

Original Article

Foreign Language Education for Sustainable Development: Teaching Japanese not only as a Strategy but as a Catalyst of World Peace

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When most English teachers teach English to Japanese students in Japan, they think "How can we teach communicative English as efficiently as possible?" In a broader sense, do teachers of other subjects think in the same way? There are some individuals who rapidly improve their communicative Japanese proficiency. They can live without feeling quite so uncomfortable in just a short period of time after arriving in Japan without any knowledge of Japanese language. The situation is not the same but such cases cannot be seen in Japanese learners of English even if they would be living in English speaking countries. With this idea in mind, this work examines the meaning and purpose of teaching and studying a foreign language and its culture. The results of the questionnaire will show that the language learners want to study everything surrounding their language in order to master it. Furthermore, they hope that learning a foreign language and its culture will contribute to world peace and education for sustainable development.

Key Words: Foreign language, Inter-cultural understanding, Multicultural education, Sustainable development, Bilingual

Introduction

The International Herald Tribune of April 17, in 2001 in the column titled "Language Barrier Hurts U.S. Security," said that clues to the devastation ahead lay under the nose of law enforcement officials when a band of trained terrorists plotted to blow up the World Trade Center in 1993. Although the FBI held videotapes, manuals, and notebooks on bomb-making that had been confiscated from a Palestinian terrorist, nobody could understand Arabic until after the explosion at the Trade Center in 1993. Six people were killed and more than 1000 people were injured. As there are not sufficient agents and analysts with knowledge of such languages as

Arabic and Korean, intelligence agencies are often caught short in times of crisis. Nobody could deny that this is one of the reasons for the tragedy of the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001.

In Europe, the movement to use more than two European languages has grown, especially over the last 10 years. It originally started as bilingualism based upon the ideal that intercultural understanding would help shut out the wars.

Looking at The Dutch National Action Program on Foreign Language by the ministry of Education and Science in the Netherlands, it might be said that cognition of multicultural society makes language education in the Netherlands.

LOTE (Languages Other Than English) in Australia is like ESL includes many languages. It has four main purposes.

1. enrichment of intelligence and culture
2. economics
3. equality of educational chances
4. external consciousness of the global society

Therefore its aims are not only the improvement of language skills but also personal, national, and international contribution and sustainable development.

On the other hand, in Japan, the idea of English education as intercultural communication sounds good but not many good nation's system realize yet, because the idea of language learning as multicultural education does not exist in Japan. Instead of being taught communication in foreign language, students are expected to memorize textbook word or phrases by rote. This is no way to help anyone acquire fluency in English.

The United Nations Resolution for the decade is Education for Sustainable Development 2005-2014. The idea of it is used for the title of this paper, hoping that language education is useful for sustainable development.

In fact, the previous survey done by the writer of this present paper from 1998 to 1999 was about learning a foreign language. It was to research a new idea looking at "five-elements of language learning; the five most important factors for teaching English for communication purposes are culture, listening, conversation, reading and creative writing". The questionnaire surveyed was conducted with 80 Japanese students from Chugoku Junior College, 80 foreign students from Okayama Japanese Center & 20 Japanese teachers. The questionnaire was very simple, asking the subjects to choose 10 points, from a list of 20, which they considered to be the most important when studying a foreign language.

The results were as follows:

1. Most Japanese students considered the most important points to be; grammar, accurate pronunciation, listening practice, memorizing books.

2. Most foreign students considered the most important points to be; understanding culture, listening practice, pair & group practice, repetition, the class focusing on the students. and conversation with native speakers.

There were lots of differences between 1 and 2. Although some methods of language teaching from Europe have been introduced into English education in Japan there are very few teachers using them effectively. These methods do not fit comfortably with Japanese people. Then, what is lacking in English education in Japan?

This present work will clarify that. The questionnaire

carried out for this work includes 3 parts: a) importance, B) purpose C) opinion (belief). The participants were asked to give a generalized opinion instead of their own.

Subjects

The author has continued to research the meaning of learning foreign languages and carried out another survey over the 3 years since 2000. This second questionnaire was based on the first one but with some points added or removed. This time the participants were 262 foreign students who are registered with the Okayama Japanese Center (OJC) and 36 Japanese teachers. The results of the previous survey are not included.

OJC is open to all foreigners who want to study Japanese 6 days a week maximum, and the lesson fee is very low. Their backgrounds vary considerably — professors, teachers, medical doctors, research students and their families. They range from 10 to 75 years old. Most of them study very hard and are rarely absent from their classes, even if they feel sick or when there is heavy rain or snow. 99% can speak daily Japanese in half a year after they had started learning Japanese as the beginners. Only 1% studied Japanese grammar seriously in order to be fluent in Japanese.

The subjects are divided into 6 categories as follows.

category	Number
a.) Chinese	97
b.) Korean	41
c.) American, Canadian, English	25
d.) Australian, New Zealander	25
e.) Brazilian, Argentine, Peruvian	32
f.) The other countries	42
g.) Japanese teachers	36
Total	298

About 70% of category a) are students and their families, who need part-time jobs, About 20% are the young spouses of Japanese who also need to work and to improve their Japanese ability. The others are old comers who have worked in Japan for more than 20 years and speak Japanese rather frequently but wish to speak better Japanese.

About 70% of category b) are young students, 20% are young spouses of Japanese and 10% are old comers who have lived in Japan for a long time but have few

chances to speak Japanese in the Korean society of Japan.

Category c) and d) are grouped together for this paper. Most of them are English teachers at English schools or members of the JET program.

Almost all of category e) are busy trainees. They are Japanese Brazilian, Argentine or Peruvian who have character of culturally Latin American and speak some Japanese but do not write Japanese or don't like to write it.

Category f) are students, researchers and trainees who are from Indonesia, India, the Philippines, Bang-

ladesh, Thailand and Nepal. They are very dedicated and study very hard.

Category g) are the Japanese teachers of OJC, who differ from other Japanese people because they have had experience with other cultures and have a good method of teaching Japanese language to foreigners.

Lots of interesting differences between the subjects who are registered with OJC under 3 months and those who are registered for 3 months or more can be seen. However, it will be discussed in the next work as here is not enough space.

Result and Discussion

table 1 Importance

item	category					
	a	b	c, d	e	f	g
1. Grammar	32%	25%	17%	25%	29%	43%
2. Accurate pronunciation	20%	21%	11%	13%	18%	23%
3. Listening comprehension	36%	35%	50%	81%	66%	51%
4. Intercultural understanding	74%	68%	71%	74%	96%	53%
5. Creative writing	40%	30%	48%	36%	49%	34%
6. Illustrative sentences	100%	90%	100%	100%	100%	78%
7. Presentation	21%	13%	31%	50%	31%	26%
8. Reading comprehension	34%	22%	26%	43%	43%	20%
9. Memorization practice	45%	47%	0%	0%	25%	33%
10. Explanation in your mother tongue or Chinese character	21%	0%	5%	0%	0%	0%
11. Character and phonogram practice (e.g. kanji)	43%	34%	45%	38%	44%	46%
12. To understand Social circumstances	35%	90%	71%	46%	31%	51%
13. Communication with native speakers	67%	81%	62%	33%	30%	60%
14. Living in a country where the language you are learning is spoken	27%	50%	83%	21%	47%	26%
15. CAI	79%	91%	96%	97%	68%	26%
16. Pair & group practice	31%	38%	55%	74%	56%	79%
17. Focusing on teacher	30%	43%	0%	0%	25%	47%
18. Focusing on students	38%	64%	67%	100%	59%	59%
19. Correcting errors when made	27%	0%	0%	0%	19%	26%
20. Deep understanding of your own language & culture	86%	71%	51%	70%	54%	79%
21. Textbook centred classes	72%	35%	8%	0%	31%	52%
22. Word for word translation	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
23. Structure Practice	30%	30%	21%	25%	26%	20%
24. Class interaction	11%	21%	84%	76%	58%	68%

A) importance

"From the following list please indicate, (by writing the numbers 1~24 in the parentheses) after every item which you consider most and least important when learning a foreign language. Please write 1 to indicate the most important, and 24 to indicate the least important."

For the sake of simplicity, It was decided to calculate

the percentages only of the points people had numbered from 1~10. These percentages are shown in Table 1. However, the percentages are not that accurate because it seems to have been difficult to rank the points and sometimes the same number was placed by two points.

Table 1 shows that item 4, intercultural understanding, item 5, creative writing, item and 6 "illustrative

table 2 Purpose, motivation

item	category					
	a	b	c, d	e	f	g
1. interest	20 %	38 %	82 %	54 %	36 %	100 %
2. economics	64 %	50 %	22 %	57 %	59 %	4 %
3. rising in salary and status	53 %	48 %	19 %	58 %	56 %	23 %
4. Job hunting, wider range of opportunities	74 %	62 %	26 %	63 %	44 %	90 %
5. Equality	14 %	59 %	27 %	47 %	63 %	0 %
6. as an approach to learning about the world	59 %	41 %	83 %	31 %	16 %	100 %
7. intercultural understanding	56 %	53 %	98 %	73 %	91 %	89 %
8. survival	7 %	7 %	11 %	9 %	19 %	6 %
9. good quality of life	67 %	65 %	30 %	53 %	84 %	88 %
10. contribution to the nation	73 %	62 %	47 %	38 %	13 %	0 %
11. contribution to world peace	58 %	56 %	77 %	54 %	56 %	46 %
12. contribution to world development	55 %	59 %	78 %	63 %	63 %	54 %
others, please state						

table 3 Beliefs

item	category					
	a	b	c, d	e	f	g
1. Japanese grammar is difficult to learn	36 %	21 %	39 %	29 %	37 %	65 %
2. English grammar is difficult to learn	41 %	77 %	78 %	10 %	31 %	53 %
3. Japanese pronunciation is difficult	25 %	74 %	48 %	12 %	33 %	41 %
4. English pronunciation is difficult	23 %	76 %	43 %	9 %	41 %	70 %
5. Chinese pronunciation is difficult	86 %	62 %	70 %	89 %	65 %	100 %
6. Kanji is interesting	93 %	93 %	89 %	81 %	63 %	91 %
7. There are mistakes sometimes in the dictionaries	35 %	79 %	100 %	97 %	91 %	82 %
8. The teacher should avoid personal questions during class	41 %	82 %	100 %	94 %	88 %	82 %
9. The teacher had better call their learners by their given names	0 %	0 %	71 %	61 %	0 %	37 %
10. The teacher should teach slang & dialects	2 %	7 %	15 %	18 %	0 %	18 %
11. The teacher should explain about different customs & gesture meanings	96 %	90 %	100 %	100 %	78 %	100 %
12. The teacher should praise the learner whenever they can answer the question, even if it is very easy	0 %	6 %	0 %	0 %	8 %	30 %
13. The teacher should have knowledge of the learners language and culture	83 %	74 %	88 %	84 %	75 %	63 %
14. A native teacher is always the best teacher	36 %	62 %	60 %	53 %	41 %	92 %
15. The learners should be able to ask questions at anytime	74 %	50 %	100 %	100 %	84 %	79 %
16. The learners should be given examples of the usage of the grammar point that they are learning or have learned	97 %	81 %	100 %	100 %	100 %	100 %
17. The learners should be able to converse in their own language during class to aid understanding even if the teacher doesn't like them to do so	61 %	8 %	23 %	47 %	9 %	29 %
18. Japan will become a hybrid society in the near future	92 %	59 %	94 %	81 %	98 %	53 %
19. Japan is global society now	21 %	62 %	38 %	84 %	57 %	63 %
20. Bilingual or trilingual education will become a necessity in the future	77 %	100 %	100 %	100 %	100 %	100 %
21. Learning some foreign languages and about different cultures is useful for human growth	94 %	90 %	100 %	100 %	100 %	100 %
22. Teaching English to young children is necessary	79 %	82 %	45 %	45 %	53 %	92 %
23. Learning foreign languages could be the key to world peace	90 %	95 %	97 %	96 %	99 %	78 %

sentences" scored very high in most of the categories, but on the contrary, item 2, accurate pronunciation and item 23, word for word translation scored very low in most of the categories. There are quite large differences among the categories in, item 10, explanation in mother tongue or Chinese character, item 13, communication with native speakers and item 18, focusing on students. Concerning item 9 memorization practice, item 17, focusing on teacher, item 19, correcting errors when made and item 21, textbook centered classes, categories a) , b) , and g) show the same trend against categories c & d), e) and f).

It is sad that Japanese teachers have the lowest interest in item 15, CAI (Computer Learning Instruction) and item 14, living in a country where the languages they are learning are spoken. It is also interesting to note the lack of interest in word for word translation in all categories.

B) purpose

"The following shows the "reasons for studying a foreign language", Number them from 1 to 13 in order of importance for the reason."

Table 2 shows the percentages only points numbered 1 to 6 are shown in Table 2. This was done for simplicity as was table 1. A decision was made to calculate only the points people numbered from 1 to 6.

Though the purpose of learning a foreign language strongly depends on the economic condition of the country or region, item 7, intercultural understanding, and item 9, good quality of life, received high percentages in all categories. Item 10, contribution to the nation, item 11, contribution to world peace, and item 12, contribution to world development, as an ideal got high percentages in all categories with the exception of category g. It is often said in English education that motivation is very important, but it seems that consciousness of purpose effects language learning.

C) opinion (belief)

"If you agree with the following comments, write "y" in the parenthesis, if you disagree, write "n"."

As answers are only "yes" or "no" in C, the percentages indicate those who answered "yes".

In this questionnaire, there are some differences between the native speakers of a language and non-native speakers of it. Native speakers are apt to think that their own language presents difficult in grammar, pronunciation

or intonation, Also they think that the languages which closely resemble theirs are much easier to learn than other languages.

What does the difference between category g) and the other categories in items 18, 19, 21, 22 and item 23 indicate? It is often said that Japanese people know and respect their own language and culture less than other nations. It is true that Japanese people have had few experiences with the disappearance or endangerment of their language or culture by another language or culture. Not only small countries but also big countries have had such experience, for example, English by French and French by Russian. Has Japanese consciousness of their language and culture changed since the end of the Second World War? It can be said that Japanese do not respect their language and culture, even though they say "Japanese language and culture is wonderful" It seems now as if English is the only useful foreign language for them and that they learn foreign languages only for personal benefit and not for the good of others. Isn't this a poor reason? It can not be said that recently, proficiency in English has increased. It is also true to say that there has been an increase in the number of English conversation schools. Japanese people are not inferior to people in other countries in field of language but lack originality and spontaneity.

Here is a questionnaire that had been taken and was announced by the government on April 12 in 2003. It shows that only 54 percent of the subjects answered that human rights of the foreigners living in Japan should be defended. and 28.1 percent think it cannot be helped that human right of them is not defended in Japan.

Isn't it the most important for Japanese to get out of such a barrier in order to improve language proficiency?

As a teacher, it is very interesting that table 3 indicates the attitudes of students shown in class. The same is shown in tables 2 and 3 more less. It means that it is very important for the teacher to consider background. Moreover this survey tells us, that Japanese teachers should pay great attention to world peace and development when learning and teaching a foreign language.

It is natural that Japanese teachers should have knowledge of the paradigm on linguistic theory or language teaching method because their students are from an inter-culture background. On the other hand how many English teachers know about this?

Conclusion

This present work examines the attitudes of learners and the purpose of foreigners learning a foreign language, i.e., Japanese. It also examines the attitudes of their Japanese teachers. The results of the study reveals that whether a person studies a foreign Language to understand the "culture" or for the purpose of "sustainable development", the way learning takes place differs from one person to the other.

Foreign students shows that it is much better for them to try to understand culture and to convey a concrete and clear message even in imperfect language rather than paying too much attention to grammatical principles, pronunciation or a textbook.

The following questions to a Taiwanese-American and her answers will take a part of the conclusion. She was one of subjects of questionnaire.

1. How do you feel about being bilingual? Tell me about your experience.
2. Are there any differences between teaching English in Japan and Japanese in America?
3. Is your knowledge about Japanese language and culture sufficient enough to deal with students in your class?

① I think that being bi-lingual is a great advantage, especially if one is bilingual in an language as difficult as Japanese or Chinese and English. Being bilingual opens many more doors not only in business and for one's career, but also in personal aspects such as travel and communication. I'm not exactly bilingual in Taiwanese, but it has helped me to understand Taiwanese culture. I can understand stories or things that my parent's friends have said. In a way, I suppose that it has helped me understand may culture as well as my parents. Taiwanese is the natural language that my parents speak, so when they speak to me in Taiwanese, communication is easier than if it's in English.

② First of all English and Japanese are very difficult languages but I do think that English is a little more difficult to learn and teach because of the many subtle nuances cslang or hidden meanings that exist in the English language. So, when I see how English is taught

in Japanese school, I find that it can be difficult for students to become proficient in speaking. The rules of Japanese are more simple so perhaps it's easier to learn, but I can't be sure about this opinion because I am not fluent in Japanese. I can say however, that in America, foreign language is not taught until high school usually, while in Japan, English is taught as early as elementary school. That is one of the biggest differences. English or a second language is stressed so much more than foreign language teaching in America. I think that this shows how the Japanese government understands the importance of knowing other languages and cultures, more so than the American government.

③ Yes, but that is only because I learned some Japanese in college. Without it, I think it would be difficult to communicate with the students and teach them English. As a teacher, I need to know the connections between Japanese and English grammar in order to teach it well.

At the end of this paper, It could be said that any one can say that language is power and any one can hope that language will be able to become a Catalyst for World Peace. Hope is courage and new will.

At the very end of this paper, I wish to thank all my students for wrestling with my hard and long questions.

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