

**A POLICY ON LANGUAGE EDUCATION IN JAPAN:  
BEYOND NATIONALISM AND LINGUISTICISM**

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**INTRODUCTION:  
JAPANESE LANGUAGE POLICY IN THE GLOBAL CONTEXT**

It is often said that we are in a globalizing era. Many countries are striving to gain economic success in the international market. Countries are described as 'developed' or 'developing' according to their relative degree of financial achievement. And many developed and developing countries consider English language education as a means to further their economic advantages within the global market (Kokuritsu kokugo kenkyuujo, n.d; Nunan, 2003). It appears that the main objective of language learning has become economic competitiveness. This tendency to promote English as a foreign language could result in what Pennycook (2001) calls a laissez-faire attitude, in that the overwhelming power of English and its consequences are not taken into account. The promotion of English in other countries by the United States (US) and Britain can be said to be colonialism. The British Council states that the expansion of English is "to further British interests" and describes these aims in economic terms (Goodman & Graddol, 1996). It is clear that these types of language policies are political in nature and serve to maintain the existing socioeconomic status quo (Pennycook, 2001, p. 50), and that the important objective of English education is economic-reproduction (Phillipson, 1992).

The spread of English has produced serious problems for affected countries. From the perspective of English linguistic imperialism (Phillipson, 1992), the world is "characterized by inequality" (p. 46) in that power is being maintained by the structure of the Center, the major English speaking countries, and the Periphery, the affected countries, have become subordinate inter-state actors within this power relationship. This power structure (re)produces cultural, scientific, media and educational imperialism and is analogous to racism and sexism. Ricento (2000) finds the "control and dissemination of

culture worldwide to be a greater threat to independence than was colonialism itself” (p. 17). In view of these theoretical concepts, I am going to suggest an alternative policy for language education in Japan. My position is that, to resist linguistic imperialism, Japan’s language policy in education should not be based on nationalistic/expansionistic or laissez-faire tendencies, but should promote minority languages and discontinue obligatory English education.

### **JAPANESE LANGUAGE POLICY IN THE CONTEXT OF JAPAN**

The Constitution of Japan was enacted under American occupation after World War II, and in consideration of past Japanese imperialism, it proclaims the eternal renunciation of war. However, the original ideal, pacifism, has been disintegrating in response to American policies. Because of the Korean War and the Cold War, the US is said to have changed its policy toward Japan from preventing it from having arms to positioning it as an ally fighting against communism. As a result, the Japan Self-Defense Forces were established, which are now being dispatched to Iraq at the request of the US. Another primary principle of the Constitution is respect for basic human rights. Yet this principle is not at all realized in terms of the rights of minorities, especially in view of recent changes in notions of human rights, such as the right to know, the right to self-determination, environmental rights, and so on (Bijuaru waido shakaika shiryoushuu, 2005). Given these flaws in policy implementation, people’s memory of Japanese imperialism has protected the Constitution for over a half century from any amendment. Thus, the starting point of an equitable language policy should be placed here, at the intersection of opposition to any kinds of imperialism and respect for human rights.

Japan is sometimes misconceived as a homogeneous country, even by politicians. In reality, 127.5 million ‘Japanese’ (Foreign Press Center Japan, n.d.) include two indigenous groups, Ainu and Okinawans. Because the census does not include ethnicity, the population and the numbers of the speakers of indigenous languages are unknown, leaving them categorized as ‘Japanese’. Since the Meiji Restoration, the government has vigorously promoted a discriminatory assimilation policy (Hitachi Systems & Service,

2003), and as a result, indigenous peoples are on the verge of losing their languages, cultures, and identities. It was only in 1997 that legislation was enacted to substitute the discriminatory former version of *Hokkaido Kyuu-dojin Hogo Hou* or Hokkaido Former-Savages Protection Law with *Ainu Bunka Shinkou Hou* or the Ainu Culture Promotion Law. Discrimination in marriage, housing, and employment opportunities as well as abuse of indigenous students in schools is still unresolved (Hitachi System & Service, 2003; Honda, 1982; Nakagawa, n.d.). Although there is an increase in the numbers of educational institutes where indigenous languages and cultures are taught as school subjects, they are small in scale compared to instruction in Japanese and English. There are no heritage language immersion schools. One serious concern for the indigenous students is that they have no choice but to be socialized into dominant Japanese Discourses under the current school systems. Gee (1990) defines Discourse as “a socially accepted association among ways of using language, of thinking, feeling, believing, valuing, and of acting that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group or ‘social network’, or to signal (that one is playing) a socially meaningful ‘role’” (p. 143). The government’s insensitivity to rights of indigenous peoples to preserve their languages and ways of being in the face of imposition of Japanese Discourse in schools suggests that the Ainu and Okinawans should be considered victims of Japanese expansionism.

In addition to the indigenous population, in 2002 there were 1,851,758 foreign residents, 33.8 % of whom are South and North Korean nationals and 22% Chinese nationals (Foreign Press Center Japan, n.d.). Since these statistics do not include people who have been naturalized as Japanese citizens, the number of people from Korean and Chinese heritage backgrounds is considerable. This population includes descendants of those who were obliged to immigrate to Japan and of those who were brought in for forced labor (Hitachi Systems & Service, 2003). Because they are ‘foreigners’ and the government has not given sufficient consideration to Japan’s historical responsibilities, they do not enjoy the same rights as Japanese, such as the right to vote and run for office. Some ethnic Korean and Chinese maintain ties with their countries of origin, which enables them to have independent schools where their languages and cultures are taught

to their children. Schools for North Korean children are flourishing with 75 schools from kindergarten to university. South Korean nationals have four full-time schools from kindergarten to senior high school. Those of Chinese background have one K-12 school, and Taiwanese have three K-12 schools (Wikipedia, n.d.).

Although these national schools provide education through the medium of their heritage languages and cultures, they lack the same legal status as Japanese schools, leading to a far greater number of students attending Japanese schools, where their cultures and languages are not taken into consideration by Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) policies. Ooshima (2003), a member of the House of Representatives, pointed out substantial discrimination against children of Korean nationals and asked for remedies. She observed that, due to the differences in legal status as indicated by School Education Law, Korean national school students do not benefit from the right to gratis compulsory education, if the medium of instruction is Korean; students from Korean national schools are prevented from receiving the same treatment as those of Japanese schools in terms of candidacy for university entrance examinations; and Korean schools do not benefit from Government subsidies and tax exemptions. Prime Minister Koizumi (2003) answered these charges as follows: for any children, irrespective of nationality, public compulsory schools are gratis; any persons of 16 years and older who are not in Japanese high schools can take the University Entrance Qualification Examination, so it can not be said that it is discriminatory against Korean permanent residents; and education of heritage languages and cultures is allowed outside of the government course guidelines. Koizumi's statement can be understood as those who want gratis education should go to public schools in which heritage languages and cultures can not be taught according to government course guidelines. Only students in Japanese high schools are exempted from taking the University Entrance Qualification Examination as a prerequisite for college examinations. This is applicable not only to Korean permanent residents, but also to other foreign residents, hence it discriminates against all non-Japanese school students. As a result, many students go to Japanese schools and their heritage languages and ethnic identities are being lost (So, 2000). To illustrate, Fukuoka (1996) conducted a survey of 800 students of South Korean heritage.

He concluded that these youths feel more attachment to Japan than to South Korea as ‘home’. Yet it is not that these ethnic minorities live in despair due to loss of ethnic identity. In Fukuoka’s (1996) survey, 77% of students use Japanese names more often than their given Korean ones, not to avoid discrimination, unlike the preconception (43% disagreed with the notion that Korean names are avoided for fear of discrimination), but because they are resisting being labeled and, thus, discriminated against. Yet Korean-Japanese identities are complex, constructed by many factors such as generational position, education, nationality, family participation in cultural events and ethnic organizations, intermarriages with Japanese, class stratification, and so on (So, 2000). These individuals have been denied the right to live their multiple identities through fear of discrimination and restrictive language education.

In sum, some ethnic minorities tend to have been invisible under the category of ‘Japanese’, such as Ainus, Okinawans, and naturalized Koreans and Chinese. Others who keep their nationalities are categorized as permanent resident ‘foreigners’ who do not enjoy the same rights as Japanese. Government policies have little regard for Japan’s historical responsibility to indigenous, national, and ethnic minorities. In addition to these intra-national multi-ethnic realities, the government is preparing for a future population shortage by changing their policy regarding immigration. It appears certain that Japan is heading toward becoming a more and more multiracial, multicultural, and multilingual country. Thus, it will become increasingly inappropriate to categorize people as either ethnically Japanese or foreign and to deprive them of educational opportunities by which each person can construct identities without interference from dominant Japanese Discourses. However, Japanese people are not yet prepared for this changing multicultural trend. They tend to not know much about minority cultures/languages, and discrimination against even second-generation permanent residents is not unusual (Fukuoka, 1996; So, 2000). For example, in my experience, it often happens that when Japanese students are introduced to a Korean permanent resident that they say, “You speak Japanese very well! Where did you learn it?” or “Why do North Korean nationals live in Japan?”

The educational policies in Japan have focused on so-called ‘international

communication’, looking only outside of Japan. This is revealed in the Prime Minister Koizumi’s (2003) statement in answer to Diet member Ooshima’s (2003) questions about Korean national schools not benefiting from tax exemption contributions: “Past cases which the tax exemption for contributions to schools were applied to were of schools which accepted many *foreign* students who stay in Japan *for a short period* due to their parents’ business...and which contribute to bringing talented persons *from foreign countries* (my translation) [italics added].” The government either does not consider intra-national understanding or lacks knowledge of how minorities experience discrimination within Japanese schools. For example, one of the most popular Japanese history textbooks for high school students states that “Ainus began to *lose* their traditional lives, customs and the religion while (the Meiji Government) opened up (Hokkaido, homeland of Ainus) [italics added]” (Ishii et al., 2004, p. 245. my translation). Ainu students are driven into internalization of a Japanese Discourse which lacks the view that, in fact, their ancestors were deceived, invaded, and killed in a name of Japan’s development (see Honda, 1982). In a similar vein, So (2000) illustrates that many young Korean nationals experience an inferiority complex, which Japanese Discourses in society and schools might well have pushed them to acquire.

There is clearly a need to implement a new educational policy on language in Japan to promote intra-national, as well as international, understanding. By ‘intra-national’ I mean ethnic groups who are categorized as ‘Japanese’, such as Ainus, Okinawans, naturalized foreign residents, and permanent residents (North/South Korean, Chinese and Taiwan nationals). The word ‘international’ here should not be understood only as the ability to speak English with English-speaking people in English-speaking countries as is often perceived by many Japanese. In 2002, 5,771,975 foreign visitors came to Japan, and the number of foreign students “reached a record high of 109,508” in 2003 (Foreign Press Center Japan, n.d.). The majority of the foreign residents, visitors, and students are from Asian countries. It is this sense of diversity that is needed for promoting internationalization among Japanese citizens. In other words, internationalization should be understood as living in harmony with foreigners, having respect for ethnic and indigenous minorities, and eliminating disregard, prejudices, and discrimination against

all those not of Japanese origin.

## CURRENT LANGUAGE POLICIES

### *Policy on Japanese Language*

Policies on Japanese language were discussed by the Council on the National Language (the Council), an advisory body of the government. Although the Council was reorganized as the Subdivision on National Language in the Agency for Cultural Affairs, the current policy on Japanese language seems to go back to the last report of the Council. Among the three issues in the report, ‘Internationalization of Japanese’ (Kokugo shingi kai, or the Council on the National Language, 2000) recommends promoting Japanese language, on the one hand, and changing Japanese so as to make it more suitable for international communication on the other. This recommendation consists of three parts:

1. Promotion of Japanese and support for learners of Japanese as a foreign language and second language
2. Suggestions for communicative competence of Japanese as the first language
3. Suggestions for dealing with increasing use of *katakana-go*, or loan words other than those written in Chinese characters, which are mostly English loan words.

The reasons the Council Report gave for the promotion of Japanese language are: the number of its speakers (the 10<sup>th</sup> largest in the world); the increasing number of learners; cultural accessibility through the language; and the importance of multilingualism in this English-dominant world. Firstly, the need for sending information to other countries about the Japanese nation and its people is suggested by the Council Report as a basis for international expansion of the Japanese language. Secondly, support for Japanese education inside and outside Japan because of increased numbers of foreigners living in Japan and learners of Japanese as a foreign language is mentioned in the report. A distinct feature of the Council Report is that the idea of the promotion of the Japanese language, compared to the US and British policies on promotion of English, does not state nor insinuate anything about economic or political interests. Rather, the Council explains Japanese expansion in terms of ecological diversity to counter the English-dominant

trend.

The second set of suggestions is supported by the Council's recognition of globalization. The report refers to traditional features of Japanese ways of communication which have valued *sasshi*, or understanding without explicit words, as illustrated in expressions such as *ishindenshin*, or communication without words. However, the Council argues that *sasshi* often causes misunderstanding in an international society where Japanese have to communicate with people from different cultural and societal backgrounds. Thus, the report argues, Japanese people have to pay attention to three points in cross-cultural communication, that is, to fully verbalize one's thoughts, to communicate in such a manner as to be plain, precise, and logical, and to be flexible in expression and comprehension according to interlocutors' cultural backgrounds. The report suggests that this does not mean that Japanese have to adjust to other ways unidirectionally. Rather, mutual understanding is important. Thus, it is also necessary to explain Japanese ways of communication to people from different backgrounds. The report essentially argues that it is desirable to have an identity as Japanese as well as flexibility towards different cultures.

The third point reflects a public concern with loan words. The report categorizes the functions of loan words into three types: new concepts and goods such as *rajio* (radio), *kimuchi* (kimchi) and *ankooru* (encore); technical terms, such as *ozon* (ozone), *inhureeshon* (inflation); and utilization of new images relating to foreign words, such as *kyaria-uuman* (career woman). Then, problems with the current flood of these loan words are stated as: communication breakdowns caused by difficulties in understanding of the new loan words, especially for senior citizens; difficulties in capturing meaning compared to the words written in Chinese characters; difficulties in understanding for foreign learners of Japanese; and impediments for Japanese learners of foreign languages. Thirdly, a statement is made that these loan words should be used with much care, especially in academic, governmental, and media uses as distributors of these words. The general public, as receivers, should be more critical about the use of loan words. Finally, measures are recommended by the Council to deal with English borrowing in government offices and the media: continuing use of loan words which have taken a firm hold on

Japanese, Japanese replacements for the words that are less intelligible English terms, and using English words which are without proper replacements in Japanese.

***Assessment of the Current Policy on Japanese Language***

Although the Council on the National Language report itself has no legal power to impose its suggestions immediately and directly to the public, it is being reflected in the development of substantial language and educational policies. In this section, I critique several points made in the report.

Firstly, the biggest flaw of the report is its lack of views on intra-national understanding of minority groups. Even though it discusses the present trend of multilingualism and multiculturalism in the world, especially those in the European Union (EU), and recognizes diversity as important, it does not mention anything about these issues inside Japan. If it says that “one particular language cannot bear the diversity human cultures have (my translation)” as a counter message toward the power of English, then, it also has to admit to and appreciate the diversity in Japan. This continuing neglect of diversity has been damaging cultural and linguistic minorities, such as the Ainu, Okinawan, Korean, and Chinese.

Secondly, the report aims to counter English imperialism by promotion of Japanese abroad, but it does not adequately justify the promotion of ‘our’ language to ‘others.’ The logic is an analogy of Japanese imperialism of the past as a counter measure against European and American imperialism. We have to be careful of this logic, because the consequences of Japan’s imperialism were the suppression of human and linguistic rights of the colonized peoples. Because the Japanese Constitution considers the dangers of Japanese imperialism, we should be against taking the risk of depriving others of their rights.

Thirdly, the measures to deal with loan words will not be as effective as the report intends and will have the potential to impede language rights. The number of loan words is so great that creating an exhaustive list will be a huge project, which will take continuous updating. This project will be carried out by a small number of linguists and so-called ‘well-informed people’, which has a risk of impeding the language rights of ordinary people. It also will be difficult and undesirable to apply the binding power of

law to any usage of language in a democratic country. But without the force of law, a sweeping change will not occur.

Fourthly, the perception of problematizing loan words is limited. The report considers one of the problems of English/Western loan words is the impediment it creates for Japanese learners of foreign languages and for learners of the Japanese language. A language is primarily for and of its speakers, native or nonnative, not a tool for studying a language. Also, it does not shed light on appropriations of loan words. For example, in Japan there is extensive word play using English, such as the pun on the phrase, 友&愛, *you and I* in pronunciation and *friend(s) and love* in meaning (Honna, 1995)). In addition, rap musicians utilize English in Japanese ways in their lyrics to express their multiple identities (Pennycook, 2003). In addition, the Council Report reveals contradictory attitudes to Western languages and to the Chinese language, saying that inconsiderate use of loan words from Western languages leads to disrespect for words of Japanese origin and ones written in Chinese characters. That is, words written in Chinese characters have to be protected from Western loan words, such as from English. However, many words written in Chinese characters originated from the Chinese language. When the words and characters from China were imported, the situation must have been similar to the current English imperialism, i.e., characterized by the common use of the foreign language and accompanying appropriation of it. In the case of appropriation of the Chinese language, Japanese people created two writing systems out of Chinese characters, *hiragana* and *katakana*. In addition, words have been coined by Japanese people using Chinese characters, quite a few of which are now used even in the Chinese language. These examples of appropriation of the Chinese language show how this language has become indispensable in the use of Japanese. If the report acknowledges an appropriation of the Chinese language, then, the attitude that strives to reduce the use of Western loan words, as an appropriation of Western languages, is a double standard. And the argument that the elderly have less understanding of Western loan words as a reason for discouraging use of them does not consider the counter-argument that, because the younger generations had less understanding of words written in Chinese characters and idioms originating from the Chinese language, use of these words and idioms should be restricted.

Lastly, if the report is intended to counter English imperialism, it does not mention the basic problem behind the increased use of English/European loan words. It obscures the problem by including non-English/European loan words in the examples used in the report, such as *kimuchi*, which is Korean. The report does not state the true problem: Japan, as a periphery country, has experienced government, academic, media, and corporate internalization of the values of the Center, resulting in anglocentrism (Phillipson, 1992, p. 47). This public group seems to promote the views that new ideas and goods cannot be expressed accurately or concisely in Japanese translations and English/Western loan words can express new images for old notions. For example, there was an incident recently which showed the absurd mentality of government promotion of Anglicization. In a small neighborhood in Chubu region, two towns intended to consolidate, and the local government office announced a new anglicized name related to a newly opened airport, Minami-sentorea (South Centre-Air). Rightfully, the name met huge opposition from the residents in and outside of the towns. In the end, the consolidation itself was retracted. This is not only a reassuring example that the public did not share anglocentricity with government officials, but it does show that people have the potential to resist the imposition of linguistic power structures.

As the Council was reorganized as the Subdivision on National Language in the Agency for Cultural Affairs, the above principles were passed on to this committee, leaving the same defects as mentioned above. It should especially be noted that the Subdivision reports (Bunkachou, 2002; 2004) do not include intra-national diversity in its scope and that they do not answer the fundamental problem in promoting ‘our’ language to ‘others’. One of the reports states under the heading, *Cultivate the attitude of valuing culture*, “enhanced education that fosters respect for *the* history and traditions of Japan and for diverse cultures *of the world* [italics added]” (Bunkachou, 2002), which reveals its disregard of the minority histories and cultures inside Japan.

### ***Policy on English Education***

Policies on English education have been under the jurisdiction of MEXT. In 2003, MEXT announced the “Action Plan to Cultivate Japanese with English Abilities”. The

plan starts with a discussion of the state of affairs with globalization: in this globalizing world, as transfers of information and capital, and movement of people and products have increased, interdependency has deepened. This has brought international economic competition, called ‘mega-competition’, and “[m]uch effort is necessary to meet such challenges”; sharing of wisdom among different peoples is needed for the resolution of worldwide issues, such as environmental problems; globalization affects individuals as well as businesses, with increased “opportunities to come in contact with the global market and service, and participate in international activities”; and “there is a strong demand for the abilities to obtain and understand knowledge and information as well as the abilities to transmit information and to engage in communication.” Based on this understanding, English is perceived as “the common international language”. English education is justified for children living in the globalizing world (Monbu kagaku shou 2003, Preface). Toward this goal, seven actions are advocated, six of which are directly related to English education, and one on Japanese ability.

1. Improvement of English education: improvement of English classes, improving teaching ability of teachers and system, improving motivation, improvement in the evaluation system, support for English conversation activities in elementary schools, and promotion of practical research
2. Improvement of communicative competence of Japanese as a base for that of English, and for fostering “Japanese people rich in humanity with an awareness of society”

The MEXT plan recognizes that English is used as the lingua franca in the current globalizing era and acknowledges a downside of this by stating, “due to lack of sufficient ability, many Japanese are restricted in their exchanges with foreigners and their ideas or opinions are not evaluated appropriately” (Monbu kagaku shou, 2003, Preface). Under this conception, it is not only English but also the Japanese language that are positioned as necessities to increase communicative competence. The plan states that “it is also necessary for Japanese to develop their ability to clearly express their opinions in Japanese first in order to learn English” (Monbu kagaku shou, 2003, Preface). To this end, several plans for improving Japanese language abilities are being made: realization of

guidelines, which stresses communicative skills; promotion of students' reading books; raising awareness of the language; and teacher education. It also states the importance of respecting Japanese language in order to live within an international society as *shutaiteki* Japanese. The word *shutaiteki* means independence, autonomy, self-control, self-directedness, and initiative. It should be noted, however, that the English version of the Action Plan (p. 18) lacks a translation for this word.

### ***Assessment of the Current Policy on English Education***

The MEXT plan has problems in terms of resisting linguistic imperialism and reproducing current inequalities. Firstly, it is limited in understanding current situations as they are. It states only the disadvantages that Japanese people experience because of insufficient English competence. Unlike the Council on National Language's report on Japanese language, movements for respecting a mother tongue and for protecting minority languages in the world are not stated. Also, it still relies on native speakers as models and promotes the JET Program. It does not refer to criticisms that the JET program is costly and has been controversial (Nunan, 2003). Several former participants of the Program revealed that native speakers from English speaking countries dispatched on the JET Program receive no special training in language education, but receive more than 3000 dollars a month. Some of the participants I talked with said they were unsatisfied with their role as 'a tape recorder'. On the other hand, teachers who worked with the assistants criticized them for not having an understanding of Japanese culture and for lacking professionalism.

Secondly, the MEXT plan reflects what Pennycook (2001) calls a *laissez-faire* attitude toward English imperialism. Here, globalization is a given and English is perceived as a necessity for living in the current era. In addition, the primary motivation for supporting English seems to be stated in the first part of the plan, that is, to challenge economic competition. However, if linguicism is analogous with racism and sexism (Phillipson, 1992), then the logic that "You should speak English" becomes synonymous with "You should become Caucasian or male." Under the Constitution's ideal, respect for human rights, Japan should not be a conspirator in imperialism. English imperialism

harms language rights (Phillipson, 1992) and a laissez-faire attitude cannot change the status quo (Pennycook, 2001). The MEXT plan has the potential for accelerating the trend towards Japanese education and society's over-concentration on Western/American cultures and languages. As a result, minority people and languages will be disregarded more than ever. Only four percent and 11 percent of high schools currently teach Korean and Chinese language, respectively (The Japan Forum, 2005). It should be noted that these languages are taught as a second foreign language, whereas English is the first foreign language.

In addition, it is a sign of Japanese linguisticism and hegemony that the plan mentions respect for Japanese language while ignoring minority languages. Disregard for minority languages is not only a violation of language rights under the Constitution, but also a failure to consider new kinds of human rights as guaranteed under the notion of the right to pursue happiness. Also, the lack of attention to internal minority issues can lead to conservatism (Pennycook, 2001, p. 61). With the current picture of politics and public opinion,<sup>1</sup> conservatism could produce extreme nationalism. The Constitution, which reflects the tragedies caused by Japanese nationalism, suggests the need for attention to current and future policy directions.

Thirdly, the plan still appears to stick to the notion of 'Westernization/Americanization = modernization = internationalization'. This equation goes back to the Meiji Restoration (1868), which was reinforced by the defeat in World War II (Tsuda, 1990, 1996, 2003). It is because of this notion that Japanese people internalized Western/American values in a hegemonic relationship (Phillipson, 1992; Tsuda, 1990, 1996, 2003). At the same time, superior attitudes towards other Asians are reported as a result of economic development and modernization (Furuta et al. 2001). Feelings of superiority, which are often unconscious, have led to the kinds of discrimination against

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<sup>1</sup> There has been a constant effort in the Liberal Democratic Party, which has been governing Japanese politics, to amend the Constitution in order to respond to the international policy of the US. That is, Japan is expected to work as an ally of the US by deployment of the Self-Defense Forces outside of Japan. As for public opinion, the response of Japanese people to the anti-Japanese feelings of Chinese people shown in the soccer games in 2004 lacked understanding: the backgrounds of the past invasion and present behaviors of politicians, which reminds them of the past, e.g. Prime Minister Koizumi's visiting Yasukuni Shrine, which is a symbol of Japanese imperialism, and repeated remarks by politicians which neglect or justify the invasion.

ethnic minorities within Japan described earlier in this paper. In this sense, the plan has the risk of reproducing the status quo both internationally and nationally.

Lastly, advocating increased competence in Japanese for the sake of English competence is problematic. Japanese is for and of speakers of Japanese, native or non-native, rather than a tool to study a foreign language. The statement that “It is also necessary for Japanese to develop their ability to clearly express their own opinions in Japanese first in order to learn English” (Monbu kagaku shou, 2003, Preface) can actually lead to disregard for Japanese ways of communication as a result of an emphasis on expressing oneself in English.

## **SUGGESTIONS FOR LANGUAGE POLICY IN JAPAN**

### ***Conceptual Framework for Revisions in Japan’s Education Policy***

The principles underlying my suggestions for a revised policy on language education are promotion of multilingualism, resistance against English imperialism, reconsideration of Western economic values of development and progress, and alleviation of identity crises of both the cultural and linguistic majority and minorities in Japan. By considering a revised policy, Japan could change the face of world-wide inequalities through going beyond nationalism and linguisticism.

Firstly, I would suggest that multilingualism is to be promoted as a form of resistance to English imperialism.<sup>2</sup> With the overwhelming power of English, a countermeasure is needed. Already existing examples of this are found in the European Union, where English is included among other official languages (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2002). To promote multilingualism, Skutnabb-Kangas first speaks of linguistic wrongs that can occur when monolingualism is the norm and multilingualism is a danger in a country (Skutnabb-Kangas, cited in Philipson, 2001). She also states the strengths of multilingualism in that

<sup>2</sup> One way to fight against English imperialism might be the notion of World Englishes in that it questions the dichotomy of native speakers (NS) and non-native speakers (NNS). This would benefit the people of what Kachru (1994) calls the Outer circle as legitimate NSs. However, it would not solve inequalities experienced by Japanese in international communication, such as business, academics, and politics, as is pointed out in Tsuda (1990, 1996, 2003): NNS of the Expanding circle will still be disadvantaged in competitive circumstances when NS can speed up their speech and use metaphors to hold the floor and manipulate the discussion.

it preserves linguistic diversity, which will be beneficial in the post-industrial societies, and that high-level multilinguals exceed monolinguals in creativity. Her effort seems to focus on convincing people, who are occupied with modernization, of the superiority of multilingualism, using the same terms as those people, such as cost-effectiveness, efficiency of creativity for the benefit of a nation, and consideration of multilingualism as linguistic capital (2002).

Japan could go beyond the notion of development, efficiency, and economic progress as primary objectives of the nation. It could avoid fruitless argument over which is more efficient, multilingualism or monolingualism, by realizing that this is another form of competition that can lead to disregard for both monolinguals and bilinguals. Multilingualism for Japan could refuse any kind of linguisticism by protecting minorities' language rights (Phillipson, 1992). The policy suggested here starts from a moral imperative (Pennycook, 2001) rather than from a practical need to compete for economic success. So far we have observed and experienced the insufficiency of economic success for promoting people's right to pursue happiness. Although Japan achieved economic self-sufficiency, it has done so by promoting Western notions of progress and by sacrificing the human rights of workers, such as reasonable working hours. In considering alternatives to Western values and economic development, Japan can overcome many of its human rights problems, including workers rights and discrimination against powerless minorities.

Yet hegemony has a strong foothold in Japan. The inferiority complex that Japanese experience regarding Western values tends to be discussed with a delicate balance between nationalism and totalitarian prescriptivism. For example, as Ricento (2000) points out, the language policy in the Meiji period aimed to attain unity as a nation and efficiency in development (Okamoto, 2002; Shibatani, 1990), but, in the process, dialects, including the Ainu and Okinawan languages, were suppressed (Okamoto, 2002; Shibatani, 1990). In another era of nationalism during World War II, the government directed the use of translated words instead of English loan words, while promoting an assimilationist policy with the people of other countries which Japan had invaded. As is seen in these cases, when nationalism requires assimilation to 'Japanese', identities of minorities have

been put in danger (Fukuoka, 1996). Thus, we should be careful not to move towards a nationalism which imposes assimilation to ‘Japaneseness’ and which nevertheless preserves discrimination. I suggest, therefore, that a language policy support diversity by respecting ethnic minorities’ individual and hybrid identities. This call for respecting minorities’ identities is in line with the ideals of the Constitution and supportive of movement towards international respect for human rights.

In promoting opportunities for minorities to claim their heritage languages and cultures, I am not suggesting the imposition of identities without taking the will of the minorities into consideration. As Joseph (2004) points out, it is ultimately up to each individual what identities they choose to construct, with the proviso that they are given a chance to consider choices other than ‘Japanese’. Under current policies, the government has no intention of improving minorities’ human rights, as revealed in Prime Minister Koizumi’s (2003) public statement. Both the lack of the equal legal status for national schools and the Japanese dominant Discourse of public schools fail to offer minorities full choices and opportunities with which to construct identities. My intention here is to recommend policies that would promote rather than obstruct linguistic and cultural opportunities.

Education is inherently political (Watson-Gegeo, 2004) in that students learn particular world views in the process of school socialization (Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986; Watson-Gegeo & Nielsen, 2003). The current school system reproduces the dominant Discourses being promoted within society and through public institutions (Garrett & Baquedano-Lopez, 2002). Thus, in order to change existing inequalities for minorities and to facilitate students’ identity construction, a pedagogy of possibility (Kumaravadivelu, 2001) should be implemented in education, by which students are empowered to counter dominant Discourses that are contrary to human rights. For example, the current trend of ‘international understanding’ in schools is nothing more than what Derman-Sparks calls cultural tourism and will not change the status quo (Kubota, 2004) regarding minority rights. We will need to look critically at the history of how inequalities have been produced and reproduced through Japanese Discourses and find educational alternatives for minorities. In addition, since socialization is interactive

and bidirectional (Garrett & Baquedano-Lopez, 2002; He, 2003; Leung, n.d; Schieffelin & Ochis, 1986), there is room for majority students to be influenced by minority students. One of the current problems in Japan is the lack of knowledge about and indifference toward minorities (Fukuoka, 1996). The situation can be improved when minority students become ‘visible’ and are allowed to express their hybrid identities within classrooms. Majority Japanese students can change through creating a third space (Bhaba cited in Watson-Gegeo, 2004) for exploring multiple identities and human rights issues. Here majority students can be given the opportunity to construct new identities for themselves, other than a unitary identity as ‘Japanese’. Since reproduction of the status quo is observed even in the early years of education (Toohey, 2001), anti-imperialist and anti-linguicist teaching should start as early as possible.

### ***Initiatives***

Based on the principles and the conceptual framework described above, I suggest the following five initiatives for a new policy on language education that aims to produce equality without the risk of moving towards narrow-minded nationalism:

1. Stop implementation of English education in elementary schools
2. Exclude English from all gate-keeping examinations
3. Introduce minority languages, including Ainu and Okinawan languages, for international/intra-national understanding, beginning in elementary schools
4. Leave a door open for English education as a third language for those who wish to learn it in addition to a minority language in junior, senior high schools and colleges, i.e., abolish compulsory English education
5. Promote critical pedagogy in language teaching

The reason for early implementation of teaching minority languages is not based on the idea of efficiency for acquiring a language, “the earlier, the better”, as prevalent in language policies in Asian-Pacific countries (Nunan, 2003). Rather, since elementary schools are the first and foremost institutional socialization children receive through compulsory education, students can begin to develop language and cultural awareness at an early age through exploring a minority language. The choice and options for minority

language awareness education should depend on regional contexts. For example, in the northern part of Japan where many Ainu live, it would be best for students to study the Ainu language in schools. In Okinawa, schools could offer the Okinawan language. In the Shizuoka prefecture, where many Brazilians live, many of whom are Japanese-Brazilians, Portuguese could be an option. Minority languages could also include those of residents and Japanese learners from previously colonized countries, such as Korea, China, Taiwan, the Philippines, Indonesia, and Thailand. Currently, students from these countries are the majority of those who study Japanese as a second/foreign language. In 2003, 86% of foreign students were from China, South Korea, Taiwan, Malaysia, and Thailand.<sup>3</sup> In 2002, four of the major foreign resident groups (80% of all residents) were South and North Korean, Chinese, Brazilians, and Filipinos (Foreign Press Center Japan, n.d.). Thus, teaching the languages of these groups would be effective in rectifying the current unilateral language learning policy for linguistic minorities.

By teaching the languages common in specific regions, communities of non-Japanese language speakers near schools could be drawn upon for gaining language practice and developing cultural awareness. In addition, while many Asian students and residents are reconciled to jobs known as the 3Ds (demanding, dirty, and dangerous) or to unemployment, they could be resources for providing qualified teachers of these languages. Changes in employment practices could counter discrimination at several levels. For example, graduates from North Korean national schools in Japan are usually not accepted for work in public schools as teachers because of their nationality, even when they are qualified in the ability to teach the language. Thus, counter-discriminatory practices allow for modeling of equity and provide role models for minority students.

To resist English imperialism, I would recommend that English only be taught as a second foreign language and there be no compulsory English education. If English is no

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<sup>3</sup> In addition, 66% of learners of Japanese abroad were in the countries of South Korea, China, Taiwan, Indonesia, and Thailand (Japan Foundation, 2004). Many visitors from these countries also visit Japan as tourists. In 2002, four out of the six major countries from which tourists came were South Korea, Taiwan, China, and the Philippines (Foreign Press Center Japan, n.d.).

longer a gate-keeping device in examinations, there will most likely be fewer people who study this language for instrumental purposes. Consequently, there would be fewer English language schools, less manipulation of images of English-speaking people through advertisements (Tsuda, 1990, 1996, 2003), and, thus, less hegemonic influence of English in Japan.

### **CONCLUSIONS: OBSTACLES, WEAKNESSES, AND POSSIBILITIES**

A paradox exists with my promoting the principles of a language policy which goes beyond Western values while writing about these principles in English. I not only write in English and use U.S. academic conventions, but I also attempt to counter Western values such as progress and development by using theories drawn from Western academics, citing many articles written in English. Yet this use of a dominant international Discourse allows me to pursue a value that has been actively promoted in the West, human rights, which I believe in. In addition, as Canagarajah (1999) points out, writing in English can be a form of resistance (p. 34). I can reach wider audiences in English, especially those people in countries which suffer English imperialism, in order to jointly resist it. I can also more easily exploit a phenomenon of English hegemony in Japanese academics that considers papers published in English more ‘reliable’ than internal publications.

The policy suggested here is intended as a countermeasure against imperialism, including Japanese linguicism. Since education most often reproduces the established societal structure, the major obstacle for this policy is that the current government is leaning to the right, deemed as following US policies, and shows expansionism in international fields, such as the recent attempt to become a permanent member of the United Nations. Thus, to change government policies, it will be necessary to raise the Japanese people’s awareness of the inequality and injustice inherent in current language and education policies. And, to raise this awareness, education must be changed. This is a vicious circle which challenges the policy proposed here. However, in effect, things are changing among people in Japan. For example, past stigmatization of Korean culture and

language has lessened through support by female fans of a Korean TV drama. Interestingly, this fashion is named *han-ryu*, or Korean style/boom, with Korean pronunciation of a Chinese character that represents the name of the country. A change in attitudes towards Koreans can be viewed as evidence that people have the potential to change under current systems (see also Canagarajah, 1999, p. 25).

I believe that even under the current education system, societal attitudes can be altered if teachers take critical pedagogical approaches in language teaching. For example, Skarin (this volume) shares a curriculum for Generation 1.5 students in a Hawaii community college which brought about attitudinal changes through Critical Language Awareness and Critical Applied Linguistics. Okazaki (this volume) draws on critical content teaching to facilitate critical consciousness or “the ability to realize and question the reproduction of socio-cultural and historical injustice and power relationship in one’s own culture, the target culture and global cultures”. Okazaki asserts that “By gaining one’s voice and resisting unjust reproduction in their own self-interest, students start to become active agents for social change”.

In Japanese society, where people are more reluctant to express their political positions than in the U.S., teachers with critical perspectives are likely to meet with antipathy not only by people who promote the dominant Discourses, but also by people who profess themselves to be ‘neutral’. Yet as Gee (1990) states “one can criticize a particular Discourse from the viewpoint of another one...But what one cannot do is stand outside all Discourses and criticize any one or all of them (p. 144).” I hope that more language teachers will appreciate our inability to remain neutral and acknowledge the potential and responsibilities we have to bring about changes for a better society. This paper and others in this issue demonstrate the potential for change. They are the result of several courses in the Department of Second Language Studies at the University of Hawaii where students as prospective language teachers are being informed and challenged by critical perspectives.

「中立」を装ったり、自らの無力さから諦めてしまうことで、不平等、不公平な現実を存続させてしまう危険性よりも、「殺される側の論理」（本多勝一、1983）から批判的に世の中を見ていく自分でありたいと思います。足を踏ん

だ側はすぐ痛みを忘れますが、踏まれた方は簡単に忘れることができません。特に、民族的マイノリティーへの差別は大抵隠されていて、身の回りにあるのに気がつきにくくなっています。「もし自分が踏まれた方だったら」と考え、痛みを想像した上での学問、教育をめざしたいと思います。

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