kas* often mispronounce or forget the Japanese words and use the wrong language at the wrong time. The following example is of an orange belt leading the warm up stretches and she mixes up the command for left (*hidari*) and right (*migi*):

> Orange Belt: Let's go to stretch number one!
>
> Stretch to the left, ah… *MIGI*!
>
> White Belt: That's not right!
>
> Sensei: Do not correct the instructor!
>
> Orange Belt: To the… left, *Hidari*!

With the reinforcement from the *sensei* she is able to correct her mistake, just as children do when they are learning to speak. The orange belt will likely make more mistakes as she learns how to use Karate-Talk, but she is also gaining the confidence to become a better black belt and one day be a *sensei* with the authority of the karate-*do* lineage.

Most of what has been said about creating black belt identities so far has been focused on high-ranking students. However, it is also important to recognize students will start developing small amounts of their black belt identity as soon as they begin training. In the early years of learning karate, *karate-kas* get their first introductions to the culture and language of a traditional *dojo*, much of which they can use as building blocks toward their black belt identity.

In the first moments of their first class, new *karate-kas* learn the word "*Ossu*." Anytime a student enters or exits the *dojo*, they must bow to the photos in the front and say *Ossu* (pronounced without the u). This word has many translations and connotations including a respectful "yes," and a recognition of what one was told to do. In the context of the bow it is a sign of respect towards the knowledge of the founders of the art. While its definition is often up to debate in karate communities, there is little doubt about its importance for demonstrating respect in the *dojo*.

One of the key underpinnings of karate-*do* that comes from traditional Japanese values is respect for other *karate-kas* and the importance of linage. It is frequently explained to students how karate has been passed through "generations" similar to a way people talk about their family history. For example, the students of CASK study under *Sensei* Garrett Chase. *Sensei* Garrett trained under *Saiko Shihan* Greg Reid. *Sensei* Reid learned from Top Master Masaru Shintani, who learned from Grand Master Hironori Otsuka (see figure 2), the founder of Wado. To this end, CASK Halifax students are fifth generation *karate-ka* in the Wado Canada linage.

Further, respect for an adherence to the social structure of the *dojo* and lineage is underscored by language used to address each other while in the *dojo*. In one class *Sensei* emphasised to his students, "We need to respect each other, respect the *dojo*, respect our training, and respect those who have trained before us." (Points to pictures of the masters at the front of the room). The value of respect is constantly reiterated in the *dojo*. All students address their instructor as *sensei*. The word *sensei* means instructor or teacher but also contains attributes of deep honour and respect (Donohue 1991, 35). *Sensei* addresses his students using the suffix "-*san*," as in the example above where he calls Toby, "Toby-*san*." In English, it typically translates as a gender-neutral 'mister' or 'miss' and, similar to *sensei*, carries elements of respect for the students who dedicate themselves to the instructions of their *sensei*.

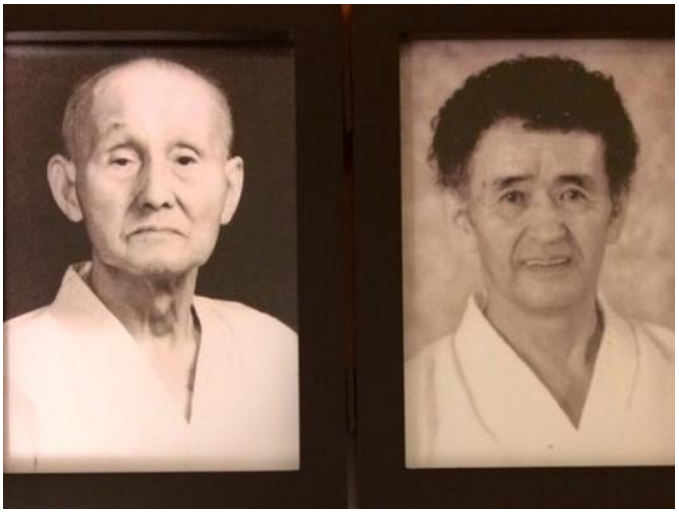

Figure 2: Photos of Grand Master Hironori Otsuka (left) and Top Master Masaru Shintani (right). Photo used with permission from CASK Karate Halifax.

Once again, central to identity creation "is the ascriptions and reception of social category belonging by others," (Madsen 2015, 24). Karate-Talk in the *dojo* makes these social categories and a sense of belonging to the group fairly evident. The uses of the Japanese language and culture in these instances indicate to students that they belong in the *dojo* and wider karate community. Knowing one's place in the linage creates a sense of belonging and contributes to that identity. Just as people are often proud to display their family crest and heritage, karate linages give students an understanding that they are part of the tradition and the continuation of their art form.

The sense of belonging is further emphasised by the expectations that students conform to the customs and language of the *dojo*. They are "relentlessly required to adhere to group principals," (Donohue 1991, 35) and perform in *iutchi* (coordination, together). Students frequently count in Japanese together, and help each other learn commands. When a student is out of line or misbehaving in class, all students suffer the consequences. Learning Karate-Talk together and the expectations of the *dojo* develops a greater sense of group identity among *karate-kas*. From the relationality principle above, the adequation or similarities in their learning experiences help *karate-kas* relate to each other and begin to identify with the group. Belonging to a *dojo* and the wider karate community is essential to their own black belt identity. If they are part of the social group who identify as black belts they too will see themselves as a black belt.

Karate-Talk helps to build a black belt identity in *karate-kas*, both in terms of identifying with a deracialized and translocated Japanese martial art culture and with the group in which they train. Less than 1% of people who begin training in karate go on to become a black belt. Developing a black belt identity is key to achieving this goal. It should follow, then, that *Karate-kas* who develop their black belt identity and develop fluency in Karate-Talk are more likely to succeed in their karate goals.

Conclusions

Language use contributes to the formation of cultural identities in every community around the world, and it is no different for the karate community. Learning and using Karate-Talk is vital to creating the black belt identity in a *karate-ka*. The repetitive nature of Karate-Talk promotes the traditional values of Japanese karate-*do* in order to pass on the art form to the next generation of *karate-kas*. Students of karate become part of the continuity of karate history that characterizes its existence.

The discursive practice of Karate-Talk, unlike other styles and registers, does not entirely lose connection with its native language when it is translocated. As learned from the CASK Halifax example, the Japanese language can be nurtured within the dominate language of a non-Japanese society in which karate is practiced. Karate as an art form is different from other arts like Hip-Hop, in that its existence is based, once again, in the continuity of its history. Hip-Hop changed in order to better suit the needs of communities who adopted it (Pennycook 2007). Canadian karate did not remove Japanese from its language practices for precisely the same reason: the need of the community is to situate itself with respect to its founders or traditions. In order to do this, Japanese language practices are maintained.

Karate-Talk practices in the *dojo* establish black belt identities in its practitioners. It helps the *karate-kas* to see themselves as part of the karate community by indoctrinating them into a moral code that the community shares. *Senseis* use Karate-Talk with *karate-kas* to altercast the black belt identity upon them, which they, overtime, adopt as their own. They also use their own Karate-Talk to show others that they are (or one day will be) a black belt not just in physical practice, but also in their mind, heart and soul. Establishing black belt identities in *karate-kas* is key to passing on the art and sport of karate. It keeps the values, morals, and traditions of the *dojo* thriving and associated with the origins of karate.

In every karate-*do dojo* in Canada, *karate-kas* train with hopes of one day earning their black belt. The ways they speak to each other, the commands the respond to, and the Japanese they learn, all combine to form Karate-Talk. Japanese in the *dojo* is essential to building a *dojo* that continues the traditions of the one before it and maintaining the ties to Japan and the roots of karate. The *sensei* leads by example to help his students become strong black belts who can successfully use Karate-Talk to teach the next generation of *karate-kas*. Karate-Talk is a factor that keeps karate as a *do* or "way," and keeps *karate-kas* achieving high levels of physical training, mental discipline, and philosophical insight, just as Grand Master Hironori Otsuka intended it to be.

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