
Comparing Japan and Singapore in some aspects of English

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Abstract: Many have heard about the declining and aging Japanese population but fewer are aware of its implications on immigration. According to UN estimates, immigration has to be at 650,000 per year to counteract the negative effects. This means that most of the Japanese will be living and working alongside foreigners in the near future. English language education in Japan has not been very successful. Although the communicative approach was introduced in the 1980s, schools still use the grammar translation method and most Japanese do not have the communicative skills necessary for interacting with foreigners. Government rhetoric has also been hesitant in encouraging the learning of English. The Japanese language or national identity is often emphasised when English is promoted. The government sees English as a threat to Japanese and Japanese identity. This paper uses the case study of the Singaporean Chinese to reassure the Japanese that unlike in the Singaporean case, risks of a language and values shift due to English are relatively low.

Keywords: English, Japan, Values

1. Introduction

The Japanese have had mixed attitudes towards English for many decades. On the one hand, they perceive English as a useful tool of communication, especially with the outside world. On the other hand, they have reservations about speaking the language and see it as a threat to their national identity. One of the reasons why the Japanese need English communicative skills more than ever is the rapid decline and aging of the population and the immigration necessary for supplementing the Japanese workforce. The scenario most feared by the Japanese is one in which English undermines the Japanese identity, as in the case of the Singaporean Chinese. The authorities in Singapore have perceived a shift from Chinese values to Western ones and attributed it to the English language. This paper shows that the Singaporean context is very different from that in Japan, and what the Singaporean Chinese experienced is unlikely to happen in Japan. A communicative approach to teaching English was introduced some years ago but has not taken root or been pursued with conviction. Government rhetoric about English is also hesitant in that encouragement to learn English is usually accompanied by emphasis on the Japanese language or national identity. Japanese people need English communicative skills to live and work with the incoming

foreigners. The communicative approach needs replace the traditional writing-based grammar translation method as soon as possible and as widely as possible. The urgency in the learning and use of English has to be conveyed very clearly to the Japanese people.

This study is based on extensive literature survey, experience of sociolinguistic fieldwork in Singapore, and 10 years of teaching experience and fieldwork in Japan (Morita, 2012, 2013a, 2013b, 2014). The main aim is to show Japanese policymakers, educators and English learners that learning English is unlikely lead to language or values shift similar to what the Singaporean Chinese experienced.

The next section presents to the readers the declining and aging Japanese population and the likelihood of immigration supplementing the Japanese workforce. Current standards of English in Japan are far from adequate for living and working with foreigners. The discussion on the weaknesses of English language education in Japan in Section 4 would be difficult to follow without first introducing the context of globalisation and internationalisation in Section 3. Section 5 presents the Singaporean Chinese and their language and values shift due to English. Finally, Section 6 discusses the differences between Japan and Singapore which make it unlikely for the Japanese to experience a shift of values or

identity due to the use of English in the foreseeable future.

2. The Declining and Aging Japanese Population

The number of foreigners is increasing in Japan. Even without taking into account the large numbers of immigrants necessary to keep away the effects of a declining and aging Japanese population, the number of foreign residents has doubled to 2.2 million over the past 20 years. Signs of transformation are also evident in rising numbers of international marriages, foreigners gaining permanent residency and foreign wives (many from low-income countries) playing a key role in rural areas. In some sectors facing a shortage of skilled workers such as information technology, the government has initiated a new fast-track permanent residency programme that targets the relevant foreigners (Kingston, 2013b).

The Japanese population is declining and aging rapidly. The country has the best records for longevity in the world. In 2005, it had the oldest population in the world with a median of just over 43 years, which is expected to increase to over 88 years. The total fertility rate has been falling from 4.32 in 1949 after the war to 1.57 in 1989. The population structure is changing. In 2012, 24% of the population of 30 million was over 65 years old. It is estimated that by 2025, 30% of the population will be 65 or over and barely two people of working age will be supporting one person of retirement age. The number of workers supporting each retiree is decreasing from 10 in 1950 to 3.6 in 2000 to 1.9 in 2025. The process of the population shrinking has already started. The population reached a peak of 128 million in 2006 and has begun to shrink. To reverse the reduction in the size of the population and avoid the effects of a declining and aging population, the level of immigration would have to be very high at 650,000 per year until year 2050, according to UN estimates. This dramatic demographic shift directly or indirectly affects every sector of society, from maternity wards to undertakers (Goodman, 2012).

Two measures which counteract the effects of the declining and aging population are frequently discussed in the media and government: female participation in the workforce and immigration to supplement the Japanese workforce. Even though Japanese women are well-educated, their rate of participation in the workforce is below that of other high-income countries. Most women seek employment after graduating from tertiary education but withdraw from work after marriage and having children. Relatively few women land career-track jobs, constituting only 12% of such new hires in 2010 (Kingston, 2013b). Many do not resume working after giving birth because there is inadequate support for them to do so and inflexible employment policies mean their careers have been derailed. A recent IMF report argued that increasing women's participation in the workforce could boost economic growth (Kingston, 2013b). Many are doubtful of the speed and rate at which women

may be coaxed into returning to work after having children because of conservative attitudes and structural inflexibilities. Recently, an assemblyman in central Tokyo criticised women for their 'shameless' demands for more public nursery schools, suggesting that raising children is their responsibility. Long waiting lists for public nursery schools in cities are the norm and more than half the women seeking these places are turned down because the facilities are full.

Another option is immigration, although there is considerable resistance to immigrant labour in influential circles in the government, media and more generally the public. The Japanese are worried about national identity, the future of the country, crime and how to manage the influx. There are however strong economic reasons for attracting immigrants: the shrinking population, impending labour shortages, and the need for more taxpayers to keep the national medical and pension schemes solvent without considerably increasing individuals' contributions. The public discourse is dominated by widespread misconceptions that foreigners commit crimes, even though national crime statistics prove that they are not a menace to society. In the early 1980s, Japan accepted more than 10,000 Indochinese refugees and they have done well and contributed to the communities they live in. The Chinese who have been arriving since the 1990s have made use of their transnational networks to facilitate and contribute to trade and investment. Many have started profitable businesses. Increasing immigration could boost Japan's capacity to innovate and create new wealth, bringing in new ideas, languages, cultural skills, global networks and entrepreneurial spirit. The potential benefits of attracting resourceful immigrants are significant. Like in the US, they could innovate, create employment, help rejuvenate the economy and make Japan more dynamic (Kingston, 2013a).

There are not many viable options available for coping with the declining and aging population. Statistics show that few foreigners commit crimes and it is difficult to ignore the benefits immigrants bring to Japan. If the UN is correct in the estimate of 650,000 immigrants per year to counteract the effects of the declining and aging population, the Japanese will be living and working alongside foreigners in the near future. It is difficult to imagine how they can live and work together without a lingua franca such as English.

3. Globalisation and Internationalisation in Japan

For many years, researchers have written about Japan's unwillingness to open up to the world. Itoh (2000), for example, explained the attitude by referring to *sakoku*, the 250 years of self-imposed isolation from the rest of the world from 1639 to 1868. She claims that the pervasive Japanese attitude of exclusiveness and insularity stem from two powerful roots: geographic isolation as an island nation and the history of *sakoku*. Itoh believes the *sakoku* mentality

still influences the way modern Japanese think, behave and relate to the world. Although Japanese manufacturers are keen to flood the world with their products, this is not matched by Japanese people working for the world.

Along similar lines, Dougill (1995) discusses the history of insularity and argue that the Japanese have no real interest in integrating with the international community due to a deeply ingrained form of cultural conditioning. Clammer (2001) points out a lack of interaction with the international community and provides examples of individuals who put into practice the rhetoric of internationalisation but are not rewarded by Japanese society. They include Japanese graduates of foreign universities who are discriminated against when seeking employment and company employees who resist being posted overseas because they know they will be left out of the inner political circles. More recently, Burgess (2013) found that although some high-profile companies such as Rakuten are exceptions, Japanese hierarchical corporate culture can be uncomfortable with confident and outspoken returnee students. A number of young people with study-abroad experience found Japanese companies unenthusiastic and reluctant to hire them. In a survey of 1,000 companies on their recruitment plans for the fiscal year 2012, less than a quarter said they planned to hire applicants who had studied abroad.

Yamagami and Tollefson (2011) found an ambivalence towards globalisation in Japan. Globalisation is perceived as an opportunity as well as a threat. On one hand, the government emphasises that individuals and the nation must develop new skills (especially in technology and English) in order to meet the challenges of globalisation. On the other hand, Diet (parliament) discourse articulates the threats that globalisation presents: violent crime, reduced personal and national security, and a sense of loss and uncertainty about the future. Burgess (2013) also found an ambivalent attitude. The country is aware that in order to remain economically competitive, it must open up, instigate reforms and embrace globalisation in all its aspects. However, there is still a strong tendency to close in, reject global norms and standards, and retreat inwards. He concludes that both government and society are inward-looking and remain rooted in an insular world view that sees globalisation as an external process owned by somebody else.

In her analysis of government documents, Hashimoto (2009) argues convincingly that what the government claims to promote can be quite different from what it really wants to achieve. Although Japan embraces internationalisation, there is at the same time an emphasis on Japanese culture and tradition. The focus is on the exportability of Japanese culture to the world or the promotion of Japaneseness in the international community. Likewise in the discourse on English, the learning of English as a lingua franca to increase global literacy should be carried out within the framework of Japanese culture. The goal is enrichment of Japanese language and culture through interaction with other cultures and languages.

The term *kokusaika*, which is most commonly used to

refer to the process of internationalisation, captures the ambivalence towards globalisation. The use of *kokusaika* first became popular in the early 1980s, when Japan had enjoyed almost 20 years of astounding economic growth, became the world's largest creditor nation and more Japanese began to travel overseas (Goodman, 2007). To outsiders, *kokusaika* may seem to refer to the process of internationalisation similar to those seen in other nations, but the meaning of a Japanese-only nationalism that reinforces a closed national identity has been dominant and flourished with financial support from government and business leaders (Burgess et al., 2010). English language education in Japan is an illustration of *kokusaika*, of how something which appears to be internationalisation in fact serves the purpose of strengthening national identity and protecting national interests. Although the government has taken many steps over the years to develop English education, such as introducing English in primary school, many have interpreted them as measures to train Japanese people to use English to promote, enhance and defend national interests and independence. Another example is the government plan to expand the number of overseas Japanese language facilities 10-fold, which was announced soon after the target of having 300,000 foreign students in Japan by the year 2020 was set. These international students have to study Japanese language and culture, based on the belief on the part of the Japanese that in *kokusaika*, there should be recognition of Japanese culture and society. *Kokusaika* is thus a challenge to preserve Japanese identity, national unity and economic power, a defensive reaction to pressure from other nations' criticisms of Japan's economic self-centredness and cultural insularity.

As we have just seen, *kokusaika* is not usually used to describe the phenomenon of the world becoming increasingly interconnected. *Gurobaruka*, which is based on the English 'to globalise' or 'globalisation' but has adapted to Japanese phonology, corresponds closely to the English meaning of a growing interconnectedness in the world. The main difference between *kokusaika* and *gurobaruka* is that Japan has control over and is an active participant in the former but the latter is an external process over which the country has little or no control.

4. English Language Education in Japan

A common rationale for learning English in Japan is that it is the international language of business, science and technology. English is also essential for participation in the global economy (Yamagami & Tollefson, 2011). The learning of English has been a major thrust of the government's push for internationalisation since the 1980s. Policy documents and discussion papers have emphasised the need for the Japanese to speak more and better English (Gottlieb, 2005). The role English plays as international language in the globalising world is stressed:

'With the progress of globalization in the economy and in society, it is essential that our children acquire

communication skills in English, which has become a common international language, in order for living in the 21st century. This has become an extremely important issue both in terms of the future of our children and the future development of Japan as a nation.'

(MEXT, 2002)

According to the above, Japanese children will be using English in living with the rest of the world in future and the ability to do so is very important to the children and the country. The above justification for learning English is common and can be found in Korea or Singapore. However, unlike in Singapore, where English is taught using modern methods, Japan uses the grammar translation method in which most of class time is spent on word-by-word translation of English texts into Japanese. The lessons are taught in Japanese and the communicative aspects of English are neglected. This is one manifestation of the defensive attitudes towards globalisation and internationalisation.

The widely-used grammar translation method had its origins in the beginning of the 20th century, when the teaching of foreign languages focused on the translation of foreign written texts into Japanese for the purpose of keeping up with technological developments in the rest of the world and importing and processing information from foreign cultures. English was seen as a means of acquiring knowledge rather than for facilitating dialog or cross-cultural communication. English teaching traditionally focused on grammar and translation rather than on developing communicative competencies, intercultural awareness and global perspectives (Whitsed and Wright, 2011). Little has changed. The main classroom activity in this method is systematic word-by-word translation of written English texts into Japanese. The teacher provides grammatical explanations in Japan and English is rarely used (Morita, 2010). This method has harmful effects on language learning since the learning of authentic language is less valuable than the memorisation of grammatical rules (O'Donnell, 2003). Research has shown that Japanese undergraduates' motivation to learn English is generally low (Hayashi, 2005) and the grammar translation method has negative effects on motivation (Kikuchi & Sakai, 2009).

Critics have argued that the fundamental purpose for English is not to foster intercultural and cross-cultural communication skills or global competency but to build national identity among students. Discourse placing importance on English is often accompanied by emphasis on Japanese. The Japanese people are exhorted to master the national language before attempting to learn English:

'However, it is not possible to state that Japanese people have sufficient ability to express their opinions based on a firm grasp of their own language.'

(<http://www.mext.go.jp/english/news/2002/07/020901.htm> -

12th July 2002; cited in Byram, 2011 [link no longer exists])

The quotation implies that the Japanese language should have priority over English. There is a tendency to perceive English as a threat to Japanese identity, and this tendency has been revealed at times, such as in the debate about whether English should be taught in primary schools. The Japanese people are also encouraged to use English as a tool to tell the rest of the world the merits of Japan or present Japanese points of view. English is linked to national development, including that of presenting Japan to the world:

'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 ideas and opinions of Japanese people are not appropriately evaluated.'

(<http://www.mext.go.jp/english/news/2002/07/020901.htm> -

12th July 2002; cited in Byram, 2011 [link no longer exists])

The quotation indicates that it is important for the Japanese to have a voice in the global community. English is taught in a de-contextualised way by focusing on grammar and translation and excluding the communicative aspects in order to preserve Japanese values, traditions and cultural independence (Whitsed and Wright, 2011). In spite of criticisms, the grammar translation method is still common in schools and universities (Nishino, 2008; Stewart & Miyahara, 2011).

Communicative learning became fashionable from the 1980s. The need for a communicative-based approach has been repeatedly emphasised over the last 30 years (Sergeant, 2009). The government attempted to improve English education in the Reform Acts of 1989 and 2002, which stressed a communicative approach to English teaching. Other improvements include the establishment of the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) programme in 1987, which invites native speakers of English to work as assistant English teachers in schools. In 1997, English conversation was introduced in primary schools as an elective. From 2006, the central university entrance examination included a listening component in English. In spite of the improvements, Japan continues to score very low in the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) among Asian countries (Morita, 2010). Yano (2011) describes the Japanese as hardly having enough English proficiency to successfully conduct business negotiations, academic presentations and discussions.

In Whitsed and Wright's (2011) study, native speakers of English teaching on a part-time basis in Japanese universities felt that the norm in English education is 'appearance over substance' and institutions are more concerned about 'impression management' than real education. Communicative English classes give an impression of being modern but in reality lack substance. The offering of these classes satisfies the government, businesses, parents and students but in classrooms, teachers are not expected to teach in a way that maximises students'

learning. The teachers in the study reported that the universities they worked in were ambivalent about the development of communicative competencies. In many cases, these classes lacked clear coordination, were unstructured, or were not integrated into the wider curricula. The majority of the teachers believed that most universities placed little value on authentic learning outcomes. The teachers also felt that their students were unable to see English as a living language beyond the context of English tests on grammar and translation in university entrance examinations.

5. The Singaporean Chinese

The Japanese have shown some interest in the English situation in Singapore, mostly because of its widely-known success. Kawai Hayao, an advisor to Prime Minister Obuchi Keizo (1998-2000), reportedly regarded Singapore as a model for Japan's English education, during a time when the issue of making English the second official language in Japan was being considered (Otani, 2010).

The present-day Singaporean Chinese are descendants of Chinese immigrants from southern China who left their homes to escape famine and civil unrest in search for work in Singapore, mostly in the 18th and early 19th century. The immigrants spoke regional varieties of Chinese such as Hokkien, Teochew or Cantonese, depending on which parts of southern China they were from. As we can see in the table below (Lee, 2012), their descendants have shifted from their ancestral varieties of Chinese to Mandarin and English:

Table 1. Resident Chinese population aged 5 years and over by language most frequently spoken at home.

Language	1980	1990	2000	2010
English	10.2	19.3	23.9	32.6
Mandarin	12.8	30.1	45.1	47.7
Other Chinese dialects	76.6	50.3	30.7	19.2
Other	0.4	0.3	0.3	0.4
	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Over the past four decades, the Singaporean Chinese have reported the increasing use of English and Mandarin as home languages in census questionnaires. The numbers for regional varieties of Chinese, on the other hand, have been falling. Today, the average young Singaporean Chinese speaks English and/or Mandarin with either passive abilities in a regional variety of Chinese or none at all.

Government policy is mostly responsible for the shift to English and Mandarin. English has been promoted as the language of economic opportunities, education, and science and technology since independence from Britain and Malaysia in the 1960s. It also serves as a neutral lingua franca for the different ethnic groups. From the 1980s, education provided by the state, from primary level upwards, has been in English only. English is an absolute necessity for students who want a secondary or tertiary education. In order to give their children a head-start at school, many

parents switched to English as their home language. English is also the language of employment and career. It is practically impossible to achieve middle-class socioeconomic status or to be successful in Singaporean society without a strong command of English.

The shift from regional varieties of Chinese to Mandarin was also engineered by the government. The early Singaporean Chinese lived, worked and socialised within their speech communities only. The Hokkiens, Teochews and Cantonese were segregated in where they lived, what they did for a living and who they socialised with. There were sometimes conflicts, some violent, between the speech groups. The regional varieties of Chinese were perceived by the government as divisive, who instead promoted the use of Mandarin from the 1970s as a neutral variety to be used for intra- and intergroup communication. Mandarin was also useful as the language of business with China. In the 1980s, Mandarin became a required school subject for all Singaporean Chinese children. Television and radio programmes in Hokkien, Teochew or Cantonese were substituted with those in Mandarin. School children were penalised for using these non-standard varieties in school. The annual Speak Mandarin Campaign introduced further measures to encourage the use of Mandarin. As in the case of English, parents used more Mandarin at home to help their children learn it.

When Singapore was a British colony, Chinese children were given a traditional and classical Chinese education which attempted to inculcate morality in students. Chinese schools reinforced the socialisation process in the family and strengthened the sense of group identity (Tong, 2010). Many Chinese schools were closed down during the Cold War years because of fears that they were associated with communist China. After independence in 1965, the segregation of the ethnic groups and their education was broken down and the government set up integrated schools for children of all the ethnic groups. The number of Chinese schools continued to fall until the 1980s when all education was provided in English.

Some years after English-only education was established, the government expressed the concern that the Singaporean Chinese had become too Westernised due to the use of English. Western and Asian values were presented in two simplistic categories. Western values were said to emphasise individualism and associated with self-centredness, self-gratification, drug abuse and dependence on welfare provisions. Asian values are collectivistic and associated with close family ties, filial piety, hard work, thrift and sacrifice. According to the argument, the Singaporean Chinese have absorbed these Western values from English and this shift from Asian to Western values and in identity causes a moral decline because it deculturises and individualises society. It is also a threat to social cohesion and national competitiveness. At this point, Chinese language education is presented as the solution to the problem in the form of cultural ballast which transmits Asian culture and values. The government believes that

Asian values are more effectively conveyed in the Chinese language (Sim & Ho, 2010). This 'division of labour' between English and Chinese, the former for the economic growth, knowledge and science and technology, and the latter for culture, values and identity, is a key feature of state education in Singapore.

Critics have pointed out that government policy is responsible for the disruption in the transmission of culture and values between generations. Due to the fervour with which the use of English and Mandarin were promoted, the language shift from regional varieties of Chinese to English and Mandarin took place very quickly, in many cases within three generations. In a typical Singaporean Chinese family in which the grandparents are immigrants from China and speak only regional varieties of Chinese, the next generation is usually Singaporean-born and speaks regional varieties, often some Mandarin and often some English. The third generation, however, due to the Speak Mandarin Campaign and emphasis on English-medium education, uses Mandarin and/or English at home, with either passive understanding of regional varieties of Chinese or none at all. In many cases, Chinese-born grandparents have no common language with their grandchildren. Had the language shift taken place more slowly across four generations, grandparents would be able to use regional varieties of Chinese with their grandchildren and have a much stronger presence in the latter's lives, thereby facilitating the transmission of culture and values. It would also improve family life and relationships.

6. Discussion

In 1819, Stamford Raffles of the East India Company acquired Singapore as a strategic commercial outpost. Since Singapore was under the control of a British company and English was the language of the company's administration and the settlement's rulers, English had prestige and a dominant position from the outset (Shepherd, 2005). When Singapore became a colony, the political administrative system was in English. It was a minority language used for official purposes in government offices and law courts and it was mastered by a small elite only (Deterding, 2007).

On the other hand in Japan, the first contact with English took place in 1600 when William Adams, an Englishman, was washed up on the shores of Bungo in Kyushu (Ike, 1995). English did not have the kind of foothold it had in Singapore since Japan was never faced with the language of a colonising power. In fact, Japan closed itself off to the world (known as *sakoku*) due to fears of European colonial ambitions during the late 16th and early 17th centuries for more than 200 years. The trend of learning English started after *sakoku* in the Meiji Period when it became evident that English was necessary for contact with the West, especially the US and Britain. We will see in this section that in addition to the differences in historical background just mentioned, there are other significant differences between Singapore and Japan.

Since independence from Malaysia in 1965, a constant

feature of government rhetoric in Singapore has been the emphasis on the extreme vulnerability of the small nation-state with no natural resources and constant struggle needed for economic survival which is dependent on the outside world. The key national goal is economic development and survival (Sim & Ho, 2010). This message is still loud and clear today in the following excerpt from the most recent Prime Minister's National Day Message:

'Our economy is holding steady amidst global uncertainties. We are attracting more quality investments. Unemployment remains low. ... At the same time, other countries are rapidly progressing and catching up. We must stay ahead of the competition, and maintain our standing in the world. ... But remember: Each one of us must still do our best, and be self-reliant and resourceful. Because Singapore can only succeed if each one of us contributes his part.'

(Prime Minister's Office, Singapore, 2013)

The annual National Day speech is generally regarded as the most important speech given by the Prime Minister in the year. Singapore has come a long way and achieved much economic success since 1965 and the one-party (People's Action Party) government claims much of the credit. In the eyes of Singaporeans, the PAP has legitimacy to rule and in general the people trust the government and are convinced by the rhetoric of constant threat and survival and the importance of English. Singapore ranks very high in TOEFL results and Singaporean students have no language difficulties when they attend top universities in English-speaking countries.

Compared to Singapore, Japan is in a very different position. The world's second largest economy has achieved enormous economic success even though the vast majority of Japanese people do not speak or use English. The role English has played in economic achievements is much smaller in Japan compared to Singapore.

Looking at job advertisements for the Japanese, one may have the impression that English skills are a necessity in the workplace since many jobs come with an English criterion in the form of a TOEIC score. The Test of English for International Communication is administered by the US-based Educational Testing Services and was created for the Japanese market at the request of the Japanese. It is mainly a test of grammar and vocabulary. With the exception of a small minority of businesses such as corporate giant Rakuten, the English criterion is for employment and promotion screening purposes only. Once employment or promotion has been secured, there is often no further need for English. In most workplaces, English is not a prerequisite for finding stable work and decent wages (Sergeant, 2009). In Kubota's (2011) study, executives of manufacturing companies that have overseas factories and/or offices reported that an average of 9.5% of employees write emails in English regularly. In job advertisements at the Employment Security Bureau in October 2007, only 1.4% of jobs in Tokyo required English skills. With the increase of foreigners working alongside the Japanese, more

English may be used in the workplace, but Japanese will still be the main language of the workplace in the foreseeable future. Japanese is just as firmly established as the language of business. In fact, one of the reasons why many businesspeople manage without English or other languages is because businesses in the region, i.e. Korea, Taiwan and China, often adopt the use of Japanese when working with the Japanese.

The picture in Singapore is very different. With the exception of unskilled positions, the vast majority of job advertisements are posted in English and English is of course a requirement, but more than that, the interview would be conducted in English and most of the tasks in one's work day would have to be performed in English. It is indispensable for all who aspire to make a comfortable living with a middle-class lifestyle. The economic superiority of English can also be seen in its contrast with Chinese. Since the beginning of the 20th century, Singaporeans who received a Chinese-medium secondary education had fewer opportunities for employment or tertiary education compared to their English-educated peers (Tong, 2010). Graduates from Chinese high schools were at a distinct disadvantage. Although there has been some improvement in the perceived economic value of Chinese due to the opening up of China and increase in business opportunities, the second-rate view of Chinese education and the Chinese-educated is still widely-held today.

The motivation to learn and use English, and the extent to which one accepts and identifies with English is very different for the Japanese and Singaporean Chinese. For the Singaporean Chinese, it is a matter of survival and livelihood. They also accept and identify with the language to the extent that many (32.6% in 2010 according to Table 1) are willing to use it as a home language. English is also a medium for the expression of the Singaporean identity, in the form of literary work, poetry, drama, film and music. For the Japanese on the other hand, English will probably be an additional language they use at work with foreign colleagues. The main language of the workplace and business will still be Japanese. It is unlikely that the Japanese will use English at home with their family or feel so at home with English that they use it to express the Japanese identity, at least not in the foreseeable future.

In a series of six surveys involving 465 respondents at Nagoya University (Morita, 2012, 2013a, 2013b, 2014), the author found that the Japanese language has a very strong and secure position in the minds of Japanese undergraduates compared to English. They see English and Japanese as languages to be used with different interlocutors and playing different roles:

'It is necessary for all Japanese to be able to speak English, but Japanese should use Japanese when talking to other Japanese.'

'It is important to be able to speak English, but Japanese should speak to each other in Japanese.'

'Japanese should come first, before English.'

Japanese undergraduates are also protective of Japanese

culture and identity:

'It is important to speak Japanese to protect the traditional Japanese culture.'

'Japanese should continue to be used to protect our identity, and what can be expressed in Japanese may not necessarily be expressible in English.'

They agree with the prediction in the previous paragraph that English may be used at work but Japanese will continue to be used as home language:

'It is possible that English will be used at work, but Japanese will continue to be used at home.'

We have seen in the case of the Singaporean Chinese that languages are carriers of values and can potentially change one's identity. In the Japanese context, the risks are relatively low and the potential benefits outweigh the risks. In addition to making intercultural interaction between the Japanese and foreigners possible, English brings with it other benefits. As Byram (2011) has shown with examples from Britain and Norway, English is not necessarily a threat to national identity. In fact, national identity can be strengthened in the context of foreign language learning:

'Language competence and intercultural understanding are an essential part of being a citizen. Children develop a greater understanding of their own lives in the context of exploring the lives of others. They learn to look at things from another perspective.'

(Key Stage 2 Framework for Languages 2005; cited in Byram, 2011)

'By learning (foreign) languages, pupils have opportunity to become familiar with other cultures. Such insight provides the basis for respect and increased tolerance, and contributes to other ways of thinking and broadens pupils' understanding of their own cultural belonging. In this way pupils' own identity is strengthened.'

(<http://www.utdanningsdirektoratet.no/dav78FB8D6918>. PDF - January 2005; cited in Byram, 2011 [link no longer exists])

Language learning is linked to learning about other cultures which will have a positive effect on students' tolerance and understanding. Language teaching plays a role in the creation of national identity, in that learning about other people gives us a stronger sense of who we are.

The grammar translation method is outdated and needs to be discontinued immediately. MEXT and educators need to take the lead in phasing out the method. University entrance examinations need to be improved and translation questions excluded. In most schools and universities, communication classes are already in place. The weaknesses described by Whitsed and Wright (2011) as 'appearance over substance' need to be improved and in general communication has to be given more priority. Future government rhetoric should provide a realistic picture of the role immigrants are going to play in counteracting the effects of the declining and aging population and the necessity of English in living and working alongside them. As we have seen in this paper that the risks of English causing a language and values shift are relatively low, there should be

fewer references to it in future government rhetoric. Government rhetoric has a strong influence on attitudes towards learning English and so they need to lead the way in making greater efforts to learn and use English.

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