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Author	中村, 優治(Nakamura, Yuji)
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Globalization, English language education, and language policy in Asia and Japan

Yuji Nakamura

Globalization of English and English language teaching in Asia

Globalization has become a ubiquitous concept in recent times, and it is apt to overuse in higher education. For example, globalization has been closely linked to internationalization, which refers to a multifaceted process defined as the policies and practices undertaken by academic systems, institutions, and even individuals to cope with the global academic environment (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Doiz, Lasagabaster, & Sierra, 2013). One feasible outcome of internationalization is the implementation of foreign language study programs in schools. Yet, an examination into current trends in foreign language programs indicates that English is the preeminent foreign language being taught at universities worldwide (Doiz, Lasagabaster, & Sierra, 2013). While it is evident that most Asian countries have placed a special emphasis on English, and that English is indeed an important language, the way it is currently taught has not yielded ideal results. English language teaching has not been effective for several reasons: 1) lack of appropriate teaching materials, 2) insufficient number of well-qualified teachers in terms of English proficiency and IT literacy, 3) insufficient communication between students and teachers or between teachers, 4) communication gap between the ministry of education and the schools (i.e. there is a gap between what the government wants teachers to do and what the teachers actually do in class) (cf. Kam & Wong, 2004; Robertson, 2015).

Asia has the largest population of English language learners in the world. For many years, ELT professionals throughout Asia have been working to find effective strategies to meet the needs of their respective communities by developing policies aimed at creating innovative & integrative practices, and transforming learning (cf. Oda, 2014). In Asia, English is the first ‘foreign’ language taught in schools and is a very important subject in primary education curricula and in some cases is used as

the sole medium of instruction. In Japan for example, it should be noted that one of the main major goals and changes set forth by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) for the elementary level by 2020 is to establish mandatory instruction hours (35) for grades 3 and 4, and to designate English as an officially evaluated subject for grades 5 and 6 and increase instruction time to up to 105 hours per year (MEXT, 2015). Under the new 2013 MEXT guidelines, raising communicative ability is the overall aim of foreign language education from the elementary to high school level (cf. Noguchi, 2015).

Further, English has been increasingly used as the primary mode of instruction in higher education. While having the ability to communicate is integral to success as more countries engage in business and trade, consideration needs to be given to the development of English language acquisition in Asia. Also, the implications of the diverse methods of English language teaching are currently not well understood. Additionally, as the need for English fluency increases, consideration needs to be given to radically new approaches of English teaching (cf. Kirkpatrick, 2014). More research should focus on the links between the sustainability of educational reform efforts and *teacher support*. In other words, future research should examine aspects of ELT reform in terms of long-term, sustainable, and scalable teacher support (cf. Samuel, 2014).

Lin (2014) suggests that the global spread of English as the medium of the international domain in the late twentieth century has intensified the need for its mastery. This trend has led to several important developments of the English language throughout East Asia, including Japan. To support this claim, Lin (2014) mentions the use of English as the Asian lingua franca at the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Additionally, Lin (2014) mentions how recent reforms have been shaped with an emphasis on English education. For instance, mandating English education earlier in the education of East Asian children, or the insistence of improving ELT curriculum and other initiatives. Thus, the globalization of English coupled with the extension of English education, has accelerated the development of ELT business in Japan (cf. Lin, 2014). In sum, both the situation in East Asia and the spread of English is being facilitated by language-in-education policies and measures, politico-economic needs, global communication, and public perceptions of English (Lin, 2014).

Meaning of globalization in Japan

In addition to its historic, educational, and social influences, globalization has played a key role in understanding present-day Japan (cf. Seargent, 2011). While

Japanese feelings toward globalization remain ambivalent, some advantages are recognized. For instance, Japanese view globalization as both an opportunity (e.g. increase access to Native English speakers) and as a threat (e.g., increased external cultural influence). In other words, globalization presents a complex conundrum where Japanese people want to benefit from the promotion of English learning, while also remain fearful about losing aspects of their established national culture and identity (Yamagami & Tollefson, 2011).

Conversations around the importance of English are not restricted to its role as an international lingua franca or the emergence of institutional varieties, but in the debates it initiates. English has served both as an aspiration to be achieved and as a resource that provides a tool for negotiating one's cultural identity in the age of globalization (Seargeant, 2011).

The impact of globalization and the expansion of English language has been researched extensively. There are numerous examples of educational initiatives aimed at improving English acquisition around the world, each containing some element of cultural nuance tying it to its country of origin. As the number of approaches to teaching English increases, tensions between traditional approaches have also been on the rise.

Matsuda (2011) recognizes a profound discrepancy in the globalization contradiction by emphasizing the mutually influencing roles of English as an international lingua franca. For example, Matsuda (2011) highlights the varying expectations which exist between high school teachers, who stress the importance of linguistic knowledge rather than skills, and students who wish to learn communicative skills. Seargent (2011) furthers this argument with the assertion that there is a wide range of contexts that show the diverse and complex positioning of English language and identities in social and educational domains throughout Japan. For this reason, more exploration and substantial information is needed.

Yamada (2015) shows that globalization has produced conflicting circumstances through the global spread of English. She claims that the desire for authentic English is prominent in Japan, and the idea of authenticity is widely used in language-related social practices such as hiring teachers and developing language teaching methods (Yamada, 2015).

Yamada (2015) also suggests that although Japanese EFL students are encouraged to be global citizens by learning English and communicative skills, they are not given opportunities to discuss either the diversity of English uses, or its users. More specifically, Japanese students are not provided with a variety of social contexts where either English is used, nor are they introduced to diverse groups of

people with English fluency (Yamada, 2015).

Lin (2014) stresses the importance of English for students in Japan. As the global spread of English as the major medium of international domains has strengthened the need for its mastery, English has become a key component in furthering Japanese internationalization. English, as it has been established as the global lingua franca, has increasingly become a useful tool in understanding the world. For example, getting information from the internet may require some recognition of, or familiarity with the English language. In other words English has positioned itself as an essential element in knowledge gathering.

Lin (2014) further describes the issue of English and employment. Rakuten, the country's largest online marketplace, and clothing retailer UNIQLO have decided to adopt English as a workplace language in order to increase global competitiveness; this development introduced a major disruption in the Japanese business world. In recent times, English has become a hiring criterion for more companies. Further, as individuals, English has become an indispensable skill for students in the competitive domestic workforce. English ability, a requisite skill in employment, is increasingly being used as a gatekeeper for both better jobs and promotion.

Most importantly, for stakeholders such as the government, the ELT industry, and parents, the main focus is still clearly on the benefits English can provide and on the effectiveness of English education. That is, English is regarded positively as the language of advantage; as a gatekeeper to better employment opportunities; and as a means to enhance competitiveness (Lin, 2014).

English as a global language and English language policy makers in Japan

It is generally understood that there is a communication gap between the demands of the Ministry of Education on classroom teachers and what teachers focus on while in front of their classes (Kam & Wong, 2004). In order to examine this gap, four distinct topics should be considered: (1) The impact of globalization on English language policy; (2) the effects of English language policy on English teaching in secondary education (3) suggestions to bridge the gap between language policy and classroom teaching practice; (4) the status of English language and in-service teacher professional development. Examining the varied approaches to English language acquisition from these perspectives allows for clearer articulation of expectant educational approaches, as well as finding methods of improving student outcomes. As English has become important for both cultural and business communication between and within inner circle countries (e.g., the US) and expanding circle countries (e.g., Indonesia, South Korea, and Japan). Explaining

issues and sharing effective strategies to pedagogical issues is key to the continued success of the globalization process. For example, the use of technology when used effectively has increased business interaction beyond circle boundaries. We need to fill the gap in existing research between the diverse approaches of English teaching. Further, it is necessary to examine disparities between government expectations of English teachers versus what actually happens inside classrooms.

Japanese policy makers believe English plays an integral role in shaping future plans for the nation (Lin, 2014). For example, the Japanese government foresees both economic development and information technology being influenced by an increased need for English fluency. This thinking is exemplified by the marketing of English in Japanese company's growing reliance on fluency, which increases the need for students to focus on language acquisition, which directly impacts both the number, and ability of English language teachers throughout Japan (Lin, 2014).

In an effort to address this growing need, the Japanese government launched the Global 30 program, which sponsored English courses learned by international students at selected universities in Japan (MEXT, 2015). Further, Global 30 sought to establish a global university network and to internationalize Japanese education. A secondary aim of the Global 30 program was to diminish the inward, or introverted attitude of Japanese students and have them realize the importance of English in the globalized world. The most distinctive features of the program are two types of advanced schools: Super Global Universities (SGU) and Super Global High Schools, which nurture global leaders. It should be noted that these proposals and ideas have mainly been initiated by the business world (Haida, 2014; Ishida et al., 2013; Lin, 2014; MEXT, 2015).

Globalization force of English and English teachers in Japan: a case study of a videoconferencing class

Increasingly, the importance of English education in the Japanese education system is receiving attention. Specifically, English education as it relates to globalization, and national competitiveness. Although English education is oft praised, some groups are resisting. For example, while the vast majority of teachers have attempted to increase their English fluency, some teachers remain less motivated to study (cf. Ishida et al, 2013; MEXT, 2014).

For junior high school (JH) English education the following points are stressed:

- 1) Making a smooth transition between primary school education (where English is primarily extracurricular) and JH (where letters and grammar are taught) so that students will not dislike English

- 2) Reviewing primary school English teaching
- 3) Meeting the goals of English language education, which requires skill integration intentional training

For high school (HS) English Education the following points are stressed:

- 1) Integrated skills teaching and integrated communication ability
- 2) Teaching English through exposure
- 3) Subject introduction: “Communication English Basic”, which was introduced to provide a bridge between JH and HS

Language teachers are working in a world which has hugely changed in the past few decades through technology. Students’ lives as well involve heavily the use of technology in an increasingly globalized society (Godwin-Jones, 2015). Second language teachers need not only to be proficient in the target language but also to be able to cope with an increased use of technology. In other words, they need to learn how to provide students with authentic materials in an increasingly interconnected and multilingual world (Godwin-Jones, 2015).

For College English Education the following points are stressed:

Nagamoto (2012) suggests introducing alternative pedagogical approaches to prospective language teachers as a way to increase student fluency. For example, alternative programs may prove beneficial for students with nontraditional learning styles (e.g., discussion versus rote memorization). Increasing the availability of approaches may prove beneficial as some individual may find discomfort with traditional modes of instruction. Further, these programs could also provide prospective teachers with practical and useful information that would enable them to develop practical assessments.

In the fall semester of 2014, the present author incorporated SKYPE videoconferencing in his course *English and English education in the age of globalization: East Asia Perspectives*. This course had 30 registered students and their nationalities varied. Half of them are Japanese (including returnees), and the remaining are international students from countries such as USA, Canada, Hong Kong, France, Switzerland, Australia, and Singapore. There were also a variety of majors, such as, communications, international business, law, political science, English literature, American literature, Japanese, Asian studies, and linguistics. The aim of this class was to explore the ways globalization affects language policy and English teachers’ practices in the classroom. Further, this course provided authentic and interactive learning experiences for students by employing technology which allowed for an in-depth understanding of the topic. Teleconferencing can increase student engagement in course material and offer exciting opportunities for

creating active and interactive learning lessons. It can enhance traditional learning by incorporating a real time global learning environment, thus positively contributing to the development of informed global citizens. For example, the aforementioned class connected learners with international TESOL experts and applied linguists from different countries, which broadened participant perspectives on crucial aspects of ELT both locally and globally. Since the panelists had already established a cordial atmosphere through several technological rehearsals, the discussion went remarkably well to get the professional academic messages across even though the occasion was the first online videoconference for all of the panelists. Students also appreciated the content and technology and almost every aspect of the panel discussion. One student especially mentioned one strong point that there was a variety of ways to get the discussion going including by reading questions posted beforehand or having students ask questions directly during the conference. Students from the inner circle (native speakers of English) tend to speak more about the content while students from the expanding or semi-outer circle speak both the content and language issues, which is not surprising.

Even among the students from the outer circle, there is a difference in their language background (some students are very close to the outer circle level while others are in the center of the expanding circle). Therefore this type of international panel discussion could be utilized in terms of the Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) education system.

Students were able to apply knowledge gained during the course coupled with English language acquired from class and apply it to real-life situations by interacting with the international scholars; this interaction would have been rather restrictive without the aid of technology.

Discrepancy between the government English language policy and the actual English teachers' practices in the classroom

According to organization theory (Weiner, 2009), there is a difference between an individuals' readiness to change and an organizations' readiness to change. In other words, how much organizational members value change deviates from how much the organization values change. Something new is felt as needed (put to full use), important (put to partial use), beneficial (partially disregarded), or worthwhile (not to put to use). For example, when government policymakers alter laws without fully appreciating how the proposed change to existing policy will impact teachers (e.g., teachers' English proficiency, appropriate materials, availability of technology, usability of technology, teacher education or teacher training programs (pre-service

or in-service teacher training). Teachers think (in theory “yes” but in practice “no”) about the change in language education methodology.

A discrepancy can also be seen between motivated teachers and non-motivated teachers, between teachers training and budget problems, between the readiness of the implementation and the number of well-qualified teachers, and between the language proficiency of teachers and the lack of appropriate teacher education (cf. Weiner, 2009; Reinelt, 2010). For example, for communication-oriented class, the skills are not practiced in isolation by a well-motivated good teacher, while one skill may be taught independently by a poor teacher, and eventually the text centered grammar translation class seems to die hard. Another example is, since limited sources have to be distributed between recruiting and training more teachers in English, and providing in-service training for those already teaching English schools, none of these is sufficiently implemented (cf. Ho and Wong, 2004).

Ho and Wong (2004) suggest that language education policies in most of the so-called EFL countries have made English language learning compulsory. Although the policy in these countries has advocated the teaching of English from the early grades in primary school, this policy has not been fully implemented largely because of an inadequate supply of primary English teachers both in quantity and ability. The conditions for learning English in some of these countries are less than ideal owing to under-funding, overcrowding of classrooms, and shortages of textbooks.

Japanese national reports are beginning to highlighting the “dualism” in the teaching and learning of English—that is, the growing chasm between rural areas and their respective allocation of qualified teaching staff and instructional materials (Ho & Wong, 2004). This imbalance is creating a dilemma for countries attempting to maintain pace with other EFL countries throughout East Asia.

In the last few years, ELT curriculum in East Asian countries appears to be driven at least in intent, by the two concept of communicative language teaching (CLT) and skills integration or CLIL. CLT has become a dominant theoretical model since the 1980s in East Asian countries. The approach is taken to mean providing the teachers with communicative activities with their teaching skills and giving learners the opportunities to practice their language skills (Ho and Wong, 2004). In the meantime, a whole new field of higher education pedagogy has emerged, known as CLIL. Its basic principle is to use a target language as the medium of instruction in order to have an effective pathway to both advanced language proficiency and educational achievement. (Read, 2015).

The issues associated with ELT throughout East Asian countries may be summed up as a series of compounding dilemmas. First, the quantitative vs.

qualitative dilemma that is characterized by the shortage of English teachers coupled with existing teachers need to improve teaching practices. The second issue relates to the traditional vs. modern pedagogical approaches. For example, some teachers may adhere to a traditional text-centered approach of grammar translation, while others are more apt to teach through a communicative approach of task based learning. The third dilemma is continuity vs. change. While some people include modern technology in the classroom, others are fearful of overreliance on technology. In order to address these very real concerns, concrete measures that aim to solve these dilemmas of dualism should be developed. Further, in order to help provide a framework for countries seeking to establish an English education structure in future, Japan could share their developmental processes across borders.

As East Asia furthers its regional, political, and business relationships, the need for a common mode of linguistic communication increases. For example, there are innumerable many languages and dialects being spoken throughout East Asia. These languages and the cultural nuance that exists between them have historically served as a barrier for establishing lasting collaborations. In order to overcome these barriers, English has served as the *lingua franca* and has been used as the platform for establishing relationships. English is now chosen as the language of Asian Economic Community (AEC). The burgeoning use of English as a means of communication can be seen in the emerging bilingual education policies throughout East Asia. For example, in Japan a modified model of ELT has evolved in their school system with primary school children being exposed to English as a means of *international understanding*. The challenge for language education in the region then becomes developing a method of examining how best to approach English teaching, that both suits the needs of the regions being served and providing students with constructive pedagogical approaches.

Once the use of English is established, the focus then turns to pedagogy. Constructive curriculum includes design, teacher training, and government language policy, which is a common issue among countries throughout East Asia. The research will advance the awareness of globalization related issues and demonstrate the need to conduct both medium and long-term investigations on this topic.

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