

[研究論文]

Installation and Consolidation of American English as “the Standard” in Japan

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Background

This study grew out of questions and issues regarding the struggles Japanese students have developing proficiency in the English language. In the high stakes game of the Japanese educational system, the study of English figures prominently in determining which tracks for advancement students are placed in (Rapely, 2010; Masutani, 2019). It has been noted that Japanese students harbor a dislike for the enforced study of English (Reesor, 2003; Rapley, 2010; Japan Today, 2015). Having a direct bearing on the students’ aversion towards English are the policies which inform the English educational environment in Japan. This paper, which represents part of the presenter’s ongoing dissertation research, explores issues of educational policy and hegemony in Japanese English education from a sociohistorical and critical pedagogic perspective. The central question related to this study is: What historical and political developments have shaped the character of Japan’s English educational system?

Critical Issues in Japanese English Education

Teaching English in Japan is big business (Reesor, 2003; Hagerman, 2009; King, 2012; Muramoto, 2015) as a consequence of the Japanese government’s policy of *kokusaika* (internationalization) which dictates that Japanese students receive compulsory English education from elementary school (Sawa, 2020). The fact that English has been made a core component of the university entrance exam (Reesor, 2003; Ikegashira, et al., 2009) along with the reality that Japanese companies as well as the government emphasize the importance of attaining good marks on standardized English exams as part of their evaluation of current and potential employees (Chapman, 2003; Rudolph, 2012) ensures that demand for English instruction remains high and that Japan (site of the 2020 Olympics) remains a primary target destination for foreigners hoping to live abroad while making a living teaching English. However, despite the prominent position given to the study of English in Japan, the results as reflected in Japanese learners’ English proficiency (King, 2012; Aoki, 2016; Aoki, 2017) has

been less than stellar (in 2019 it was reported in the Japan Times that Japan’s English skill level had fallen “below the world average” and was placed “in the ‘low’ category, which is the second-to-bottom group, alongside Russia, Vietnam and Iran”: *Japanese ranked 53rd in English skills in annual worldwide survey*), giving rise to a number of questions as to why such a “wealthy, well-educated country that invests so much time and money in English education is compared so unfavorably in standardized tests?” (Hagerman, p. 55). Standardized English exams have also come under fire recently due to the controversy ignited by the Japanese government’s decision to partly base admission to university on standardized exams issued by private sector providers. A survey indicated that “Two-thirds of universities and 90 percent of high schools viewed the planned introduction of private-sector English language tests for a new standardized college admission exam as ‘problematic,’” as this measure is seen as putting students from less privileged backgrounds at a distinct disadvantage, and has even prompted the National Association of Upper Secondary School Principals to take the “unusual step of asking the education ministry...to ‘postpone’ the introduction of the new system” (Masutani, 2019). Equally unusual (for Japan) was the organization of a formal demonstration outside of the education ministry buildings (Masutani). The sustained outcry over this issue led to the Japanese government’s decision to accede to the request to postpone implementing private sector-issued exams as well as a retraction of the education minister Koichi Hagiuda’s remarks on a television program that students should compete for university admission “in accordance with their (financial) standing” (“Private English tests for Japan university entrance exams delayed after minister’s gaffe,” 2019, November 1).

Some observers concur with the sentiments expressed above in their assessment that standardized English language exams such as the widely disseminated EIKEN and TOEIC (administered by the US-based ETS organization) are indeed problematic (Chapman, 2003; Hagerman, 2009), with one researcher going so far to overtly declare the TOEIC to be a “scandal” through which private companies in conjunction with the government have reaped immense financial benefits via the interested parties collectively being “more concerned with benefiting itself than with the English ability of the test-takers” (McCrostie, 2010, p. 1). Further, in an industry which employs a large number of English-speaking expatriates from around the globe, nearly 90% of Japanese parents polled expressed dissatisfaction with Japan’s English educational system (“Nearly 90% dissatisfied with Japan’s English education”) with Japanese

students themselves expressing a dislike for the study of English (Lafaye & Tsuda, 2002; Kirkpatrick, 2019).

In addition to the problems associated with standardized English language exams, issues have been raised regarding the predominance of an Anglicized version of English in Japan, with some observers noting the prevalence of American English (A. Matsuda, 2000; Fukuda, 2010), and how the dominance of an American English in Japan has influenced the Japanese language as well as Japanese people’s views of “language, culture, race, ethnicity, and identity” through their interaction with native English instructors and that the teaching of English “creates cultural and linguistic stereotypes not only of English but also of Japanese people” (Kubota, 1998, p. 295). Owing to official government policy and the omnipresence of English in everyday life (Stanlaw, 2004), Japanese students cannot avoid being affected by English. The fundamental issues at the heart of Japan’s English educational system appear to be systemic, and intimately related to the political environment. A thorough examination of the relevant political background is therefore necessary to understand the character and shape of Japan’s English education system.

The Political Environment

The most basic reality of postwar East Asian order has stayed remarkably fixed and enduring; namely, the American-led system of bilateral security ties with Japan, South Korea, Taiwan and countries to the South. This “hub-and-spoke” security order remains the single most important anchor for regional stability. (Ikenberry, 2004, p. 353)

It is a well-documented fact that the US maintains unequal power relations regarding the East Asian “spokes” which revolve around it. Less investigated, or called into question, is whether truly democratic systems beneficial to the general populace were installed, and how the lack thereof may have impacted English education in Japan.

The weight of US hegemony in Japan was set down in a very unambiguous manner. Japan was bombed with nuclear weapons by the US in armed conflict, occupied by a US military government, and has since been subject to considerable enforced influence down to the present day, both via activities conducted from the continued presence of numerous US military bases, as well as by a government whose administrative staff was initially handpicked and supported by

US officials. Along with people such as criminal syndicate godfather Kodama Yoshio and other members of the imperialist elite, class A war criminal Kishi Nobusuke (the grandfather of Japan's former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe) was released from prison and became Prime Minister (Seagrave & Seagrave, 2003), aided in his second ascent to a lofty government position by the generous funds supplied to him by the CIA (Gibney, 2015). In his first tenure as deputy minister of industrial development in Manchuria during World War II, it was Kishi who had made the decision to staff Japanese factories with Chinese and Korean slave labor via the rationale that Chinese people were mentally more similar to dogs than people (Driscoll, 2010, p. 266). The pro-US Liberal Democratic Party (L.D.P.) still in power today (they have continuously ruled Japan since the end of WWII except for two brief intervals totaling roughly 4 years) was in fact installed by the US via the CIA, a decision that a leading Japan scholar at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology notes has led to consequences which make us "look at the L.D.P. and say it's corrupt and it's unfortunate to have a one-party democracy. But we have played a role in creating that misshapen structure" (Weiner, 1994).

Having restored to power members of the pre-war establishment who were beholden to them for their freedom, the US government along with their Japanese partners set their stamp upon Japan's educational system. Japan's educational policies, which inculcated views consistent with conservative American interests, were implemented in order to secure US financial aid (Nishino, 2011). The ultimate goal of the US planners was to "completely dismantle the old system and replace it with a new system based on American values" (Lagotte, 2003, p. 241). The objective, "as explained in the U.S. policy papers, was to 'effect changes in certain ideologies and ways of thinking of the individual Japanese' by using 'all possible media and channels'" (Tsuchiya, 2002, p. 194). Shoriki Matsutarō, another former class-A war criminal released and supported by the CIA, used his connections to create Japan's first privatized television station (Nippon Television Corporation), which proved to be a boon to US planners as US-positive content was disseminated throughout the nation via Nippon TV as well as through Shoriki's Yomiuri shinbun newspaper (日本テレビとCIA—発掘された正カプファイル, 2006). So effective was the pairing of the CIA with Shoriki in the area of psychological manipulation, that along with Walt Disney's animation (the animated short film "Our Friend, The Atom" was broadcast on Nippon TV) they were able to shift Japanese public opinion from revulsion at the horrors of the Hiroshima/Nagasaki nuclear holocaust to acceptance of the construction of nuclear power

stations in their country, which was a big financial success for US corporate giants GE and Westinghouse (“Tepco’s ‘deal with the devil,’” 2011). The main objective of this re-orienting Japanese people to a US-friendly perspective “did not aim at (creating) any truly democratic society. As historian Charles S. Maier argues, the U.S. viewed the postwar world as ‘a tabula rasa’ where it could build a ‘consensual American hegemony’” (Tsuchiya, p. 194).

In terms of English education, one of the consequences of a political and social environment that could be shaped to such an extreme degree by US interests is that Japan adopted American English as the standard teaching model for its English education system (Kubota, 1998; Mizuta, 2009; Honna & Takeshita, 2014; Yamada, 2015). The collusion for profit between well-placed Japanese and their US supporters as demonstrated in the example of nuclear power cited above has found expression in such institutions as the ubiquitous US-produced TOEIC exam (Bresnihan, 2012; Takahashi, 2012), which not only is a poor indicator of a student’s communicative ability (Chapman, 2003; Chapman & Newfields, 2008; Takahashi, 2012; Bresnihan, 2013) and may actually dissuade Japanese students from the study of English (Takahashi, 2012), but has all of the earmarks of a project made for the primary purpose of generating profit (McCrostie, 2010). The producer of the TOEIC, ETS, is a US non-profit organization created in 1947 by three other nonprofit educational institutions: the American Council on Education (ACE), The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, and The College Entrance Examination Board. Underwritten by the Rockefeller and Carnegie Foundations (Borman, 2011), it has been described as a “highly competitive business operation that is as much multinational monopoly as nonprofit institution” (Frantz & Nordheimer, 1997) which overlooks cheating on its exams (Zwick, 2002). The ETS does not report financial information to the Securities and Exchange Commission and is exempt from paying federal corporate income tax on many of its operations (Jo, 2007). It has been described as part of the logical outcome of the “educational efficiency binge of the 1920’s” which was underwritten by Rockefeller and Carnegie and resulted in the widespread application of “business methods” to secondary schools which resulted in educational bureaucrats and “experts” being brought in to determine curriculum and methods of evaluation and teaching (Borman, 2011).

The Rockefeller Foundation was a significant factor in planning for the US’ entry into World War II, designed programs to further US interests globally after the war prior to the conclusion

of the conflict, was instrumental in restructuring Japan along the lines of US interests after the war, and specifically prescribed the development of a large-scale English-language-instruction program for Japan (Berman, 1983, p. 3, pp. 41-42; T. Matsuda, 2007, p. 80, p. 116; Parmar, 2012, pp. 68-74; Shoup & Minter, 2004, p. 128, p. 136; Thompson, 1992, p. 401). As far as J. Rockefeller III was concerned, “an extensive program of *English-language instruction* (Professor Matsuda’s italics) in Japan was an absolute necessity,” a sentiment which was given further credence by a United States Information Service (USIS)-Japan evaluation report which “emphasized the potentialities of an English-language teaching program” that would “open for the infiltration of sound American ideas by ostensibly assisting in improving English-language teaching techniques” (T. Matsuda, pp. 117-118). The USIS was the overseas operational moniker for the State Department’s United States Information Agency (USIA). The USIS employed propaganda for its psychological warfare campaigns, which were designed to influence public opinion (Dizard, 2004). Originating as the Office of War Information (OWI) in 1942, it had a large presence in Japan in the post-war era, as “Japan remained one of the largest single USIS programs abroad throughout the Cold War years” (p. 44). The purpose of USIS operations in Japan was to stem the tide of communism (T. Matsuda, p. 115) in order to successfully incorporate Japan into the US’ “grand hegemonic project to re-create a liberal, capitalist world order...after 1945 Washington sought to make a subsystem in East Asia, the strategic center of which was Japan” (pp. 15-17).

Spreading American English across Japan therefore was an imperative as an aid to indoctrinate Japanese citizens in “sound American ideals,” especially a type of capitalism which is focused on encouraging rampant consumerism. Within the capitalist economic system, in which the few owners of the means of production employ workers who sell their labor for an hourly wage, a person is reduced to “a cog in a super-rational money-driven machine in order to make profit” (Boetger & Rathbone, 2016), while the “government of advanced and advancing industrial societies can maintain and secure itself only when it succeeds in mobilizing, organizing, and exploiting the technical, scientific, and mechanical productivity available to industrial civilization” (Marcuse, 1964, p. 3). The inevitable result of such a system is that education will tend to become bureaucratized into a technical type which serves the state via its emphasis on sorting future workers in a time-efficient manner, i.e. standardized testing. Modern education then can be said to be an institution which reproduces inequality (Bowles & Gintis, 2011) and

tips the scales in favor of the privileged class who have access to the resources necessary to thrive such as sufficient capital to afford private tutoring, with the result that, through “competition, success, and defeat in the classroom, students are reconciled to their social positions” (p. 111). The fact that the TOEIC and American English have become prevalent throughout Japan is owing in no small part to the strong US roots which were set down in Japanese soil as a result of the outcome of World War II and the subsequent activities of US authorities and their Japanese collaborators in the post-war era, a scenario which was also replicated in South Korea after the Korean War (Joun, 2015).

Significance to Education

Holliday (2005) views the hegemonic aspects in TESOL as embedded so deeply that any dissemination of educational principles will inevitably perpetuate a western discourse on account of the “Centre-biased” ideological elements entrenched within the core of TESOL, elements which may trigger certain peripheral acts of resistance, but will nonetheless remain in place. Owing to its pervasive influence on English teaching professionals, learner-centeredness has become “*control-constructed* and fails to address the persons of students and teachers. By control-construction I mean the bureaucratization and technicalization of liberal democratic principles such as learner-centeredness by professional discourses so that they can be controlled and accounted for” (2005, p. 11). Essentially, English teaching professionals may easily fall into the trap of teaching an approved process rather than making the effort to dig very deeply into the matrix of the student-student/teacher-student classroom dynamic in order to flesh out and address the core fundamentals of student needs as well as important questions regarding the instructor’s ability to address them, i.e. in the case of a foreigner teaching in Japan, whether or not he/she is sufficiently clued into the students’ culture to a level which will allow the instructor to truly understand their needs, which could well be informed by sensibilities vastly different to an American or British citizen. This issue has been alluded to by Anderson, who notes that “Japanese students can be especially puzzling...because on the surface they are influenced by western customs...However, at a deeper level they retain cultural values and communication styles that are clearly at odds with those of educators from English-speaking countries” (2008, p. 92). Holliday views the bias in western views of the “non-Western Other” (2010, p. 259) as so

extreme that radical measures are necessary to authentically break free of ideologically-constructed false views of other cultures.

Despite the awareness raised by these disclosures (Levine & Phipps, 2012; Hawkins, 2011) and efforts of educators such as Wang (2011) to actively implement critical pedagogic practices, many ELT teacher training programs continue to operate on the assumption that preparing instructors to work for social justice can be adequately handled by having them sit in university classrooms and engage in reading and discussion (Zeichner, 2011). Researchers in second language acquisition (SLA) interactional analysis have on the whole been reluctant to seriously engage with ideological forces which act upon classroom discourse (Brenner, 2012), even as consideration of sociocultural practices and relations of power have made their way into recent SLA research (Clarke & Morgan, 2011). As a consequence perhaps of the neoliberal wave which has swept over educational systems around the world (Clarke & Morgan, 2011), neoliberal policies have resulted in the hegemony of a human-capital based positivist view which prioritizes student efficiency and performance over student needs, and sees language as “both tool and commodity in the service of a globalized economy” rather than as “an inherently social phenomenon that is constructive of...social relations and identities” (Clarke & Morgan, p. 66). Clarke and Morgan further assert that language education is especially susceptible to the epistemological, ontological and ethical assumptions of neoliberalism, and therefore “run[s] the risk of ‘simply adopt[ing] the label of social justice without challenging or changing existing practices’” (in McDonald & Zeichner, 2009, p. 606).

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