

Chapter 18

Changing Language, Continuing Discourse: A Shift Toward ELF and Persistent Native-Speakerism in Japan's ELT Policy



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18.1 Introduction

As “globalization” replaces “internationalization” as a buzzword in the Japanese discursive sphere, a conceptual shift has also occurred from English as a foreign language (EFL) to English as a lingua franca (ELF). Japanese policymakers consider English ability, along with IT skills, essential constituents of “global literacy.”

The advance of globalization and the information-technology revolution call for a world-class level of excellence. Achieving world-class excellence demands that, in addition to mastering information technology, all Japanese acquire *a working knowledge of English—not as simply a foreign language but as the international lingua franca*. English in this sense is a prerequisite for obtaining global information, expressing intentions, and sharing values. (PMC [The Prime Minister's Commission on Japan's Goals in the 21st Century] 2000, p. 10, *emphasis added*)

As Gargesh (2006, p. 91) points out in South Asian context, English is now accepted as an “asset” that represents “educational and economic progress” in Japan as well. Knowledge of English is seen to provide individuals with a key to success and enable a nation to become part of the global community. This rhetoric echoes what Kachru termed the “alchemy of English”: “knowing English is like possessing the fabled Aladdin's lamp, which permits one to open, as it were, the linguistic gates to international business, technology, science, and travel” (Kachru 1986, p. 1).

Despite top-down initiatives, however, Aladdin's lamp has been beyond the reach of many Japanese learners of English. Officials cite the low rankings of Japanese test-takers in standardized exams like TOEFL and TOEIC (MEXT¹ 2012a). Business

¹ Monbusho (Ministry of Education) was reorganized in 2001 into Monbu-Kagaku-Sho, or the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT). To ease understanding, this paper uses “education ministry” to refer to both the pre- and post-2001 organizations.

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leaders blame grammar-focused instruction for their employees' lack of English proficiency and reluctance to engage in overseas operations. Parents demand that school education equip their children with practical English skills (BERD 2006). The perceived failure to produce successful language learners is not uncommon in Expanding-Circle countries, where educators often face issues including difficulty in motivating students, a lack of teachers' competence and confidence in English, and the struggle to develop an appropriate methodology (McKay and Bokhorst-Heng 2008). Although the Japanese education ministry has responded to these concerns by setting score targets in standardized exams and promoting communicative instruction, policymakers argue that teachers and students have only partially attained the goals set in policy proposals, hence the need to accelerate English education reforms.

In the academic field of English language teaching (ELT), teaching English as an international language (TEIL) addresses the need to better prepare learners to become competent users of English in international contexts and provide teachers with the theoretical and practical resources to do so (Matsuda 2012; Sharifian 2009). TEIL studies agree that traditional mono-model pedagogy is no longer tenable and that a fundamental change in every aspect of ELT is needed. Applying TEIL as an analytical lens, this chapter examines how the current and future ELT policies in Japan embody their changing focus from EFL to ELF as a response to globalization. Following Seargeant (2009, p. 57), the present study regards "policy" as "the statements of intent issued by the administrative authority of a country concerning goal-oriented procedures of action" as contrasted with practice, which is "the way in which such proposals are enacted within the classroom." The study of language policy encompasses not only "statements of intention for language-related decision-making in a polity" but also reveals "fundamental elements of the discourses that politics construct around languages and their attendant cultures" (Liddicoat 2007, p. 33). Thus, studying official documents with the stated aim of implementing ELF-centered ELT in Japan should yield insights into assumptions and value judgments in conceptualizing ELF.

This chapter focuses on contrasting the overall tones and rhetoric in various policy proposals with TEIL principles, thereby leaving room for detailed exploration of each reform scheme. The critical analysis instead aims to identify the discrepancy between the stated intention of shifting Japan's ELT from an EFL to ELF orientation and the underlying inclination for native English speaker (NES) norms. Scrutinizing the language used in these texts highlights the continuing discourse of English as a language for outward internationalization, rather than part of the linguistic repertoire of multilingual and multicultural global citizens.

18.2 TEIL Principles as an Analytical Lens

Conventional ELT, especially EFL teaching, assumes that learners seek communication with NESs and integration into their culture, and that the best instruction is provided by NESs speaking only in the target language. Conversely, TEIL must be based on a new set of assumptions: (1) English is increasingly used in multilingual and multicultural settings, (2) the native speaker model is becoming irrelevant to most English learners, and (3) the appropriate method of teaching English depends on the local learning culture (McKay 2002). McKay and Bokhorst-Heng present the following principles that should inform “an EIL pedagogy in an era of increasing globalization” (2008, p. 180):

1. EIL curricula should be relevant to the domains in which English is used in the particular learning contexts;
2. EIL professionals should strive to alter language policies that serve to promote English learning only among the elite of the country;
3. EIL curricula should include examples of the diversity of English varieties used today;
4. EIL curricula need to exemplify L2-L2 interactions;
5. Full recognition needs to be given to the other languages spoken by English speakers;
6. EIL should be taught in a way that respects the local culture of learning. (*ibid.* pp. 195–198)

Similarly, Matsuda and Matsuda (2018) clarify what the TEIL paradigm entails: (1) exposure to multiple varieties of English, (2) focus on communication strategies, (3) cultural materials from diverse contexts, and (4) understanding of the politics of EIL.

Putting the emerging paradigm into practice, local educators knowledgeable of the local language and culture must take initiatives to design an appropriate curriculum and pedagogy. However, many are yet to fully accept TEIL, hence the urgency to develop TEIL-informed teacher-training programs and facilitate collaboration between ELF scholars and ELT practitioners in areas such as materials development and testing (Matsuda and Matsuda 2018, p. 72). To set TEIL in the Japanese context, where native-speakerism is persistent and prevalent (e.g., Houghton and Rivers 2013), researchers and educators must first address many questions including whether the curriculum provides opportunities for learners to encounter native and non-native varieties of English, empowers Japanese teachers of English (JTEs) to resist the popular perception idealizing NESs and their monolingual teaching method, and encourages learners to foster self-awareness as independent users of EIL without judging them only against NES norms.

18.3 The Changing Face of ELT Policies in Japan

Japan's ELT has been the focus of many academic studies both in Japanese and English, mostly through a historical approach (Seargeant 2009). Recent important contributions stem from critical perspectives that reveal a persistent native speaker-oriented and often simultaneously ethnocentric attitude toward English and its education (Hashimoto 2000; Kubota 2002, 2018). Some studies focus on “English as a second official language” (Hashimoto 2002; Matsuura et al. 2004), primary English education (Kanno 2007), and the internationalization of higher education (Rose and McKinley 2017). Furthermore, studies on ELT practices that incorporate the TEIL perspective have rapidly accumulated. Besides investigations of teaching materials (Kawashima 2009; Matsuda 2002; Takahashi 2014; Yamada 2010) and teacher-training programs (Matsuda 2017), empirical work provides examples and resources to implement a TEIL-informed language classroom (Hino 2012). However, fewer studies scrutinize the discourse underlying various ELT reform projects inspired by advancing globalization, specifically regarding TEIL principles, thus substantiating the research outlined in this chapter.

My analysis focuses on recent policy documents that espouse ELF teaching: (1) Five Proposals and Specific Measures for Developing Proficiency in English for International Communication (MEXT 2011), (2) English Education Reform Plan Corresponding to Globalization (MEXT 2013), (3) the new Course of Study implemented in 2020 (MEXT 2017), and (4) the proposed Core Curriculum for teacher training (Tokyo Gakugei Daigaku 2017). Other documents consulted include the Strategic Plan to Cultivate Japanese with English Ability and the Action Plan (MEXT 2002, 2003), as well as the past and current Courses of Study. I examined the original Japanese versions and contrasted them with official English translations when available. My discussion centers on the policies concerning primary and secondary programs, because their high enrolment rates of almost 100% indicate a greater intra-national impact.

The centerpieces of the reform plans include (1) the earlier introduction of English in primary education, (2) promotion of a “teaching English through English” (TETE) policy in secondary schools, and (3) development and implementation of a standardized framework for assessing communicative competence. The 2008 revision of the Course of Study installed once-to-twice-a-week English language activities (without assessment) into the fifth and sixth grade syllabi, and the latest edition in 2017 offers them to third and fourth graders. Fifth and sixth graders are to now receive subject English classes (with certified textbooks and grading) thrice a week. The TETE principle was implemented in senior high English classes in 2013, and extended to junior high from 2020. Although the requirement has been relaxed following strong protest from JTEs, the ministry reports that the ratio of English use to Japanese in classrooms has increased, demanding further improvement throughout the curriculum (MEXT 2014). To establish a coherent evaluation system that better assesses students' communicative competence, the official policies have set target scores in TOEFL and other standardized tests since the 2002 Action Plan. JTEs are

also required to achieve higher scores in these exams to improve their proficiency and make English-only classrooms feasible. Furthermore, the ministry recommended that colleges adopt the standardized tests to fulfill the English language component in their admissions and/or graduation requirements, implementing several government-funded projects that provide financial incentives. All these directives were issued under the banner of upgrading Japan's ELT to meet the "global standard." However, they are only widening the "conceptual gap" (Seidlehofer 2002) between the principles and practices of teaching ELF, which is addressed below in terms of models, methodology, and assessment.

18.4 Conceptual Gaps Between TEIL and Japan's "New" ELT

18.4.1 *Model Users of English: Global Englishes Versus Inner-Circle English*

Throughout the post-war years, Japan's ELT treated American English as the model. In contrast, the reform plans suggest a change toward a poli-model approach in line with the TEIL framework, in which model English users are the speakers of local, educated varieties of English. For instance, regarding language elements, the Course of Study for Upper Secondary School states that consideration should be given to "the fact that different varieties of English are used throughout the world as means of communication" (Monbusho 1999). However, no mention is made on the possible establishment of a Japanese variety of English or empowerment of JTEs as model users of EIL. Rather, recent proposals intensify native-speaker dependency both in primary and secondary education by encouraging the greater involvement of NESs as Assistant Language Teachers (ALTs) who team-teach English classes with JTEs and advise local education boards (MEXT 2013). The education ministry aimed to ensure every elementary school access to ALTs by 2019 (MEXT 2014). Because Japanese classroom teachers have not been trained to teach English, ALTs are expected to provide the necessary English input during lessons, while classroom teachers are assigned the role of model learners, undermining their status as teaching professionals. Although most ALTs are neither language experts nor certified teachers, their nativeness "qualifies" them to lead classes. In one survey, more than 60% of homeroom teachers responded that ALTs played the primary role in ELT activities (BERD 2006). The involvement of native-speaking ALTs is also vigorously promoted in secondary education, where a TETE policy has been espoused as a tenet of communicative language teaching (CLT) (McKay 2012).

The main supply source of ALTs is the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Programme, which began as a youth exchange program in 1987. In 2017, 5163 people were invited from 44 countries, among whom 4712 from 23 countries serve as ALTs, including a few each for languages other than English, namely French,

German, Chinese, and Korean (CLAIR *n.d.*). However, the statistics show NES dominance among program participants. Of the participants in 2017–2018, 91.5% (4312) ALTs are from 6 English-speaking countries: the US, the UK, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and Ireland, with most being from the US (59.4%). Recently, the program added South Africa, Singapore, Jamaica, Barbados, and Trinidad and Tobago as designated English-speaking countries. In addition, several non-English-speaking countries such as the Netherlands, Slovenia, and Switzerland are also sending ALTs, implying that the program is slowly opening its doors to Outer- and Expanding-Circle speakers. However, a word of caution must be added about whether this trend truly reflects a shifting attitude among Japanese policymakers toward non-native-speaker teachers. The widening definition of English-speaking countries may not have resulted from an affirmative policy change for a more culturally diverse teaching body, but from increasingly fierce global competition for Inner-Circle speakers of English (Yamada 2005). The fight has already begun, even within Japan, to secure regular native-speaker attendance in schools. A recent newspaper article reports that weekly visits by ALTs to a public junior high school have decreased to monthly since the elementary schools in the vicinity started inviting ALTs for their newly introduced ELT classes (Hirayama 2018).

While the government-sponsored project is becoming slightly more inclusive, the teaching materials in use demonstrate a persistent preference for Inner-Circle models, notably American English. Kawashima (2009) concludes that the speakers on the authorized textbook CDs remain predominantly North American, with more than 90% of the narrators speaking either American or Canadian English. This is striking, since the visual representation of the characters in these textbooks is diversifying. Most junior high school textbooks now in use have Japanese students as protagonists, with Chinese, Korean, Brazilian, and other non-English-speaking people appearing as their resident friends and visitors, though far fewer than Inner-Circle NESs (e.g., Takahashi 2014). As Suzuki et al. (2017, p. 496) note, “Despite the conceptualization of ELF in the rationales of reforms, classroom realities are very different. NS English is presented as a lingua franca and students learn this for international communication”. Where the pictures in the textbooks show interactions apparently in ELF, the accompanying sounds present them only in American “Standard” English, prompting a skewed perception that ELF simply disseminates American English. Certainly, this does not empower students or teachers to become users of educated local varieties of English, but leads them to consider themselves failed learners of an unachievable “standard.”

Matsuda and Friedrich (2012) mention that the selection of American variety as a dominant instructional model does not in itself pose a problem. It may even be reasonable for Expanding-Circle countries to adopt such an “established” variety because of its widely recognized, though not universally proven, legitimacy. However, the selection should be made only after considering various factors including students’ goals and needs, the availability of resources, and local attitudes toward variation in English, and be complemented with raising awareness of its sociolinguistic realities to prepare students for encounters with diverse varieties of English (*ibid.*). However, there is no sign of considered decision-making in

selecting a model for Japanese students. Rather, the Course of Study has ambiguously prioritized American English by recommending the need to teach “contemporary standard pronunciation,” for which the instructional manual adds only an equivocal explanation:

English is used worldwide in various ways, its pronunciation and usage varying greatly. Among the varieties of modern English, the instruction should be on a so-called standard pronunciation, neither biased toward a particular region or group of people nor too informal. (Monbusho 1999, p. 33, my translation)

Nevertheless, a notable change is evident in the 2017 edition of the instructional document, which may bring a slow but steady shift in the traditionally Inner-Circle dependent syllabi. While still encouraging JTEs to seek cooperation from NESs in phonetic instruction, the manual also asserts that “it is important to expose students to not just English spoken by their teachers and ALTs but also various English speech sounds so that they can deepen their understanding of ELF and increase confidence in their English” (MEXT 2017, p. 96, my translation). The importance of increasing student exposure to non-native English use is reiterated in the rationale regarding the TETE principle:

Non-native English teachers tend to flinch from using English differently from those who use it everyday. However, it is important for the students to be exposed not just to English spoken by such people [as daily English users] but also to English spoken by their teachers. Considering the wide use of English across various countries and areas in our contemporary world, it is important [for them] to have opportunities to encounter different kinds of English. Particularly for them to gain confidence in their English and learn to use it with pride, their teachers’ attitudes and behavior toward English use they witness in class have an immense impact. This is why the teachers are advised to actively use English so that the classrooms become actual communicative situations. (MEXT 2017, p. 87, my translation)

In this context, Glasgow (2013) highlights the urgent necessity of providing resources and guiding JTEs to develop confidence in their English use, particularly when they report feeling insecure about pronunciation (Miura 2010). Otherwise, teachers can be “obstacles to ELF-aware approaches” (Suzuki et al. 2017, p. 497). One proposed measure to reeducate teachers to accommodate an ELF-focused pedagogy is the Core Curriculum developed in 2017 by a project team commissioned by the education ministry at Tokyo Gakugei University. Evidently reflecting the TEIL perspective, the Curriculum requires that pre- and in-service teachers complete coursework to understand historical changes in English and the sociolinguistic reality of ELF (Tokyo Gakugei Daigaku 2017, p. 114).

However, the Core Curriculum was prepared according to the preceding official recommendations, wherein I highlighted implicit native-speakerism. The Core Curriculum was compiled by academics, while the recommendations and reform plans were the work of ministry bureaucrats and council board members including business people. Their different stances and perspectives are reflected in the respective documents, and may have resulted in conflicting approaches to ELT. Actually, some official projects include contradictory messages in a single document. For example, a report on the Five Proposals (MEXT 2014) lists two potentially conflicting objectives as follows: Through communicating with NESs and local talents

proficient in English, (1) students are to be exposed to the Standard English sounds and acquire accurate pronunciation while (2) they are ensured to have regular opportunities to convey information, express their opinions, and engage in interaction in English without worrying about making mistakes. Which direction between the primarily mono-model approach and the proposed multi-model approach the curricular innovations will take we must closely observe. However, one thing is clear: increasing native-speaker involvement to introduce English in elementary schools earlier and promote English-only instruction at all levels of education will alienate JTEs, the primary agents in ELT in the formal education system. Rather, available resources should be allocated to train pre- and in-service JTEs to become competent and confident users and teachers of EIL (Kirkpatrick 2018).

18.4.2 Desirable Teaching Method: Locally Appropriate Pedagogy Versus Oral-Focused CLT

As its response to the global spread of English use, Japan's ELT increasingly emphasizes the importance of developing oral communication skills. The shift in language was evident in the 1998 Course of Study, which first employed the term "communication" as a loanword written in *katakana*. The focus since has been on maximizing students' exposure to the target language by providing opportunities to use it in classroom activities such as debates and discussions. However, CLT-oriented pedagogy has been slow to replace the traditional teaching practice focused on grammar and reading (BERD 2016). Researchers cite factors including class size, limited resources, lack of teacher and student confidence and competence to engage in meaningful interaction in English, teacher beliefs, and the negative wash-back effect from college entrance examinations (Gorsuch 2001; Gottlieb 2008). Acknowledging that these problems "hindered" the spread of CLT has resulted in reform plans aiming to further promote CLT and eliminate traditional practice.

However, the TEIL framework challenges the premise of CLT, because it sidelines the local culture of learning and students' first language (L1). TEIL recommends developing and adopting a locally appropriate pedagogy, in which students' native language and culture are valued as important resources to scaffold the learning of a target language. Holliday's distinction between weak and strong versions of CLT (1994) is noteworthy in this context. The weak version, grounded in the Western conceptualization of communication, prioritizes oral interaction and active participation in various classroom activities such as group discussions and debates. In contrast, the strong version, based on a broader definition of communication, allows students to use their L1 to enhance their textual comprehension, providing a more suitable option for Outer- and Expanding-Circle countries. Nevertheless, the former is more often embraced in the widespread understanding of CLT. The focus on oral communication according to the CLT syllabus is also the mainstay of the ELF teaching understood in Japan, which relies on and reinforces the popular belief

that “authentic” communication in English occurs only when there are NESs, or simply “foreigners” (Tsuneyoshi 2013), involved.

The view of NES variety as authentic or “genuine” English (Yano 2011, p. 131) provides a rationale for hiring more NESs in CLT-centered ELT, because they are viewed as providing “living English” to students:

...a native speaker of English provides a valuable opportunity for students to learn *living English* and familiarize themselves with foreign languages and cultures. To have one’s English understood by a native speaker increases the students’ joy and motivation for English learning. In this way, the use of a native speaker of English has great meaning. (MEXT 2003, *emphasis added*)

The expression “living English” in Japanese is “*ikita Eigo*,” which is also used in the 2011 Five Proposals. However, the provisional English translation prepared by the education ministry employs “practical English” as an equivalent. This gap in translation indicates the two faces of these policy documents, namely the public face to release information to the international community and the domestic face for the Japanese linguistic community. The discourse on native speakers providing “living English” suggests that what JTEs offer in the classroom is deficient, obsolete, or unusable, even though they are the “authentic” users of EIL. The native-speaker-oriented mentality (Yano 2011), or what Kachru (2005, p. 90) termed the “native speaker syndrome,” compromises what little confidence many JTEs have in their language skills. The top-down pressure to conduct an English-only classroom further undermines teachers’ confidence in their English skills: “Local bilingual teachers are ideally placed to understand the localized English needs of their learners and to design a pedagogy appropriate for the particular local context. Unfortunately, their own lack of self-confidence and top-down ministry directives do little to encourage them to undertake this task” (McKay and Bokhorst-Heng 2008, p. 50).

Also implicit in the rhetoric on “living English” is regarding NESs, along with ICT, as “commodities” to be imported and marketed, as evident below:

Proposal 3: Providing students with more opportunities to use English through *effective utilization* of ALTs, ICT and other means: *ALTs are a valuable asset* increasing opportunities for students to come across practical English [*ikita eigo*], and to actually use English by themselves, in the course of team teaching and other activities. In this country, there are few opportunities, other than classes, for students to communicate in English; hence it is important to *efficiently utilize ALTs* in out-of-school activities, such as clubs and circles, thus aiming at reinforcement of English skills. (MEXT 2011, *emphasis added*)

The discourse on commodifying NESs is grounded in the essentialist dichotomy between NESs and the Japanese (see Toh 2012) and the binary conceptualization of English and Japanese, i.e., the linguistic attitude that equates Japanese nationals with Japanese speakers and ethnic Japanese, and English speakers with foreign nationals, i.e., as non-Japanese outsiders. McConnell presents a voice from a JET-invited ALT, who found his assigned role “dehumanizing,” because the foreign teacher is essentially regarded as a “curiosity, a ‘living globe’ wheeling out on special occasions” (2000, pp. 125–126). Moreover, while there are numerous bilingual and multilingual speakers of Japanese, English, and other languages in Japan, their

presence is seldom considered in these policy documents, despite the rich linguistic resources they offer (Hashimoto 2013; Kubota and McKay 2009).

A further problem regarding the ongoing ELT reforms in terms of methodology is that they start by rejecting conventional pedagogy, which focuses on the acquisition of structural knowledge using L1 as a learning aid, as ineffective, outdated, and detrimental to developing communicative abilities. Even though CLT, as currently understood in academia, does not exclude explicit teaching methods and grammatical instruction, it remains to be confirmed as more desirable and reflective of progressive pedagogy (Murray 2018, p. 51). Ironically, current global business leaders, educators, and policymakers with effective communication skills in Japanese and English are the products of conventional instruction, while the younger generations supposedly trained in a more communicative syllabus are struggling to showcase their improved skills. Furthermore, contrary to popular belief in oral primacy, the need to read remains central to global communication. The emergence of communication forms such as e-publications, emails, and instant messaging has made the ability to read accurately all the more important and useful. Thus, the teaching focus on reading skills and use of translation to assist reading is not only justifiable, but also beneficial in ELF-informed classrooms (see also Shiroza 2014, 2016).

18.4.3 Improved Assessment Scheme: Localized Exams Versus Those Developed in Inner-Circle Countries

Language assessment is one difficult area regarding implementing EIL pedagogy, because established assessment practices, grounded in the monolithic view of English, tend to evaluate accuracy and fluency against established native-speaker norms. However, the hegemony of the Inner-Circle standard is increasingly questioned in terms of its relevance to multilingual and multicultural users of English (e.g., Jenkins 2006; Newbold 2018). For example, Davidson highlights “a well-established and legitimate concern that large, powerful English language tests are fundamentally disconnected from insights in analysis of English in the world context” (2006, p. 709). Thus, in the TEIL framework, it is important, and particularly urgent in Outer- and Expanding-Circle contexts, “to create localized versions of a standardized exam, incorporating situations and language features that are relevant to the local context” (Matsuda and Matsuda 2018, p. 73).

Japan’s “New English Education corresponding to globalization” (MEXT 2013) also requires a new assessment framework that better evaluates teachers’ and students’ oral communicative skills. A central tenet of the assessment reforms is the revision of college entrance exams, which, according to the official understanding, have negatively impacted the teaching practice in secondary schools through an excessive focus on grammatical and lexical knowledge and reading comprehension skills. Based on the belief that high school teachers and students are working toward securing students’ college admission, the proposal recommends that universities

incorporate listening and speaking components in the applicant screening process so that secondary-school teachers start investing class time on speaking activities as part of test preparation. According to the Five Proposals,

It is pointed out that English entrance exams in universities do not always aim at English skills required by the global community including speaking ability. The entrance exams must be modified so as to involve not only listening and reading skills stipulated by the Courses of Study but also speaking and writing, with all the four skills tested at proper balance. (MEXT 2011)

However, to assess the four skills “at proper balance,” the proposal does not just recommend developing and implementing new types of English tests for Japanese college applicants, but advocates adopting standardized proficiency tests exemplified by TOEFL and TOEIC, two widely recognized exams developed and administered by Inner-Circle institutions:

The Government shall encourage the use of TOEFL, TOEIC and other external certification tests for Admission Office exams, general entrance exams and other types of entrance exams, from the standpoint of proper evaluation of foreign language communication skills of prospective students. (ibid.)

Conventional exams developed by individual universities and the Center Exam by the National Center for University Entrance Examinations have been criticized for their “unsuitability” in global education, because they only test reading and listening skills.² A new nationwide exam that incorporates writing and speaking components was developed for implementation in 2020 but intended to be replaced by TOEFL, TOEIC, and other standardized exams³ administered by private enterprises in 2023.

The adoption of TOEFL as a substitute for entrance exams was first suggested in 1986 by an interim advisory board for the prime minister, but later dropped from subsequent proposals. The idea resurfaced a quarter-century later in the Five Proposals, and has since been repeatedly advocated by various governmental and quasi-governmental organizations including the ruling Liberal Democratic Party’s project team and prime minister’s advisory committee (Kantei 2013; LDP 2013; MEXT 2012b). The plan has also been espoused by business leaders including Mikitani Hiroshi, CEO of the Japanese e-commerce giant Rakuten, which made headlines in 2010 by announcing its decision to “Englishnize” (Mikitani 2012), or designate English as an official working language. As an appointed member of several advisory committees for the prime minister and chair of a project team for educational reforms in Keizai Doyukai [Japan Association for Corporate Executives (JACE)], Mikitani (2012) asserts that all Japanese universities should adopt TOEFL as an admission requirement, because the traditional entrance exams promulgate

²Note that the four skills framework is discursively constructed and has been challenged as part of the Western-driven knowledge structure (See Kumaravadivelu 2012).

³By March 2018, eight exams were approved by the ministry as legitimate substitutes for the Center Exam, namely Cambridge Assessment, TOEFL iBT, IELTS, TOEIC, GTEC, TEAP, TEAP CBT, and Step EIKEN.

juken eigo, or the English for entrance exams, which is unusable outside Japan and thus not worth learning. Under his chairmanship, JACE announced its proposition urging the government to promote the widespread use of TOEFL in Japanese higher education institutions (JACE 2013). Aligned with these initiatives, the use of TOEFL and TOEIC is expanding in Japanese colleges. Currently, 14.2% (111 universities of 779; 17.4% of national and 15.7% of private universities) require prospective students to submit TOEFL scores to qualify for admission or receive favorable treatment in some general entrance exams (CIEE 2017). Moreover, 47% of national and 34% of private universities require certain scores in TOEFL and/or TOEIC as a graduation requirement (Kawai-juku 2014).

The adoption of TOEFL in Expanding-Circle countries has been problematized elsewhere such as in Saudi Arabia. For example, Kahn warns that by using “TOEFL as a placement test, educators and learners depend on tests that may be isolated from their learning culture” (2009, p. 195). Although the adoption of TOEFL is justified by the fact that the medium of instruction in many Saudi Arabian universities is English, she notes that it has more to do with the availability and face validity of such high-stakes international tests. Students and their families believe that “a curriculum that uses TOEFL as a benchmark for language proficiency must be of high educational standard” (*ibid.*, p. 203), because the test is developed in Inner-Circle countries and accepted internationally as a token of advancement. Similar beliefs emerge in Japanese policy documents that insist on incorporating TOEFL to adapt its education to the “global standard.”

Other problems of adopting standardized tests in Japan include (1) guaranteeing valid and feasible test administration and (2) securing education equality. Questions have been raised regarding how to provide the exams for all 500,000 college applicants and whether the skills assessed match those that secondary schools teach and universities require of their incoming students. Furthermore, exam-driven learning in secondary schools, where reform proposals cling to the idea of education driven by instrumental motivation, must be avoided. In addition, opportunities to take these tests are not equally guaranteed, because of factors including the affordability of test fees, accessibility to test venues, and availability of test-prep resources. TOEFL/TOEIC preparation courses are proliferating in for-profit college-prep organizations throughout Japan. This approach is inconsistent with socially sensitive EIL pedagogy, which propagates, “If English is to become a truly international language, educational leaders and planners need to establish policies that afford English access to learners of all economic backgrounds” (McKay and Bokhorst-Heng 2008, p. 196).

Traditionally, each university in Japan has administered entrance examinations at its own discretion. Even after the National Center Exam⁴ was launched as a

⁴The Common First Stage Achievement Test (*Kyotsu-Ichiji*) was introduced in 1979 and administered until 1989 as an admission requirement for national universities. It was superseded by The National Center Test for University Admission, with the revised schedule and content allowing applicants to apply for more than one national university and enabling private universities to use the scores in their admission decisions.

standardized college admission test in 1990, national universities have conducted further screening based on their internally developed exams, and most private universities have had limited use of its scores in admission decisions. However, the proposed reforms are leading Japanese universities to a unified applicant screening process, which is not compatible with the inclusive, diversity-sensitive TEIL framework. The “locality” in locally appropriate teaching and testing does not just mean “national” as opposed to global, but the particularity of each educational environment, necessitating that each university make an effort to regain control of its own discretion in preparing and administering procedures to evaluate prospective students according to its own educational principles.

18.5 Conclusion

Thus far, this chapter has highlighted a contradiction in Japan’s ELT policy discourse between the stated objective of implementing ELF-focused pedagogy and the persistent and exacerbated NES orientation. While endorsing ELF should entail acknowledging diversity in English use, the proposed ELF pedagogy in Japan renews the emphasis on the Inner-Circle model; whereas localized teaching practices should be encouraged, imported teaching methodologies represented by CLT are promulgated; whilst locally developed assessment is desired, TOEFL and other standardized tests are replacing conventional college-specific exams. Changing language in curricular documents does not embody discursive transformation in conceptualizing English and its status in Japan. Rather, what is articulated is “a society which still maintains an ambivalent attitude to the English language” (Seargeant 2011, p. 10).

The ideological transition from EFL to ELF has been discussed in other Expanding-Circle contexts such as Indonesia (Kirkpatrick 2018; Zein 2018). The prestige and practical value of English has never waned but only grown steadily, not just in Japan but across Asia. English now plays a significantly larger role in these countries than ever before. For example, English-medium instruction (EMI) is rapidly expanding throughout East and Southeast Asia. There is also a growing trend in schools to offer English lessons at an early stage of education. In addition, exposure to English outside the school setting has increased considerably due to advances in ICT. The internet plays a vital role in the lives of young people, and their daily use of social networking sites and other online activities provide access to a range of varieties of English in Asia and elsewhere (Zein 2018).

However, there is a significant difference between Japan and many other Asian nations in their sociolinguistic landscapes. For example, Indonesia is one of the most linguistically diverse nations in the world. Although the country has established Bahasa Indonesia as the national language, the majority of Indonesians speak it as a second language. Kirkpatrick (2018) suggests that the use of their own national language as a lingua franca has accustomed them to linguistic variation and further developed their tolerance for such variation. Therefore, diversity in English

as a lingua franca is more likely to be accepted in Indonesia than in other more linguistically homogeneous nations (ibid., p. 195). In contrast, there is a “strong essentialist view of the national language” in Japan, which was formed through a largely “successful” attempt to establish a standard national language that overrode minority languages and dialects, and united the nation under a common national identity (Galloway and Rose 2015, p. 46). The process of language standardization created the ideology that identifies the nation with one ethnic group sharing a single language. Galloway and Rose suggest that this may partly explain the insistence on a “monolithic view of linguistic diversity,” which makes it difficult to recognize and accept variation in English (ibid., p. 176).

As McKay states, a localized pedagogy must be established that is “socially sensitive to the diversity and richness of the English used today in an increasingly globalized and complex world” (2012, p. 346). Such pedagogy must achieve “a balance between local and global concerns” (ibid., p. 345). However, Japan’s ELT lacks this balance, disregarding historically situated locality and pursuing the imagined global standard currently epitomized by ELF. Furthermore, there is a risk that ELF, along with preceding concepts like EIL, will be consumed away as another import from Western knowledge production. Therefore, ELF scholars and educators must continue scrutinizing policy proposals for implication of native-speakerism ingrained in people’s minds and obscured in the proclamation of ELF. It is also urgent to empower local educators by reappraising the values of conventional pedagogy as basis for developing a localized practice of socially-sensitive ELT.

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