THE IDEOLOGY OF INTERCULTURALITY IN JAPANESE LANGUAGE-IN-EDUCATION POLICY

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Language learning is frequently justified as a vehicle for promoting intercultural communication and understanding, and language-in-education policies have increasingly come to reflect this preoccupation in their rhetoric. This paper will examine the ways in which concepts relating to interculturality are constructed in Japanese language policy documents. It will explore in particular the ways in which ideologies of nationalism and Japanese identity have an impact on understandings of the nature and purpose of interculturality and how these are developed discursively in Japanese language-in-education policy documents. Language policies construct a discourse of interculturality which focuses on the development of a nationalistic adherence to a particular conceptualisation of Japanese identity, which is unique, homogenous, and monolithic. These themes will be discussed in the contexts of Japanese policy documents relating to foreign language teaching and Japanese language spread.

INTRODUCTION

The development of language policies is, in all societies, an ideologically positioned process in which prevailing discourses affect the language, focus and purpose of policies. As Schiffman (1996) argues, language policies are based on belief systems, attitudes and values surrounding language and its use (that is, linguistic culture). Policies contain, (re)produce and transmit values and assumptions about the phenomena they seek to act on and thereby define what is valuable and what is valued by those engaged in policy making (Considine 1994). The values and assumptions on which a language policy is based shape understandings of the phenomena being planned, and in this way ideology affects language planning at a fundamental and definitional level. In language planning, one of the key questions which underlies analytic work has been the question ‘what is being planned?’ (Eastman 1983; Kaplan and Baldauf 1997). This question is important at two broad levels: it can apply to determining which aspect of language is being planned or it can apply to how the aspect of language being planned is understood in the planning process. Most attention in the analysis of language planning has focused on the former of these levels rather than the latter; however, it is frequently issues of underlying con-
ceptualisation which have the greatest impact on the effectiveness of resulting language policies in affecting the language behaviours being planned. Moreover, it is through such conceptualisations that ideological frameworks work effectively to shape and reproduce views of the phenomena being planned.

This paper will investigate one aspect of such conceptualisation of the target of language planning – interculturality – in the context of Japanese language-in-education policies. Language education policy in Japan covers four broad contexts:

- Teaching foreign languages to Japanese people;
- Teaching Japanese outside Japan (language spread);
- Teaching Japanese to immigrant minorities;
- Education for indigenous minorities.

While issues of interculturality are found in all of these planning contexts, this paper will focus on those areas of language in education policy in which interculturality is seen in an internationalised context: foreign language education in Japan and Japanese language spread beyond Japan. In these contexts interculturality focuses on communication between the Japanese and others who do not speak Japanese and who do not have access to ready Japanese culture. This means that such policies create a context in which interculturality as a dimension of internationalised communication can be understood. Understandings of interculturality begin and are nested in understandings of the self, as interculturality is fundamentally an engagement between self and other. This paper therefore will explore an element of Japanese ideology – Japanese constructions of the Japanese self – and their impact on the ways in which policies are shaped.

The term ‘interculturality’ and its derivatives are not in themselves transparent and neutral terms, but are subject to a wide range of interpretations, and in part the exploration of what this term means is at the basis of this paper. At the same time, intercultural issues in education, including languages education, have had a wide treatment, and understandings of the intercultural from these perspectives can provide a framework in which to consider how the intercultural emerges in Japanese language policy.

Liddicoat (2004, 2005) argues that approaches to cultural content in languages education may vary, from approaches to culture which focus on the culture as an external body of knowledge which a learner acquires as a recalled body of information, to engagement with issues of identity and existing cultural memberships involving the learner in decentring from existing cultural positions in the process of engaging with a new culture.
He sees this as a continuum between a ‘cultural’ approach to learning and an ‘intercultural’ approach.

The ‘cultural’ is typified by the development of knowledge about culture which remains external to the learner and is not intended to confront or transform the learner’s existing identity, practices, values, attitudes, beliefs and worldview. Cultural approaches have a long history, especially in the European context where civilisation in the teaching of French and Landeskunde in the teaching of German have focused on a presentation of cultural information judged to have been of national significance, with particular focus on literature, art, history and geography (Byram 1989). Both civilisation and Landeskunde have focused on developing a better knowledge of salient aspects of the national culture of the relevant country among language learners. However, the cultural focus is by no means uniquely European. In Japanese teaching, Nihonjijou (lit. ‘the Japanese situation’), which was developed and mandated by the Japanese Ministry of Education, presents Japanese culture in terms of cultural icons and culture-internal stereotypes with a focus on Japanese history, literature, arts and crafts, politics, economics, sports, geography and ecology, science and technology (Toyota 1988a). The emphasis here is on a factual presentation of a particular instantiation of Japanese culture, which, within the Japanese context, concerns particular constructions of national identity and national distinctiveness related to a nationalistic agenda (Kubota 2002). The approaches tend to have been developed within the cultural context of a dominant target language society and present a view of the target culture packaged for outsiders; however, they typically became the dominant model of culture teaching in languages education during the twentieth century and continue to persist as one model of culture teaching and learning.

In cultural approaches, culture tends to be constructed as monolithic, homogenous and uncontroversial. The representations of cultural interpretations of events in the approaches described above do not present a nuanced view of how understandings are created and accepted within a target culture. In particular, they tend to assume a dichotomy of right and wrong interpretations which do not reflect variations of opinion or contestations of meaning (Steele and Suozo 1994). They therefore have a tendency to construct the target culture as inflexible in its construction of meaning and essentialise cultural meanings as easily learned, mono-faceted conceptualisations of experience. The cultural approaches tend to present culture as an idealised version of national culture, which is manifestly homogenised and frequently archaised. There may be some recognition of variation within a cultural approach, however. Where culture is presented as variable, this variability is presented as geographic or as temporal. In each case, however, the variant cultures tend to be essentialised and presented as homogenous constructs.
The ‘intercultural’ is a transformational engagement of the learner in the act of learning, which involves the student in oppositional practice (Kramsch and Nolden 1994) to develop an intercultural identity. The borders between self and other are explored, problematised and redrawn (Zarate 1986, 1993). In intercultural approaches culture is understood as an interactionally constructed product which is created, recreated and contested by members of the cultural group and also by those learning about, encountering and interacting with members of that culture. Engagement with culture is a form of dialogic process that attempts to locate the cultural component of language teaching at the moment of noticing a disjuncture between one’s own assumptions and expectations and those of interlocutors from the target community (Liddicoat et al. 1999). Intercultural approaches advocate a critical foreign language pedagogy which examines the culturally constructed nature of behaviour, both that of the self and the other, and from reflection on the disjuncture between self and other creates hybridity. The central aim of culture learning within intercultural approaches is the development of a negotiated interactional space between cultures – the third place (Crozet et al. 1999; Kramsch 1993) – in which questions of identity and belonging can be mediated across linguistic and cultural borders. Bhabha refers to this as ‘a third space, that does not simply revise or invert the dualities, but revalues the ideological bases of division and difference’ (Bhabha 1992: 58).

Intercultural approaches to language teaching and learning, therefore, have evolved a position in which language learning becomes a site for developing cultural mediation skills. This, in turn, has had an impact on the ways in which the ‘cultural syllabus’ for language learning has been conceptualised. Intercultural approaches are not concerned with constructing a ‘coverage’ of the target culture, but rather in providing opportunities for students to develop the necessary learning skills to enable them to be cultural mediators. The cultural content in intercultural language learning, therefore, seeks to provide opportunities for learners to notice, compare and reflect on encultured ways of speaking and acting, rather than presenting a pre-packaged version of the target culture.
JAPANESE LANGUAGE-IN-EDUCATION POLICY DOCUMENTS

The main corpus for this study consists of recent key policy documents produced by the Japanese Ministry of Education (Monbusho/MEXT). For foreign language teaching these key documents are:

1. 語が使える日本人の育成のための戦略構想、英語力・国語力増進 [Developing a strategic plan to cultivate ‘Japanese With English Abilities’ to improve English and Japanese abilities] (Monbusho 2002c). This is the key policy position paper of the Ministry of Education for foreign language teaching in Japan.

2. 学習指導要領、外国語 [The course of study for lower secondary school: Foreign languages] (Monbusho 2002b). The course of study is the centrally approved curriculum for languages study.

Collectively, these documents can be considered as the officially articulated policy discourse about foreign languages in Japan. For language spread policy, the key documents are:

3. REX: 見つけよう新しい自分 世界で活かすあなたの日本語 [Regional and Educational Exchanges for Mutual Understanding] (MEXT 2004a). This document describes policy and practice for the main language spread activity conducted by the Ministry of Education. It contains a number of sub-documents the most relevant of which are REX プログラムでは次のような活動を行います [Kinds of activities done under the REX Program] and 事前研修 [Pre-departure Intensive Training Program].

This document represents the main official policy discourse for language spread at government level, although there is also significant language spread work undertaken by the Japan Foundation, which works independently from the Ministry. These documents can be considered as one of the discourses in Japan around language teaching: the officially ratified policy discourse. This is, of course, just one of the Japanese policy discourses relating to languages education – discourses exist not only in official policy, but also in pedagogical theory and practice. The aim here is not to depict the entire universe of Japanese discourse around language education, but rather to examine this discourse in the particular context of policy.
IDEOLOGICAL POSITIONING IN POST-WAR JAPAN

NIHONJINRON

A key dimension of Japanese ideologies of identity is 日本人論 (Nihonjinron, literally ‘the question of the Japanese people’), which can be seen as an attempt to construct the parameters of a distinctive Japanese cultural and national identity (Befu 1993, 2001; Dale 1986; Kosaku 1992; Miller 1982). A core element in Nihonjinron is that Japan is linguistically and culturally homogenous; that is, the Japanese are a homogeneous people who constitute a racially unified nation (単一民族国家 tan‘itsu minzoku kokka ‘single race nation’). The perceived homogeneity is an ideologically constructed world view rather than an accurate reflection of the nature of Japan, ignoring the presence of both indigenous minorities and also immigrant populations (Maher and Yashiro 1995; Murphy-Shigematsu 1993, 2002). Nonetheless, in spite of the underlying diversity within Japan, Nihonjinron makes a fundamental equation between nationality, ethnicity and culture, locating the Yamato Japanese as the sole Japanese group. From the starting point of an ethnically homogenous people, Nihonjinron attempts to frame Japanese identity in terms of the distinctive characteristics which constitute Japaneseness. One dimension of this has been to emphasise the uniqueness of the Japanese people and society, which are constructed as not only unique, but also as being ‘uniquely unique’ (Gjerde and Onishi 2000; Kosaku 1992; Mouer and Sugimoto 1986). This claim to singularity is manifested through comparative generalisation between ‘Westerners’ and the ‘Japanese’, with special properties being attributed to the Japanese brain, social customs and language (Maher and Yashiro 1995; Miller 1982).

Nihonjinron has a strongly linguistic dimension and it has therefore the potential to impact on language planning and policy in the Japanese context. In particular, because of the close links it draws between language and culture, it has potential to have a particularly strong impact on language policies which deal with interculturality, especially the learning of additional languages. This paper will investigate two language-in-education contexts, foreign language education in Japan, and language spread of Japanese, to examine the ways in which the ideologies of Nihonjinron affect policy discourse in these areas.

FOREIGN LANGUAGE EDUCATION IN JAPAN

Language planning for foreign language education in Japan has taken place within a broader educational policy of internationalisation (国際化 kokusaika). The Japanese word kokusaika is made up of components which imply a meeting between countries,
and so language education is framed as an intercultural event. In policy rhetoric, however, *kokusaika* is primarily conceived as an encounter between Japan and the English-speaking world and the emphasis within policy has been on the development of western styles of communication, specifically communication in English (Kubota 2002; Morita 1988). Foreign language teaching in the Japanese educational context, therefore, unambiguously means English language teaching, and the 2002 course of study for languages (Monbusho 2002b) explicitly states:

> 必修教科としての「外国語」においては、英語を履修させることを原則とする

([For compulsory foreign language instruction, English should be selected in principle.]]

English is justified by a discourse which locates English at the centre of international communication as a hegemonic language which has taken on the role of an international lingua franca.

Even though the focus of *kokusaika* is on relations with the wider world, the word itself is not identical in meaning with the English term 'internationalisation', especially in so far as internationalisation implies an opening up to the world (Suzuki 1995). According to Suzuki, *kokusaika* is concerned with spreading Japanese culture, values, and history internationally, and moving the other to see the world from a Japanese perspective, in order to preserve Japan’s interests and promote the ‘correct understanding of Japan’. In the Japanese context, the development of communication in and through English was important and desirable for international objectives, but those objectives are envisaged in terms of the necessity for expressing Japanese identity and Japanese points of view in an international context (Hashimoto 2000). This need for English language communication is constructed as a necessity for representing Japanese thoughts and values in an international area in which Japanese is not a language of international communication. For example, in announcing the reformed course of study produced in 2002, the Japanese Ministry for Education (Monbusho 2002c) stated:

> その一方、現状では、日本人の多くが、英語力が十分でないために、外国人との交流において制限を受けたり、適切な評価が得られないといった事態も生じている。同時に、しっかりした国語力に基づき、自らの意見を表現する能力も十分とは言えない。
At present, though, the English-speaking abilities of a large percentage of the population are inadequate, and this imposes restrictions on exchanges with foreigners and creates occasions when the ideas and opinions of Japanese people are not appropriately evaluated. (Author’s translation.)

Thus, foreign language learning is seen as a vehicle for the expression of Japanese through other languages rather than as a way of mediating between Japanese and other perspectives. The relationship between English language and Japanese identity is further encapsulated in the naming of the policy goal as the creation of 英語が使える日本人, which is officially translated as 'Japanese with English abilities', but is more accurately translated as 'Japanese who are able to use English'. In this formulation, English is presented as a tool which adds to the communicative repertoire of the Japanese, but with no implied effect on their Japaneseness.

One important correlate of the need to articulate Japanese distinctiveness is that questions of self-expression in Japanese become closely integrated with policy about learning English. For example, Education Minister Toyama's press release announcing the introduction of the new course of study, takes the intersection between English and the expression of Japanese viewpoints further to state 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. (Toyama 2002, author’s translation)

An important part of learning to express Japaneseness in a foreign language is learning how to express it in Japanese, and the study of Japanese is to form the basis on which Japan’s international perspectives can be articulated. Internationalism is, therefore, part of the Japanese nationalising discourse of Nihonjinron that compares and contrasts ‘self’ with ‘other’ with a view to establishing the distinctiveness of the Japanese (Ehara 1992; Masden 1997; Yoshino 1992). Within the Nihonjinron ideology, the study of the languages of the other reinforces what it means to be Japanese; in other words, distinguishing self from other, insider from outsider, ‘we’ from ‘they’, and Japanese and non-Japanese (Masden 1997: 57). As Johnson (1983: 32) argues, kokusaika ‘is merely the
latest code word or jargon expression for a much longer standing tradition of intellectual discourse [that is, Nihonjinron] about Japan’.

The impact of Japanese internationalisation is, therefore, monodirectional – it allows Japanese self-expression in the world rather than articulating a mutually informing encounter between cultures. The emphasis then is based on nationalistic values relating to particular conceptions of Japanese identity rather than engagement with international perspectives and interculturality (Kubota 2002). The focus of kokusaika reflects the Japanese concept of 和魂洋才 wakonyoosai, which embodies in a slogan-like four character expression a close association between Japanese spirit (和魂 wakon) and Western learning (洋才 yoosai). The emphasis in this concept centres around the adopting of Western knowledge while maintaining a fundamentally Japanese world view in which Japanese attitudes and values remain unaffected by the integration of Western systems (Nakamura 2002). In this way, the educational goals and objectives of kokusaika throw into highlight a tension between nationalism and westernisation and the representation of Japan in an international context, rather than an engagement with diversity, either in Japan or outside.

The purpose of international education is to foster the development of 国際理解 kokusairikai ‘international understanding’. Kokusairikai in the Japanese context is an understanding of Japanese identity in an international context through exposure to aspects of English-speaking culture. This orientation can be seen in the revised course of study for English in the discussion of the selection of teaching materials (Monbusho 2002b). The following quote is from the course of study for Junior Secondary School and Senior Secondary School foreign language study:

(2) … その後、英語を使用している人々を中心とする世界の人々及び日本人の日常生活、風俗習慣、物語、地理、歴史などに関するもののうちから、生徒の心身の発達段階及び興味・関心に即して適切な題材を变化をもたせ取り上げるものとし、次の観点に配慮する必要がある。

…

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世界や我が国の生活や文化についての理解を深め
Teachers should take up a variety of suitable topics in accordance with the level of students’ mental and physical development, as well as their interests and concerns, covering topics that relate to the daily lives, manners and customs, stories, geography, history, etc. of Japanese people and the peoples of the world, focusing on countries that use English. Special consideration should be given to the following.

b) Materials that are useful in deepening the understanding of the ways of life and cultures of the rest of the world and of Japan, raising interest in language and culture, and developing respectful attitudes to these elements.

c) Materials that are useful in deepening international understanding from a broad perspective, heightening students’ awareness of being Japanese citizens living in a global community, and cultivating a spirit of international cooperation. (Translation from Monbusho 2002a.)

In this quote, the place of teaching Japanese identity through English language learning can be seen. Topics to be covered include aspects of Japanese life, history, etc., as well as that of other parts of the (English-speaking) world promoting a deeper understanding Japanese identity and its place in the world. In the text above, Japanese identity is fundamental to accessing English, and the purposes of English are to foster Japanese identity and locate it within the context of a multicultural world. Kubota (2002) has made a similar observation of the former course of study, which equally stipulates that English language study should enhance students’ awareness of themselves as Japanese people in an international community.
LANGUAGE SPREAD POLICY

The converse of language planning for the internationalisation of the Japanese is found in the teaching of Japanese to non-native speakers – in the Japanese program to spread the knowledge of Japanese beyond Japan. Japanese activities relating to the teaching of Japanese date especially from the period of the 1980s and are integrated with the koku-saika agenda of the time. The core reason for Japanese language spread is to enhance international understanding of Japanese. In this sense it represents the converse of the reasons for foreign language teaching in Japan. Foreign language teaching aims to enable communication of distinctively Japanese perspectives to others through other languages, while Japanese teaching aims to achieve the same result by increasing knowledge of Japanese.

The teaching of Japanese for fostering understanding of Japan is one of the themes of a 2004 appeal to the Japanese Prime Minister about the international study of Japanese (Ogoura 2004). The document argues that communicating about Japan in English is inadequate for representing Japan on the world stage, and that communication in Japanese is necessary and strategic in disseminating Japanese culture and ideas:

Japan still relies on the use of English, or some other language that is seen as readily understandable to a large audience, whenever it makes important declaration within the international community. Keeping people around the world interested in Japan will be very difficult unless we ourselves endeavor to make strategic utilization of the very linguistic culture that has been used to develop our ideas and culture. (Ogoura 2004)

In addition, the appeal argues for aggressive promotion of Japanese as a way of increasing Japan’s international role:

We believe that switching from ‘passive support’ to ‘aggressive promotion’ of Japanese-language education could prove to be a very effective means for further bolstering Japan’s role in the global community. (Ogoura 2004)

In this document, Japanese language spread has a dual function: (1) it is a vehicle for disseminating understanding of Japan, and (2) it is strategically important for enhancing Japan’s international presence. The document does not, however, restrict itself to issues framed as relevant to Japan’s interests only; it also argues that access to Japanese is be-
eneficial for the learner in that it gives access to one of the world’s great cultural assets in the form of the accumulated literature in Japanese, to Japan’s ‘appealing’ culture, and to Japan’s culture of ‘craftsmanship’. In all of these, access to Japanese culture is represented as enhancing for the learner. The document does not however emphasise Japanese distinctiveness and is even at pains to set aside perceptions that the language is ‘too unique’. Nonetheless it does articulate with kokusaika ideologies to a certain extent through its desire to foster understanding of Japan.

In promoting understanding of Japan, Japanese language spread policy demonstrates a nationalistic, essentialising and archaising approach to Japanese cultural identity. Japan’s programs for language spread have a focus on the teaching of both language and culture, as can be seen from the following description from the Regional and Educational Exchanges for Mutual Understanding (REX) program:

派遣先では、中学校・高等学校の生徒に日本語を教え るほか、日本の社会や歴史、文化を紹介する活動などを行います。

[At their destinations, they will teach pupils at junior high school and high school not only Japanese language but will introduce Japanese society and history and culture. (MEXT 2004b, author’s translation)]

The ways in which Japanese culture is conceptualised for dissemination among the non-Japanese is seen most clearly in the study of 非日本 Nihonjijou or Japanese way of life. Nihonjijou was established officially by the Ministry of Education in 1962 and covers a syllabus of a general introduction to Japan, Japanese history, culture, politics, economics, nature, science and technology:

…日本事情に関する科目としては、一般日本事情、日本の歴史及び文化、日本の政治、経済、日本の自然、日本の科学・技術といったものが考えられる

[… the subjects for nihonjijou may be considered to include a general introduction to Japanese way of life, Japanese history and culture, Japanese politics, the economy, Japanese nature, Japanese science and technology. Ministerial order 21/1962. (Toyota 1988b)]

The nature of culture taught under a Nihonjijou approach is exemplified by the following extract from a description of the REX pre-departure training program:
The themes represented here are traditionalising themes which privilege distinctly Japanese practices which may have limited applicability for the lived experiences of Japanese people. While the scope of Nihonjijou is not restricted to such practices, the approach is criticised for presenting an ethnocentric and stereotypical view of Japan which reinforces a view of the society as monoethnic, monocultural and monolingual (Nagata 1995). The teaching of Japanese culture for overseas learners of Japanese therefore focuses on an essentialised version of the culture and is conducted in a way which emphasises the distinctiveness of Japanese culture in conformity to the Nihonjinron ideology.

CONCLUSION

In both policy contexts, foreign language teaching and Japanese language spread, understandings of the purpose of language learning focus on a form of engagement with the other, and in this sense are intercultural. However, the nature of interculturality as it is presented in these documents is profoundly shaped by ideologies surrounding Japanese understandings of the Japanese self. The ideological context of Nihonjinron constructs the Japanese self as unique and this privileges a position in international communication of needing to communicate this uniqueness to others. The construction of Japanese identity in terms of uniqueness is reinforced by the promotion of a particular, essentialised view of what is encapsulated in the idea of Japaneseness which highlights distinctiveness, especially as this distinctiveness is realised in traditional cultural practices and aspects of language. These perceptions of uniqueness frame languages education as a vehicle for expressing this uniqueness. This means that foreign language learning comes to be viewed as a tool for expressing Japanese values and perspectives to the non-Japanese. Similarly, in language spread Japanese becomes the development of a tool by which the non-Japanese can become recipients of uniquely Japanese messages. The discourses which emerge as a result of the impact of Nihonjinron on Japanese language-in-education policy construct the intercultural as a movement from self to other only.
While Japanese language-in-education policy constitutes a coherent discourse about interculturality as a mono-directional process, policy texts themselves represent just one voice in the overall construction of educational discourses about language and culture. In particular, policy discourses intersect with the theorising discourses of academia and the practitioner discourses of language teachers. Between and within each of these discourses there are potentially different underlying constructions of the intercultural and an important direction for future research lies in articulating the parameters of these discourses and the interactions between them. Each of these discourses can support, contest and reconceptualise the key concepts of policy and each is motivated by its own ideological positionings. Collectively, they constitute a universe of discourse about interculturality, the study of which is beyond the scope of this paper.

REFERENCES


