Foreign Language Education Policy in Japan and England: Problems of Teaching Foreign Language Communication in Island Nations

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Introduction

Debates and discourse about foreign language policy are always about more than just how to improve practical language skills. Political, social, economic and cultural questions are never far below the surface. Choosing a particular foreign language for the young people of the nation to study may be a sign of the importance of that language for the perceived national interests of the state. Also, school subjects have to compete for limited space on the school timetable. Policy-makers who argue for a significant proportion of time spent on foreign languages, therefore, have to make a case for why the subject they are promoting is more important than other candidates.

Japan and Great Britain are both island nations with long histories. In both cases, the wall of water that separates them from the outside world can be invoked by nationalists as a powerful symbol of what separates them from the rest of the world. For these people, pride in their mother tongue is combined with an ambiguous attitude to the languages of other nations. In the Japanese case, nationalists recognize the importance of learning foreign languages, especially English. However, they are concerned that there should not be "too much" English imported into the country lest it dilute or undermine the native Japanese language. In the British case, too many people with influence in education dismiss foreign languages as unnecessary since the rest of the world can (or should—in their opinion) speak English.

This paper seeks to outline various problems relating to foreign language education policy in Britain and Japan. Because of limited space the discussion of issues relating to Britain will focus mostly on policy in Eng-

land.[1] The paper will be divided into three parts. It will start with a discussion of the biggest problems facing teachers and policy-makers in England and Japan. It will then move on to a discussion of nationalism and language policy. Finally there will be a section on university language teaching and university entrance exams. More attention in this paper is devoted to the Japanese case than the British case, because foreign languages occupy a much larger place in the curriculum in Japan at secondary, tertiary and adult levels.

Part I: Policy Problems in England and Japan

The Foreign Language Education Problem in England

One of the most serious problems facing those who try to promote foreign language education in England is the lack of a perceived need to learn foreign languages because "everyone speaks English." Advocates also regret the fact that foreign languages have recently been made optional at GCSE (General Certificate of Secondary Education, usually taken at the age of 16) level, meaning that any pupil who wants to can "drop" foreign language study after the age of fourteen and never pick it up again. The GCSE was introduced in 1988 as a replacement for the preceding exam system that separated "academic track" pupils who took the 'O' (Ordinary) level exam from the majority of boys and girls who took the CSE (Certificate of Secondary Education) exam. In foreign languages this was seen as an opportunity to correct some of the faults of the previous system. These faults were laid bare by an HMI (Her Majesty's Inspectorate) report of 1977. It stated that much foreign language learning was "characterized by some or all of the following features; under-performance in all four language skills; the setting of impossible or pointless tasks for average (and in particular less-able) pupils and their abandonment of modern language learning at the first opportunity; excessive use of English and an inability to produce other than inadequate or largely unusable statements in the modern language; inefficient reading skills; and writing limited to mainly mechanical reproduction which was often extremely inaccurate" (quoted in Jones 1994, p. 18).

1 Although there are crucial areas relating to language policy in Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and the Isle of Man that do not directly affect England, they will not be discussed in this paper.

Another obstacle for advocates of foreign language education is the fact that they are expensive subjects to teach at university level due to the intensive small-group teaching required and also to the need for students to spend one year in a country that speaks the target language. This topic will be discussed in more detail in part III of this paper.

The English Language Education Problem in Japan

In the teaching of numeracy and literacy and certain key subject areas like mathematics and science, the Japanese education system has come in for widespread praise. Unfortunately the same cannot be said for the teaching of foreign languages, or rather English since this is the first language of choice in almost all cases. Criticism of the methods used for teaching English is widespread. In addition to this, Japanese children and young people face some serious obstacles on the road to English proficiency. For example, they face the problem that there is little opportunity to use English outside the classroom. Most students studying English in Japan have very limited opportunities to practice English in "real" situations, i.e. where English is the appropriate method of communication between the student and another person.

There are also serious problems with the exam system. English exams for entrance to high school and university have often been blamed for encouraging students and their teachers to "study for the test." Since these exams mostly test factual knowledge of written English, they do not encourage the study of English as a tool for communication. In fact students who spend time on English conversation practice instead of exam preparation are actually risking adverse consequences in terms of their chances to advance to a good school or university through the exam system.

Problems with the formal English curriculum in schools and universities have led to complaints made by employers about the poor level of graduates' English. Traditionally the main mouthpiece on education for Japan's business community has been Keidanren (The Federation of Economic Organizations). A survey that it conducted of its member companies in 1999 found that their biggest concern from the perspective of industrial competitiveness was "the shortage of English language skills" of new recruits (Keidanren 2000: 19). Many also remarked upon the considerable time and cost they had to expend providing English language education themselves.

Keidanren, therefore, published a report the following year that called for a greater emphasis on communicative skills in language class in schools, for more native English speakers as teachers, and for smaller class sizes.

A flourishing private industry that shows the inadequacy of English education in formal educational institutions. There is a massive, private *eikaiwa* industry in Japan upon which Japanese people spend each year roughly 3000 billion yen (Gottlieb 2001: 44). Anthropologist, Brian McVeigh describes some of the English taught here as "fantasy English" (McVeigh 2000) but acknowledges that the success of the industry is due to the desire of many Japanese people to actually speak English, and their recognition that they cannot learn this in the formal education system.

Since at least 1987, formal English language education policy has emphasized improving communicative competence. The Japanese Ministry of Education has authorized changes in the curriculum that introduce oral communication in English classes in high school (see Ministry of Education, 2000). Reform efforts however have come up against the major problems. These problems include the cultures of learning and teaching in Japan. and the misuse of native-speakers of English. These issues are discussed below.

Problems Related to Cultures of Learning and Teaching in Japan

Teachers and policy-makers trying to introduce methods of communicative language teaching in the Japanese classroom face serious obstacles related to deeply rooted cultures of learning and teaching. Anthropologists, Thomas Rohlen and Gerald LeTendre wrote in *Teaching and Learning in Japan* (1996): "certain expressions or models of learning or teaching in Japan evoke expectations, patterns and associations that are identifiable across situations. Within these patterns, both teachers and learners express themselves in terms of certain ideal concepts that shape an inherent dialogue and guide attention to shared expectations" (p. 369). How do these models and patterns find expression in everyday classroom life? In order to avoid the pitfalls of analysis that relies too much on the illusory explanatory value of a 'large', monolithic, unchanging Japanese culture, this paper proposes to make use of the concept of 'small cultures' advanced by applied linguist Adrian Holliday for use in analyzing groups of learners and teachers involved in the foreign language education process (Holliday 1999). Within this paradigm, the term 'culture' refers to 'the composite of cohesive behaviour within any

social grouping, and not to the differentiating features of prescribed ethnic, national and international entities' (Holliday 1999: 247). With this paradigm we can examine a given group of Japanese people without having to assume that the fact of their 'Japaneseness' alone determines or restricts their behaviour. We can acknowledge, however, that the culture of the community they have grown up in as well as the culture of the particular institution or institutions where they spend the majority of their time will have an influence on the make-up of their 'small culture'.

In the case of a classroom group, Holliday writes that 'a small culture will form from scratch when the group first comes together, each member using his or her culture-making ability to form rules and meanings in collaboration with others' (Holliday 1999: 248). In the process of creating this 'small culture' members of the group may indeed make references to larger conceptions of ethnic or national culture. The strength of the 'small culture' paradigm is that it allows the researcher to observe members of the group justifying certain behaviour in the name of a larger culture (like the nation) without, on the one hand, simplistically accepting this as a *prima facie* explanation which requires no further comment, or, on the other hand, denying that it has any explanatory value at all, and is a mere smoke-screen for the real motivations of the people concerned. When a new class of language students comes together, the members will start forming the 'small culture' of their new group. Any experienced teacher knows that no two classes are identical, each one will have its own internal dynamics. In the case of a class in a Japanese high school or university, in the vast majority of cases, all or nearly all of the students will have spent all their lives growing up in Japan. Thus the norms and expectations of the new 'small culture' of the group will be heavily influenced by values relating to education that can be found in the wider community. There follows a list of customs, expectations and beliefs that inhibit the teaching of language as a communicative medium in Japan.

1. Deference to the authority of the teacher means that usually Japanese learners passively follow the instructions they are given. In the communicative foreign language classroom this attitude is an obstacle to those instructors who want to encourage students to experiment, stretch themselves intellectually and develop their own learning strategies.

2. The Japanese emphasis on humility means that students who have progressed further with the acquisition of English communication skills than others in their class are self-conscious about displaying their skills in front of their peers. There are cases of returnee students with excellent English skills who pretend to be poor at English in order to blend in to the group. English teachers can also be inhibited in displaying their skills in front of colleagues who have limited abilities. I have heard of cases where younger high school English teachers were told not to speak English in the teacher's room because it was causing more senior English teachers who had poor speaking skills to loose face.
3. The idea that there is one 'correct' answer or way of doing things also causes problems in the English classroom. Teachers who orally ask a student a question in English as part of a class activity often have to wait while the student sits in silence, racking his or her brain for the one correct answer. This phenomenon is made worse by the fact that school students are taught English first as a written language. When required to focus on spoken English they have a lot of trouble getting out of the habits they learned while studying the written language. They will try to "write" answers to questions in their heads before speaking. This habit is a barrier to the development of good, conversation skills. The problem is reinforced by the cultural trait of believing that when the teacher asks a question there must be one "correct" answer.
4. The egalitarian nature of education in Japan means that (at least in the formal education system) English is usually taught to mixed-ability groups. Given the fact that class size is usually large (in secondary and higher education English classes usually consist of 35-45 students, although at present many institutions are working hard to reduce class size), this means that the more-able students are held back. Students who have specific learning difficulties with languages are also disadvantaged by this system. The 'you-can-do-it-if-you-try' attitude leads these students and their parents and peers to believe that their lack of success at language learning is due to lack of effort. This can lead to misery for students who struggle with dyslexia and other problems related to language learning.

How does the researcher reconcile the fact that different nations have different cultures of teaching and learning with the fact that each classroom contains a unique combination of individual people? When western observers of Japanese high school classrooms comment that, compared to their own countries, the students are passive and reluctant to make contributions or ask questions, they are drawing attention to a general tendency, The 'small culture' paradigm allows the researcher to link this tendency to some of the national characteristics that were observed by Rohlen and LeTendre in their research. But it also allows the researcher to avoid the trap of believing that the culture of teaching and learning is a monolithic entity that smothers all educational activity throughout the whole nation of Japan. Instead we can see that the overwhelming majority of Japanese students when they take part in the creation of new learning groups on the first day of an academic year will behave, and expect others to behave, according to certain social norms that relate to their own formative experiences as infants and young children. These norms, in turn will be reinforced by the behaviour of the older children and adults with whom the newcomers interact. Returnee students, especially if they are only present in small numbers in the school, often have problems knowing how to behave because the Japanese norms of behaviour are different in important ways from those they have experienced in the schools they attended overseas (Goodman 1993).

The fact that in this paradigm, norms of behaviour are not considered monolithic is very important, when we move on to consider the cases when obstacles to establishing good communicative English teaching practice are overcome. An example of a successful programme aimed at improving communicative English teaching is the Super English Language High School (SELHi) programme organized and sponsored by MEXT (Ministry of Education: 2003). The aim is to establish 100 such schools, including at least one in all of Japan's 47 prefectures. The initial three-year pilot programme started in 2002 involved eighteen schools, fifteen public and three private. These schools were given extra resources from MEXT in return for conducting action research into the improvements in English teaching that they were undertaking. Most of these schools decided to focus their efforts on a select group of students. This means that some students are allowed to follow a special course where more time is devoted to English language study. Private high schools have always been able to do this. It is only through re-

cent policies of 'flexibilization' that public high schools have been allowed to follow suit. Reforms at the high school level, discussed in the 1980s and implemented in the 1990s now allow more flexibility and choice for schools, students and parents (Cave 2001). However, a backlash against these reforms fueled by fears that academic standards are falling has raised the possibility that some of the changes may be stalled or even reversed (Tsuneyoshi 2004). A return to rigid high school curricula would jeopardise efforts to improve English language teaching in public schools.

Parents who want their children to develop good English skill can choose private high schools that specialize in this area if they can afford it. Mejiro Gakuen high school in Tokyo is an example of a successful English language programme offered by a private high school. Students who take the special English course at this school do nine hours of English in their first year, ten hours in their second, and twelve hours in their third. Students who take this course must also participate on a twelve day study tour in Abingdon, Oxfordshire, UK that includes an eight-day home stay. As well as the authentic experience of an English-speaking country, students on this kind of programme are receiving roughly double the amount of classroom hours devoted to English compared to students at regular high schools. Clearly, public schools cannot include expensive foreign trips as part of the required language programme, but now, thanks to a more flexible national curriculum, they can offer some students the chance to focus more on English.

Those high schools that offer special courses in English language allow selected students who take those courses to concentrate on English and reduce the number of class hours spent on other subjects such as mathematics and science. This practice overcomes the twin obstacles of mixed-ability classes and shortage of time spent on the task that bedevil English language programmes at most high schools. It is also a practice that comes up against the egalitarian norm that was described earlier as one of the common characteristics of learning in Japan. For that reason schools that have adopted this kind of programme have encountered problems in breaking with tradition. For example the principal of Kanto International High School described how there was some resentment from teachers and staff in the school against those who were involved in the special English language programme [Speech given at the Japan Association for Language Teaching Annual Conference, Nara, 20th November, 2004]. In this case the process of breaking

with long-established norms about the 'correct' approach to learning was a painful one, but one that was successfully achieved. This kind of battle will have to be fought and won by more schools if English teaching is to be improved across the nation. One of the biggest problems with the existing curricula in all public junior high schools and most senior high schools is the lack of class time devoted to English (Hato 2005). It can be anticipated that this process of change in turn, if successful, could play a part in undermining the egalitarian norm as a national characteristic of education in Japan. This underlines the interconnectedness of education and social values that exists in every society.

Native-speaker Teachers in Japan

Native speakers of English are employed at all levels of the education system and in all types of schools. At each level of the system the criticism is the same: native speaker teachers are under-used and are not allowed to make the full contribution to communicative English learning of which they are capable (see McConnell 2000, chapter 5 for an analysis of this in the case of the JET programme). This situation is often made worse by discord and misunderstandings that arise between groups of native speaker teachers and Japanese teachers. The use of the 'small culture' paradigm (linked with national characteristics of teaching and learning values) is one appropriate heuristic approach to this issue. If 'small cultures' created by groups of Japanese teachers are based on their national values then the 'small cultures' of groups of foreign teachers are similarly based on their own national values related to education. In universities that have several foreign faculty members there may be differences in socialization patterns between the Japanese and the non-Japanese (Poole 2005: 256). At times of extreme tension or misunderstanding this factor can contribute to an 'us-versus-them' mentality between foreign teachers and their Japanese colleagues. It is clear that this kind of problem, when it arises, is another obstacle to progress in improving English teaching.

It is not inevitable that the 'small culture' of a group of Japanese teachers will exclude foreign teachers from membership. Many researchers, however, have written about the difficulties foreigners encounter when they try to join Japanese groups (for example Komisarof 2001). In the case of small groups of teachers in individual schools and universities this factor can con-

tribute to problems in organizing a coherent curriculum. Foreign teachers are often left to teach in their own style in the classroom while Japanese colleagues feel unwilling or unable to integrate their teaching with that of the foreigners. Also, foreign professors who have qualifications in applied linguistics and TEFL, and who could be a source of expertise in advanced English teaching methods in universities complain about being excluded from important decisions related to curricula design, assessment and so on. In some of these cases inadequate Japanese language skills on the part of the foreigner are an obstacle to their participation in decision-making bodies in the department or school.

The separation of foreign teachers from their Japanese colleagues is compounded by employment practices that often make the foreigner a temporary employee. Native foreign language teachers in universities are often hired on short-tem contracts that cannot be renewed beyond a certain limit regardless of qualifications, research output or teaching performance. In high schools the vast majority of native-speaker English teachers are employed as Assistant Language Teachers (ALTs), the majority of them on the JET programme which has a three-year limit (although there is currently a discussion underway to increase the limit to a maximum of five years in a limited number of cases). The social norms of Japanese groups place a heavy emphasis on long-term relationships. Therefore, in addition to all the other barriers in place that restrict foreigners' access to Japanese groups, the certain knowledge that the foreigner will not be around for very long must count as a major contributing factor.

In response to the widespread criticism of the practice of limiting the tenure of foreign teachers in high schools, various efforts have been made to allow more native foreign language teachers to enjoy the same security as their Japanese colleagues. MEXT has set aside a special budget to allow the hiring of foreign teachers permanently in public junior high schools. In private universities, however, the picture is one of less security for foreign and Japanese professors alike. As universities feel the financial squeeze brought about by demographic trends that reduce the number of potential students, conditions of employment have become less secure.

Part II. Nationalism and Foreign Language Policy

Writers on nationalism like Anderson (1983), Gellner (1983 and Hobsbawm (1990) have stressed the important link between national language and national identity in the development of the modern nation state. Starting in Europe, the modern nation states developed policies that would establish "standard" national languages within each country's borders. Domestically, this entailed the marginalization of non-standard dialects and languages, like the Welsh language in the UK or the Ainu or Okinawan languages in Japan. National polices towards "the other," i.e. the languages of foreign nations, also became a key issue. The study of foreign languages was essential for purposes of trade, information transfer, and diplomacy. However, national policy had to ensure that the foreign languages were kept in their place as secondary in importance to the mastery of a citizen's "native" language.

Language Policy and Nationalism in the UK

British nationalism has often been tied to the English language. However, centralized, coordinated policy has usually been lacking. Ager makes the following points.

> British language policies prior to the late 1980s were . . . disparate and fragmented. Initiatives were taken officially, but often locally: by Local Education Authorities or agencies such as the churches (for education in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland), by local councils, the Post Office, the police and the Home Office immigration service, by the publishing industry (in dictionaries and reference works), without central coordination and usually without legislative frameworks.

The introduction of the National Curriculum in 1988 for the first time established national policy on language education in schools. However, controversy surrounded later amendments of the curriculum that allowed pupils to drop all foreign language study after the age of fourteen. Some schools were accused of encouraging some students to drop "difficult" subjects like foreign languages at GCSE level because they would probably get lower

grades and therefore bring down the performance rating of the whole school. The GCSE results for each school go towards placing the school on the national "league table" where all schools are compared. The accusation has often been made that the *quantity* of good grades (A,B,C) has become all important, encouraging schools to guide many pupils away from more challenging subjects like foreign languages where they might not achieve top grades. An unintended consequence of national policy, therefore, has been to reduce the number of children studying foreign languages to intermediate levels or above.

National foreign language policy is also closely tied to perceived national strategic or economic interests. For example, extra funding for Russian language study was made available during the Cold War. Currently increases in funding for are being made for Chinese language study and the languages of Eastern Europe and the Middle East. This topic will be covered in more detail in part III.

Language Policy and Nationalism in Japan

The Japanese government has held for sometime that improvements in English language aptitude are necessary for reasons of national interest. However some linguists for example Suzuki Takeo of Keio University and Tsuda Yukio of Tskuba University oppose this policy because they want to resist "English language imperialism", and they want to defend the Japanese language and culture. The title of one of Tsuda's books on this topic is "a recommendation for bad English"(Tsuda 2000). It argues that Japanese people should be proud of their inability to learn English properly.

These authors are concerned that Japanese people are over-eager to learn English and to absorb western culture. Suzuki (in Suzuki 1999) places the problem in an historical context by pointing out that when Japan was forced out of a state of self-imposed isolation at the end of the Edo period the new government decided that it was in its own interest to take knowledge and skills from the west. In order to do this it had to use the medium of the main languages of the west namely English German and French. The key point here for Suzuki is that these languages were not forced upon the Japanese by a colonial administration or a conquering army. Rather, they were seized on by Japan's elite as a way of furthering national development. Because these languages became a passport to development and power they

came to be glorified by the Japanese people.

Following the Second World War the overwhelming influence of the United States on Japan's rebuilding programme meant that the English language came to be emphasised at the expense of French and German. The postwar development of English as a global lingua franca furthered this trend so much so that the present day glorification of western culture is based on the medium of English. Both authors refer to the phenomenon of *eigo shinkō* or "English worship." Tsuda refers to this glorification as a kind of illness and likens it to "Stockholm Syndrome" the process by which the victims of a hijacking or a kidnapping can sometimes come to identify with and feel affection for their captors (Tsuda, 2000: pp 189-191). Both Suzuki and Tsuda believed that the glorification of a foreign culture goes hand in hand with an inferiority complex towards one's own language and culture. After doing research on some exchange students in Hawaii, Tsuda asserts that Japanese women in particular are guilty of this attitude (Tsuda 2000: chapter three).

Suzuki makes a distinction between civilisations that are autonomous (*jiritsugata*) and those that are "heteronomous" (*taritsugata*). The former are self-sufficient and mature whereas the latter are dependent upon more powerful or sophisticated civilisations for many things. He says that present-day Japan in terms of goods and money is autonomous, but in spiritual terms is heteronomous (Suzuki, 1999: pp. 27-28). The worship of English combined with an inferiority complex about Japanese are symptomatic of this state of affairs.

The promotion of national pride combined with attacks on an education system which, it is claimed, undermine this pride have been salient features of recent efforts by nationalist groups to change Japanese education policy. One thing that the nationalists discussed in this paper have in common with the nationalists who are behind the new revisionist school history textbook that caused such international controversy in 2001 is this concern with overcoming a perceived "inferiority complex" or "masochistic" tendency in existing education policy. In its place they want to teach Japanese children to have pride in their national identity.

Part III. Foreign Language Teaching in Universities

Foreign Language Teaching in Universities in the UK

There are about 320 colleges and universities that offer higher education degrees in the UK at present. Foreign language teaching is mostly high quality and very specialized. Unlike their counterparts in Japan, British students do not normally study a foreign language unless it is part of their major area of study. This means that only some institutions offer some languages: for example, seventeen universities offer Italian as a single honors subject and thirty-one offer German. The way that universities in the UK are funded has encouraged them to focus on those courses that either bring in large amounts of research funding, or are popular with large numbers of students that can be cheaply taught. This is a problem for foreign languages. They cannot draw in the research funding that science and technology departments can bring in, and difficult languages like Chinese, Japanese or Arabic are expensive to teach because they require a low teacher-student ratio, a large number of contact hours and also expensive travel budgets for students and staff. European languages are less expensive to teach, but still require a low teacher-student ratio.

Many people have noticed the serious lack of funding given to area studies departments dedicated to Asia and the Middle-East. Hugh Cortazzi, who was British ambassador to Japan from 1980 to 1984 wrote an opinion article for Japan Times on July 30, 2003, in which he criticized the decision to close the Institute of East Asian Studies at Durham. In regard to this decision he made the following remarks.

> The decision to close the Durham department was particularly deplorable. University authorities blamed the Higher Education Funding Council [HEFCE], which responded that it was up to the university. The university informed institutions with which it had exchanges in Japan and China of its decision before informing staff! Even worse was its failure to consult with donors to the department, including the Japan Foundation, the Daiwa Anglo-Japanese Foundation [大和日英基金] the Great Britain Sasakawa Foundation and NSK Ltd.

Hugh Cortazzi and others asked people to write to Durham University to complain about the closure of the East Asia Institute. Many people did so, and there was much criticism of the decision in the media. However, the closure of the institute went ahead.

One year later the British education minister, Charles Clarke finally succumbed to intense pressure relating to the crisis in East-Asian studies and in other vital areas that were under threat from the new higher education funding scheme, and ordered a major review of five key subject areas in a bid to stop them dying out.

The five subject areas are:

- Arabic and Turkish languages and Middle-East area studies for "strategic security".
- Japanese and Chinese languages and East-Asia area studies for "business and trade purposes."
- Science, technology, engineering and mathematics for "maintaining the UK's excellent science base."
- Vocationally oriented courses of interest to employers.
- Area studies and language course relating to East Europe and the Baltic States because of the accession of some of these countries to the EU.

When Clarke announced this review he recognized that the government policy of encouraging individual universities to focus more sharply on their particular research strengths had had detrimental effects in the above-mentioned areas. Therefore it was necessary for the government to intervene to protect subject areas which may be in the national interest to preserve. He said "any sensible government needs to take a long-term view of what our students are studying and whether we have enough graduates in the subjects needed to help our economy and society thrive." (Guardian, December 1, 2004).

The review announced by Clarke was led by Sir Gareth Roberts and issued a report in June 2005. In relation to area studies in the areas mentioned above the report concluded that government intervention was required because these subjects were strategically crucial to the nation but were very vulnerable to closure because of the small size of departments. However, the

report also said that it was only necessary to secure one or two centres for each subject in order to secure critical needs.

In order to provide more funds for these area-studies centres the review announced that the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) and the Higher Education Funding Council (HEFCE) were putting forward £22million over a period of five years. The review stated the following:

> The overarching aim of this new initiative is to create a world class cadre of researchers who have the language skills to undertake contextually informed research that will ultimately enhance the UK's understanding of the following areas:
> - The Arabic Speaking World,
> - China,
> - Japan, and
> - Eastern Europe, including areas of the former Soviet Union.

This crisis over the provision of foreign language education for "difficult" languages is one example of the law of unintended consequences. Departments that specialize in these languages do not fit neatly into either the model used normally by the humanities or by the sciences.

Foreign Language Teaching in Universities in Japan

English teaching at the university level in Japan has been the target of intense criticism. Japanese employers in particular have become impatient with having to take on cohort after cohort of supposedly high-level students who are seriously lacking in communicative English language ability. By making use again of Holliday's 'small culture' paradigm discussed in part one above we can examine how groups of professors who have responsibility for English teaching in their universities place their priorities and values in areas other than the furtherance of the English language abilities of the students in their care. This analysis is not aimed at the small number of university departments in Japan that have an excellent record of teaching English. It is rather aimed at the majority of universities where English is a compulsory part of the curriculum for the first two years of study. It is the students who take these courses that Japanese employers are mostly complaining about.

Many professors who teach English language are actually specialists in English literature or another academic discipline that does not require expertise in the teaching of foreign languages. They are therefore often lacking in basic training and knowledge related to teaching English as a foreign language. In addition to this, some professors in four-year universities regard the teaching of practical communicative English as a job for *senmon gakkō* [technical colleges] or the *eikaiwa* schools. For these professors, teaching the skills necessary for English conversation is beneath their academic dignity. People who are placed in a situation where they are required to teach, but who lack any training in teaching often think back to the ways in which they were taught. University professors in Japan, therefore can often be found to be continuing with styles of lecturing that are out of date compared to modern methods of education. At present pressure is being put on these professors to improve their teaching and pay more attention to the needs of students (Poole 2005: 263).

Groups of professors, for example those in a particular department or faculty, will usually have a 'small culture' that emphasizes the national characteristic of deference to those in authority. This norm is a severe obstacle to professors giving feedback to other professors about teaching techniques. Resistance is further compounded by desires to preserve professional autonomy. Although there are now considerable efforts underway in Japanese universities aimed at improving teaching across the entire curriculum, these efforts are hampered by this kind of resistance. On the other side of the equation, however, the increasing tendency for Japanese academics to have part of their education abroad is having a marked effect on the 'small cultures' of some faculty common rooms. Professors who have experience of foreign universities may challenge some of the standard Japanese norms of behaviour if they believe that these are counter-productive from the point of view of the academic and professional health of the institution. This kind of foreign influence may bring about some change to foreign language teaching as well as other kinds of teaching in Japan in the future.

Survey of University Students in Two National Universities in Japan

In order to get the students' perspective, I conducted a short survey of attitudes to English among second-year students in Nagoya University

and Shiga University between 2001 and 2002. The students were studying for majors in either Economics (both universities) or Engineering (Nagoya only). As is common for almost all students at four-year universities in Japan, the students had to study English as a compulsory subject for their first two years. Although the students at both universities would be considered above-average academically, I found there were serious problems of motivation when it came to English. The survey was one way of finding reasons for this problem.

All students had been studying English for at least seven years (three years at junior high school, three years at senior high school, and their first year at university). Question three in the survey asked them to state their main purpose for studying English at the present time. They were allowed to answer that question freely (in English). For all the classes at both universities the largest category of answer to this question was "speak/communicate with foreigners." Only a small percentage of answers (10% in Shiga and 4% in Nagoya-Economics, 5% Nagoya-Engineering) said that the main reason was to get the required credit (necessary for graduation). However this answer did not square with most teachers' experience of serious motivational problems among the students. If their real motivation was to communicate with foreigners, then why not put more effort into improving communication skills, including work outside the classroom? A clue to solving this dilemma might be found in the answer to the next question on the survey. This asked what the main purpose of English study had been at senior high school. Again they were free to write any answer. In the case of the Shiga students 71%, and in the case of Nagoya 61% (Economics) and 79% (Engineering) the answer was "to prepare for the entrance exam." Students will have had to have taken the English "Center exam" as well as the Shiga University or Nagoya University English entrance exam in order to enter these universities. Could there be a link between the kind of study students do for university entrance exams and the problems they then encounter when studying English after arrival at university? At this point it is worth considering the nature of the English language exams that are set to determine university entrance. A case can be made that the habits of language study picked up by high school students as they strive to pass difficult, written exam papers are not conducive to the successful study of English as a communicative language.

University Entrance Exams in Japan

I have written in more detail about the university entrance exam system elsewhere (see Aspinall 2005). As far as English language teaching is concerned many language teachers complain that the style of exam most commonly used hampers efforts to teach communicative English in the classroom. Most of the questions in English language university entrance exams are concerned with grammar, vocabulary and reading ability. In an effort to expand the scope of skills tested by exams listening components have recently been introduced by more and more individual universities and by the national centre exam system. Also, some testing of pronunciation takes place in national English exams. However, the structure of the questions related to the pronunciation and stress of English words, is seriously flawed. The following typical kinds of question have been taken from the English Centre Exam of January 2007.

Problem Number One, Part A: Choose the word which has an underlined part that is pronounced **differently** from the underlined parts in the other words.

1.	assure	classic	efficient	social
2.	abroad	approach	coast	throat
3.	ghost	graphic	phrase	tough

[The correct answers are 'classic', 'abroad', and 'ghost'.]

In my opinion the difference in pronunciation in the case of question 2 is a very fine one. Anyway, does knowing the pronunciation of individual words help students in their actual speaking? Teachers preparing students for this kind of question are still teaching them *about* the language, rather then getting them immersed in it. A diligent candidate who has memorized the pronunciation of a large number of words could score well on this question but be unable to actually speak the words accurately in the course of a real conversation.

Problem Number One, Part B: In the following two questions choose the list of three words where one word has the most-stressed syllable in a **different** position from the other two.

1.1.	en-ve-lope	fur-ni-ture	hor-ri-ble
2.	ma-te-ri-al	psy-chol-o-gy	re-mark-a-ble
3.	ef-fec-tive	in-ter-view	rec-og-nize
4.	em-bar-rass-ment	li-brar-i-an	phi-los-o-phy

[The correct answer is number 3]

2.1.	gram-mat-i-cal	in-tel-li-gent	i-so-la-tion
2.	beau-ti-ful	bi-cy-cle	in-stru-ment
3.	ca-pac-i-ty	en-vi-ron-ment	i-den-ti-fy
4.	ben-e-fit	in-di-cate	op-po-site

[The correct answer is number 1]

It is very hard to imagine what the practical purpose of questions like this might be. Once again, this question reflects the established practice of English language teaching in Japan—that it is teaching *about* the language. The teacher and students are talking about some remote body of knowledge that has no relevance to their daily lives. It is as if English were the language of some long-dead civilization. In this context the discussion of how the words are broken up into different syllables and the stress of the syllable will vary from word to word makes sense. However as a tool of practical English communication, the above exercise is a criminal waste of the language learner's time.

Conclusion

This paper has discussed the contrasting problems facing foreign language education policy in England and Japan. The nature of English as a global language affects policy in both cases. In the former case it can be used as an excuse by many who, when given the option, elect not to study any foreign language at all. In the latter case the ambitions many have to learn English can be thwarted by the fact that it is absent from the realities of their daily lives. The "island nation" character of both countries' histories has left contrasting legacies. England, through its maritime empire spread the English language throughout the world. Japan, on the other hand, with its

"closed nation" policy of the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries cut itself off from the outside world. With its late emergence as a major power, Japan's leaders realized the necessity of learning foreign languages, especially English, in order to learn from technically more advanced nations. However, for most Japanese people, foreign languages had to be learned at a distance. For practical reasons of knowledge-transfer, skills relating to the translation of written documents were emphasized. There was no reason to learn English conversation (except for a small elite) because there was no one to talk to. The legacy of this system is a school and exam system that emphasizes the understanding of written English: students study *about* the English language, without learning how to *use* it. Efforts to change this emphasis have come up against institutional inertia, nationalist objections and obstacles relating to the culture of teaching and learning in Japan. Many of those who do succeed in learning good English communication skills do so in spite of the system, not because of it.

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