

Second Language Acquisition and Current Trends in Japan: The Cultural Risks

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Abstract

This paper discusses second language acquisition with reference to periphery countries and the effects of English on culture and language. It includes a brief history of the spread of English as an international language and reasons why many countries are creating English language programs. Globalisation and communication advances since the 1990s are discussed with particular reference to their effects on Japanese society, culture and language. Many countries have decided to protect their national identities while simultaneously implementing English language programs that suit the needs of their people. Successful policies have taken into account the relationship between language and culture and the dangers of creating programs that do not consider the consequences of acculturation. It is important for Japanese policy makers to study the experiences and actions of other non-English countries, the current research available and pertinent language programs worldwide in order to formulate a viable English program that produces bilingual graduates literate in both English and Japanese. An effective English language program will incorporate theory, practice and the experiences of other countries, applied to the needs and nature of Japan and its people.

In the years following World War II the Government of Japan and its people have been struggling with evolutionary processes aimed at achieving a greater national awareness of world wide cultural diversity and proficiency in English. The Government of Japan refers to this quest as 'global literacy'. Considering the current trend towards the globalisation of markets and communications, these aspirations appear worthwhile and valuable. However, it is only after studying the posture from which these trends evolved that Japan can develop informed national policies regarding teacher training, early childhood education programs and curriculum, based on current research, experiences in other countries and explicit national language goals.

Similar educational goals have been followed for generations in other countries, which in turn, allow these countries to participate more actively in the diplomatic arena, since their nationals hold positions of international importance and are able to participate more fully in the exchange of international ideas and dialogue. A side effect of the lack of English proficiency in Japan can be demonstrated pointedly with the fact that although Japan contributes 20 percent of total U.N. dues, Japanese United Nations employees only equal a fraction of the number that would represent that financial contribution (Hanai 2000).

The realities of modern day globalisation and economic interdependency are important factors in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching today. Most industrialized countries value American concepts of economics and lifestyle, and the development of the American capitalistic system has been beneficial, particularly to the Group of Seven Industrialized Nations (G7). The system has created a massive middle class society within the industrialized world, with the ability to live well above the economic standards of their predecessors. In the last half of the Twentieth Century, English has become more and more important as a significant factor leading to economic growth and stability. In the last decade, with the advent of the World Wide Web and cyberspace communication, English is seen as an essential tool for economic stability and political presence in the Twenty-first Century. Some countries, which experienced British or American imperialism a century earlier, are now well positioned to participate globally, since English is already established as their second language.

The reasons for learning English as a second or foreign language today, are often not discussed or considered in depth. On the surface, the economic and political importance of English acquisition often outweighs any serious considerations into why or more importantly, how it should be acquired. English has come to symbolize wealth and success, as well as political, intellectual and economic power. Speed and rapid decision-making characterize this new high tech age. If a company, government or country wants to ensure economic success in this global village, it seems imperative that the population acquire English quickly and proficiently. This may be true, but certainly there must be other factors that have traditionally led to economic success. If this were not the case, India or the Philippines

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would be a member of G7 and Japan would be a developing nation. Clearly there are other factors that traditionally contributed to national wealth and prosperity such as first language literacy, work ethic, birth rate, education and social stability. As national policy and pressure from the business community pushes English programs into the Japanese educational system, it is necessary to understand why it is being implemented, and also assess what, if any cultural compromises will result.

The advent of the computer age has certainly been a factor in the increased pressure to learn English as a foreign language. Cyberspace is quickly becoming the international storage and retrieval centre of most academic, economic and political information. Accessibility has increased at a momentous rate, but only for individuals with English ability (Phillipson: 57-58). If countries want access to current research, trends, ideas or attitudes, they must have individuals who are proficient in English. The acquisition of English as a means to further economic success and political acumen may be a reality, but national planners must know and understand exactly why they believe that English proficiency is necessary and more importantly how any implementations will affect national culture and identity. Although English as an International Language is a world phenomena, each country must deal with the reality in a slightly different manner. Educational policies must be tailored to the economic needs and cultural situation of the individual country.

With regard to Japan, the dilution of culture would not be a result of the goals themselves, but rather a result of the underlying attitudes of young Japanese people today. Adults are able to objectively study other cultures and languages as a mind expanding and interesting pursuit, whereas, many young Japanese have a desire to learn English and study North American and European cultures in order to become more Western. Dr. Takeo Doi (85) points out that "the Japanese, while they may sometimes react to foreign trends so sensitively as to seem servile and adulating, also seem to manage somehow to maintain their own preferences." This may not be true in the 21st Century. A current trend that poses a serious threat to future generations is the apparent devaluation of Japanese culture and values by young people. This should not result in a xenophobic reaction that would lead to any cancellation of existing English education policies, but in an increased emphasis on equally important and balanced programs to promote Japanese culture and history, Japanese language purity and a high level of competency in kanji. These social trends and educational purposes must be analysed thoroughly, in order to implement second language programs that will enhance rather than dilute Japanese culture.

Since 1951 and the signing of the United States-Japan Security Treaty, the two countries have maintained an unusual and somewhat imbalanced relationship. Certainly Japan was offered a large and lucrative market in the west and in particular the United States. In return, however, Japan opened its doors to western culture, policies and perspectives, and in particular American social and political influences.

One of the main concerns after 1945 was Japanese economic recovery, and from this point of view, the partnership with United States was obviously a success. Even taking into account the doldrums of the 1990s, few Japanese would want to revert back to pre-1945 political or economic systems. Yet, American society does not offer up only economic benefit. Unfortunately, along with Hollywood motion pictures and fast food chains, comes a far different social conscience, and with it, far greater social instability. Western influence is starting to show its darker side in the Japan of the new millennium:

"In 1997, youths aged fourteen to nineteen, who constituted just 9 percent of Japan's population, committed 34 percent of all murders and robberies and fully 45 percent of violent crimes. Nearly four-fifths of young miscreants lived with both parents, and about 90 percent could be described as thoroughly middle class. To the shock of most adults, adolescents arrested for theft reported that their main motive simply was to get money for entertainment. As the Japanese became materially affluent, the social commentators cried, they seemed to become spiritually bankrupt (McClain: 621)."

These statistics may be a direct result of western cultural influences or an indirect result of Japanese cultural erosion. Somehow, Japanese policy makers and educators have to combine the economic successes of the past fifty years, with a balanced philosophy of what it means to be Japanese. As the school system embarks in the spring of 2002, on a new and possibly more intensive English program from elementary school upward, the cultural dynamic of foreign language learning at an early age and the influences of foreign English teachers on the attitudes of young children should be seriously considered. How programs are implemented and through what content English is being

taught are extremely important issues. According to Skutnabb-Kangas, the foreign teacher who enters the classroom is already in a position of power as 'the sensei'. The teacher carries additional prestige as the speaker of English. Usually second language acquisition also includes learning about the cultures of English countries, which opens the door to teachers, albeit innocently, giving the impression that English ways are better, rather than different.

Culture refers to the wide and varied influences that have shaped an area or country. It envelops historical, political, social and environmental factors that in turn create a sense of belonging and distinctiveness. The extent to which language is a part of culture is clear on at least three levels. J.A. Fishman (qtd. in Baker: 86) describes the relationship between language and culture as:

" 1) A language indexes its culture. A language and its attendant culture will have grown up together over a long period of history, and be in harmony with each other. Thus the language that has grown up round a culture best expresses that culture. Its vocabulary, idioms, metaphors are the ones that best explain at a cognitive and emotive level that culture. 2) A language symbolizes its culture.... A language tends to symbolize the status of that language. For example, to speak English in Kuwait following the victory against Saddam Hussein of Iraq was to be symbolically associated with status, power and victory. Speaking English often symbolizes money and modernity, affluence and achievement. English may also symbolize colonial subjugation. 3) Culture is partly created from its language. Much of a culture is enacted and transmitted verbally. The songs, hymns, prayers of a culture, its folk tales and shrewd sayings, its appropriate forms of greeting and leaving, its history, wisdom and ideals are all wrapped up in its language. The taste and flavour of a culture is given through its language. Its memories and traditions are stored in its language."

Globalisation has brought with it dynamic language contact and conflict worldwide. This has resulted in language shifts in a number of countries and language maintenance has become a central issue with many ethnic groups and national governments: "Ethnic groups regularly use language as one of their most significant identifying features.... Most ethnic groups believe that their language is the best medium for preserving and expressing their traditions (Spolsky: 57)." Attempts to reverse language shift can be an emotional issue, resulting in non-productive negative backlashes that hinder economic and political strength. Japanese educators and policy makers must be cognisant of the power of a language. English language programs certainly do need to improve if Japan wants a greater percentage of its people to be functionally bilingual, yet a strong and academically rich Japanese language program must be maintained. Otherwise, along with learning English as a foreign language, young students will also begin to incorporate English cultural norms into their daily lives, to the detriment of their own culture (Apple: 44). An official French study points out the enormous influence international English language policies have on cultural norms (Haut Conseil de la Francophonie: 341). Therefore, to maintain a rich and pure language is to maintain a rich and pure culture, and thus, in learning a second language individuals will come to understand a second culture in more depth.

This form of indoctrination has not been lost on American policy makers. One director of the United States Information Agency described its mission "to further the achievement of US foreign policy objectives.... by influencing public attitudes abroad in support of these objectives.... through personal contact, radio broadcasting, libraries, television, exhibits, English language instruction.... (Coombs: 60)"

Much like the old sociological arguments of heredity versus environment, there are theories in linguistics, which argue that language determines thought (linguistic determinism) versus culture determines language. Edward Sapir and Benjamin Whorf claim that one's mother tongue determines the way one views the world. They theorize that our outlook on life is innately fused to the categories and structure of our first language, which is the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis. It is agreed today that different languages and cultures do reflect various and differing worldviews. (Yule) Therefore, individuals will judge and react to others differently, depending on how they perceive the person. These perceptions are very much linked to language use and body language. Skutnabb-Kangas find one form of prejudice that they term as 'linguicism' as the common idea that prestige world languages such as standard English are intrinsically better than other less economically powerful languages. If English is seen as intrinsically better, then it is a small step indeed to view English culture as intrinsically better as well. This knowledge can be a powerful tool in promoting English and therefore American or Western political viewpoints throughout the world.

National policies to promote a second or foreign language and create generations of young people cognisant of other peoples and their cultures are noble purposes in which few educators find fault, but policy makers must ensure that the goals are meeting national needs and not simply serving the purposes of others.

With young Japanese children, it is important that a foreign language be taught through Japanese cultural content. As the new government mandate suggests, English should be taught without the use of katakana, which only hinders clarity in pronunciation. It should also be taught in a Japanese context. If the program encompasses American holidays, ways of life, entertainment and famous American individuals, then it is not simply teaching a foreign language. It is subtly and intrinsically propagating American culture. Young children are very susceptible to new information and such Americanisation, not balanced with a firm rooting in Japanese values and beliefs, could erode the valuable side of Japanese culture. A foreign language is simply a new way to communicate with more people, and Japanese people speaking English should still be communicating through their unique Japanese and eastern perspective. English can be taught through discussions of famous Japanese individuals, Japanese historical events and the significance of Japanese traditions. Knowledge of American holidays, religious rituals or famous individuals is general knowledge or cultural appreciation that should be taught to young adults, after they have a sound knowledge of their own cultural identity. Traditionally, many other countries have taught foreign cultural appreciation to young children in elementary school. The knowledge of other countries and their people is enriching and important, but the programs are balanced and each country is given equal allotment of curriculum time. With the current global changes and the inundation of American cultural influences on foreign countries, it is very important that social studies curriculum balance this influence with education concerning other countries of the world. Japanese society, and in particular Japanese young people are strongly influenced by western culture and values already. It is important that these influences are not inadvertently reinforced through English language classes within the school system. Serious national reflection may not change national policy, but an understanding of the factors influencing government decisions will build a stronger foundation on which to place further English language policy.

Second language acquisition and second language learning are used interchangeably in the field of Applied Linguistics and Language Education. Some researchers differentiate between acquisition and learning (Krashen 1976). A first language is acquired through total immersion, usually with no formal training and with family and friends as tutors. Whereas 'learning' connotes some form of formal or classroom situation where a second language is sequentially and systematically 'taught'. There is ongoing research to try and simulate first language acquisition in the second language classroom. Observing the ways in which a child acquires a first language, it is clear that the methods are varied and less structured. Acquisition can be successful through any number of styles and settings. For the purpose of this discussion second language acquisition refers to the learning or acquiring of a second or foreign language both in formal and informal settings, since that is the ideal language classroom situation.

Until the middle of the 20th Century, second language acquisition emphasized reading and writing proficiency, because most international communication was made by way of letters and documents. Official visits from one country to another were an expensive and time-consuming undertaking. The traditional Grammar-Translation Method worked well in school systems worldwide. Individuals in positions of power were proficient in their first language as well as in written French or English.

With the advent of improved modes of transportation, international travel became more frequent and it became obvious in the 1960s that this Grammar-Translation Method was not producing individuals who could speak a second language. Methods in language teaching began to change, with Lambert in Canada pioneering such approaches as Language Immersion.

Although Japanese students receive formal English training beginning in junior high school, their English conversation skills are poor. This is partly a result of archaic Grammar-Translation teaching methods. Grammar-Translation methodology would have worked well in the Meiji Period (1866-1912), but does not serve the language needs of Twenty-first Century Japan. Secondly, the low performance of Japanese students' English speaking and listening skills are a result of first culture interference. Japanese culture is intrinsically entwined in ritual, style and form. In many circumstances the form in which something is uttered, rather than the words or message, actually conveys the meaning. By the age of puberty, young Japanese students are cognisant of the importance of form and style in their mother tongue. This preoccupation with the form rather than the message hinders their ability to experiment with a second language comfortably.

It is important for Japanese educators not to confuse approach (message versus form) with method (product versus process). Methodology in any country reflects the greater social order. There is a tendency to believe that the teaching methods in some periphery countries that approach teaching from a teacher-centred, product-oriented realm may be the reason for low second language proficiency. There is not enough research to support that assumption. Learner-centred teaching approaches of many English-speaking countries reflect the political and social situations in those countries. They should not necessarily be viewed as progressive, but rather methods that suit children in that particular country. Teacher-centred, product-oriented classrooms may very well reflect the social norms and agenda of Japanese society at large. It may not be necessary for Japanese teachers to reflect on their teaching methods, but rather on their teaching approach. Changing the approach from an emphasis on reading and writing to an emphasis on speaking and listening will in turn change the eventual product (English speaking students). At an Asia-Pacific Conference concerning English proficiency, Chongkittavoon Kaui pointed out: "What surprised me in Japan is that the form of learning English is like a ritual, but in Thailand when you speak in English you just say anything you want, as long as you can communicate (Hani)." For many years, Japanese school programs and educators have worked in reverse, emphasizing the form over the message.

The solution is not necessarily more native English speaking teachers, although a certain number of well-trained, culturally sensitive foreign teachers may be necessary at various stages of language learning. A more long term and beneficial solution would be Japanese teachers, proficient in English and competent in modern teaching techniques. Furthermore, in order for these teachers to be successful, the Japanese system of university entrance exams should not include archaic and unusual English grammar testing, but would be better served if university entrance required a minimum TOEIC score. This would alleviate pressure on teachers to 'teach to the university test', therefore, allowing them to teach conversational English. If students required a minimum TOEIC (or equivalent test) score, it would put the onus on the student rather than the school system. It would increase student motivation and be extremely cost efficient.

The advent of computer technology and global use has particularly affected countries whose language does not use an alphabet. Students today are not writing kanji as frequently as the previous generations. As a result of various pressures on the educational system standards of kanji proficiency have dropped. Secondary school entrance requirements dropped in 2002 from proficiency in 1000 kanji characters to proficiency in 700 characters. Teachers are well aware that kanji ability is dropping and more and more students can read some characters, but cannot write them. It is not inconceivable that future generations will be speaking Japanese while reading and writing in hiragana only. At this point, the Japanese language could be threatened. Although, this dilution of language is partly a result of computer technology, it does not bode well when combined with increasing pressure to learn a second language and mass media globalisation.

Ms. O-Son-Fa, chief researcher at GLOCOM (International University Global Communication Center), warns of the possible ramifications to Japanese language and culture based on the Korean experience. After World War II, Korea replaced kanji with the hangul alphabet. She points out that only 2 % of the total volumes in the Library of Seoul are read today, because 80% of Korean words are of kanji origin. She is concerned about cultural deterioration through oversimplification of the Korean language (Kobakan: 1).

The field of Applied Linguistics and English as a Second (Foreign) Language (ESL/EFL) has expanded at a tremendous rate in the past two decades, but few researchers and policy makers have stopped to ask 'Why English?' In our economic evolution, it may be an efficient and necessary fact that we must be able to communicate internationally with one language, but countries should have a clear understanding of why they are promoting English, the benefits resulting and the methods to combat cultural homogenisation. Unfortunately, the 'one language policy' combined with American economic success has resulted in serious erosion of other world cultures and languages. Experts estimate that 420 languages are on the verge of extinction worldwide (Grimes). Two obvious examples of the power of language, specifically English, are the resulting loss of indigenous culture in the Philippines and Guam. In the Philippines:

"with the imposition of the English language, the country became dependent on a borrowed language that carries with it the dominant ideology and political-economic interests of the United States. With the dependence of the country on a borrowed language, it became dependent too on foreign theories and methods underlying the borrowed language, thus resulting in a borrowed consciousness. The people's values were then

more easily modified so that they equate foreign interest with national interest. Thus it became easier for the United States to further subjugate the Filipino people and impose its will on them (Enriquez and Marcelino: 3)."

"In an article entitled 'ESL: a factor in linguistic genocide' (Day 1980), the experience of Guam is described. In 1906, eight years after the island was ceded to the United States, an English-only policy... was introduced. In 1922, the indigenous language, Chamorro, was prohibited (Phillipson: 153)." Today, Chamorro is an official language of Guam, but it is seen as unimportant economically and although school programs are attempting to reintroduce young Guamanian students to their former mother tongue, the cultural damage is complete.

Governments and policy makers can prevent this cultural erosion if they know and understand the reasons why English has become the international lingua franca. One Director of the Center for Applied Linguistics in Washington D.C. has offered this explanation:

"From a minor language in 1600, English has in less than four centuries come to be the leading language of international communication in the world today. This remarkable development is ultimately the result of 17th, 18th, and 19th century British successes in conquest, colonization, and trade, but it was enormously accelerated by the emergence of United States as the major military world power and technological leader in the aftermath of World War II. The process was also greatly abetted by the expenditure of large amounts of government and private foundation funds in the period 1950-1970, perhaps the most ever spent in history in support of the propagation of a language (qtd. in Phillipson: 7)."

Britain and the United States have established large departments and councils directly responsible to their central governments, with clear mandates to promote the English language abroad. Although power shifted after World War II from an empire centred in Britain to an emerging power base centred in the United States, it was clear that the interests of both countries hinged on similar policies. As early as the 1930s, the benefits of English language propagation to the centre of the empire, both economically and politically, were made clear. The British Council, a massive force in the study and spread of the English language today, began in 1935. The Prince of Wales concisely stated its aim at the official inauguration ceremonies when he said:

"The basis of our work must be the English language... (and) we are aiming at something more profound than just a smattering of our tongue. Our object is to assist the largest number possible to appreciate fully the glories of our literature, our contribution to the arts and sciences, and our pre-eminent contribution to political practice. This can be best achieved by promoting the study of our language abroad.... (Phillipson: 138)"

When the Prince of Wales was speaking in 1935, neither he nor the British Council realized the enormous role future mass communication would play in assisting the propagation of the English language worldwide. The combination of computer technology, globalisation and English as an international language should be viewed as a package. Industrialized countries are benefiting from the advances, but the situation warrants a paradigm shift regarding its influence on the national cultures of countries with non-English traditions.

"The recent world-wide diffusion of English,... has raised not just concern among speakers of other languages, but controversy among sociolinguists. To what extent, they argue, is it the result of conscious planning by the governments and experts of English-speaking countries like the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, South Africa and Australia, and to what extent is it the result of a large array of factors connected with modernization and globalisation? But whatever the cause, the spread of English is producing a new sociolinguistic reality, by threatening to take over important functions from other major languages and by furthering language shift (Spolsky: 76-77)."

Societies can determine that the acquisition of English is important while at the same time working to protect their own language and traditions. The Japanese Diet should not be considering musical concerts that play Beethoven. European classical music has a strong international forum. Individuals worldwide are given ample

opportunity to appreciate it. The Diet should be promoting taiko concerts. A nation can become bilingual and a player on the world stage while conscientiously working hard to maintain an appreciation of its own traditions.

There are two types of non-English speaking countries that are affected by the global one language policy of the American Empire. One group can be called periphery-English countries. Some choose to embrace English as a means of international communication for economic benefit (Japan, Scandinavia) while others had English imposed on them through colonial rule (India, Nigeria). These countries are the periphery because they follow the linguistic norms of the centre and are seen to benefit economically from the one language policy (Phillipson: 17). They fall under the core-periphery title and they differ dramatically from many second and third world countries where foreign aid comes under the auspices of English language education and development. It is basically a differentiation between the rich and the poor worldwide. Although periphery countries have benefited economically in the last fifty years, the reality of the one language policy and its underlying goals should be relevant and important to the respective governments. In many respects, national language policies worldwide, are in reality American/British language policy. This underlying purpose is not necessarily negative, if respective national governments realize this fact and also understand that it is their responsibility to protect and nurture their national identities while competently playing in the international business and political arenas.

With the advent of mass communication through the World Wide Web and the reality of a new Global economy, both based on the English language as the means of international communication, approaches and attitudes toward second language acquisition are evolving rapidly.

Today, researchers point out the new approaches necessary to produce second language students who are capable of proficient verbal communication. S.P. Corder (1963) states that first language learning follows a lawful sequence, or built-in syllabus and should be, by and large, identical to second language learning. If his Creative Construction Hypothesis proves to be valid, then the approach to teaching a second language has been at fault. The cross-lingual approach should be replaced with intralingual practices. These ideas certainly support the Direct Method approach in the classroom. It is described by Brown (1970) as a great deal of active oral interaction, spontaneous use of language, no translation between first and second languages and little or no analysis of grammatical rules.

Stephen Krashen has developed a theory of second language acquisition, which is influencing classrooms and teaching techniques worldwide. He has studied and researched children and their patterns in acquiring their first language. He points out that when children acquire their first language, it is through meaningful interaction in the target language and natural communication. Young children are not concerned with the form of their statements, but with the messages they are attempting to convey. Children do not sit through grammar lessons at the age of two, nor do adults correct every grammatical error a young child utters. When a child utters his first words or statements that are understood by his caretakers, there is usually celebration that he/she has begun to communicate or clearly send a message. Parents respond to the child's request with bravados and if the child has asked for something, then it is given to him, to reinforce that he has sent the correct message. Children do not plan to learn a first language. They see a need to communicate with the people around them and attempt to send messages in whatever form they can master. To the young child, the message is most important. The correct form comes later through trial and error.

Krashen points out that acquisition requires meaningful interaction in the target language - natural communication - in which speakers are concerned not with the form of their utterances but with the messages they are conveying and understanding. He believes that language acquisition does not require extensive use of conscious grammatical rules and does not require tedious drill. Unfortunately, as students become older, and classrooms become the setting, then 'acquisition' is replaced with 'learning'.

Krashen's theory sees learning as the product of formal instruction and it comprises a conscious process, which results in conscious knowledge about the language, for example knowledge of grammar rules. According to Krashen 'learning' is less important than 'acquisition', and acquisition is best achieved through conversations with sympathetic native speakers who are willing to help the acquirer understand the message.

Krashen views the study of the structure of the language as having general educational advantages and values that high schools and colleges may want to include in their language programs. It should be clear, however, that examining irregularity, formulating rules and teaching complex facts about the target language is not language teaching, but rather is 'language appreciation' or linguistics. According to Krashen, the only instance in which the teaching of grammar can result in language acquisition is when the students are interested in grammar. Very often, when this occurs, both teachers and students are convinced that the study of formal grammar is essential for second

language acquisition. Krashen believes that both teachers and students are deceiving themselves. They believe that it is the subject matter itself, the study of grammar, that is responsible for the students' progress, but in reality their progress is coming from the medium (the language) not the message. Any subject matter that held their interest would do just as well. Naomitsu Kumade, Professor of English Literature at Otsuma Women's University in Tokyo has confirmed the importance of relevant language and vocabulary in second language learning by pointing out that if the students' interest is to be heightened, then they need to be taught the vocabulary necessary to exchange views on issues that really matter to them (Negishi: 1).

Many of Krashen's theories have been directly and indirectly substantiated through the 30+ years of successful French Immersion programs in Canada. Krashen as part of his second language acquisition theory explains the effectiveness of immersion teaching as being a result of 'comprehensible input'. This theory states that language is only acquired in one way: when messages are received and understood in that language, that is, when one receives comprehensible input. Stress is laid upon 'input' rather than 'production' (Berthold). The immersion approach emphasises the message rather than the form: it concentrates 'on what is being said rather than how it is said' (Krashen 1984 : 62).

French language immersion programs began in Canada thirty years ago, as an experiment initiated by concerned English parents, who were not satisfied with the existing French language programs within the Canadian school system. Although the Canadian government had established two official languages, English and French, English-speaking Canadians were not graduating from secondary school proficient in French. Although the Canadian situation differs historically and culturally from Japan, the poor French-speaking performance of English-speaking Canadians was, like Japan, in large part due to the use of the Grammar-Translation Method within the school system.

Lambert and Tucker were involved in Canadian French immersion programs from the inception. Their research over thirty years is very valuable for policy makers and practitioners today who are attempting to implement or improve English language education. Japanese educators require the initiative and resources to study the successful EFL programs in other countries and the knowledge to implement modern teaching techniques in their classrooms. The research has proven that education in both languages does not have to hinder academic achievement or proficiency in the mother tongue:

"Barik and Swain report that by grade 5 children in the Ottawa (Canada) early total French immersion program were performing better than control students on some aspects of English skills. Swain has also reported that French immersion students used more complex syntactic structures in written English composition than regular program students.... Grade 3 and 5 children in a trilingual English-Hebrew-French program in Montreal performed at the same level in English and significantly better in Hebrew when compared to children in a bilingual English-Hebrew program.... Where the development of both languages is promoted by the school program, there is also evidence of positive linguistic effects (Cummins and Swain: 10-11)."

Therefore, the evidence shows that teaching a second or even third language can actually contribute to a higher proficiency in the first language. As a result of this extensive research, it is clear that if curriculum balances language education in bilingual/multilingual environments, the child can maintain high linguistic standards in all the languages. Second language programs based on the experiences of other bilingual success stories will in turn be successful. The concern of Twenty-first Century does not have to be first language erosion, but the phenomenon of cultural erosion. If implemented properly, second language learning can enhance first language proficiency, which in turn strengthens first culture stature.

One paradox of globalisation is that national identity crises seem to be an inevitable side effect. While the world embraces international trade and travel, and moves to reduce trade and travel barriers, micro-national boundary disputes such as those in the former Yugoslavia, the Basque region and Armenia are erupting worldwide. These conflicts are partly the result of acculturation fears and national identity crisis. As the world becomes more interconnected economically, and the same shops and restaurants operate in Paris, Istanbul, Beijing and Tokyo, cultural differences could diminish. As a means of defining personal identity, people look back to their roots and individual differences, often resulting in micro-divisions and conflicts. This can result in various forms of

xenophobia, which hinder bilingual education. Rather than such a reactive position, national policy makers may have to face the reality of a one-language international policy, while at the same time taking measures to protect their own traditions. Second language education should not erode the existing culture. Immersion programs have proven that second language education can actually enrich first language academic proficiency and therefore the indigenous culture.

Canada may have been the first country to experience the wave of American cultural influence in the Post World War II era. Policy makers and academia saw the national borders disappear as airwaves and mass communication inundated society and threatened national identity. As early as 1960, a national debate concerning Canadian cultural identity resulted in the establishment of the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC), working under a mandate (Canadian Broadcasting Act, 1991) that works to protect national identity and cultural sovereignty. Canada recognized at an early stage the detrimental effects of global media pressures, which Boyd-Barrett explains as "the process whereby the ownership, structure, distribution, or content of the media in any country are singly or together subject to substantial external pressures from the media interests of any other country or countries without proportionate reciprocation of influence by the country so affected (qtd. in Phillipson: 61)."

Recently France has taken a much more politically aggressive posture towards English as an International Language, by attempting to 'outlaw' foreign words in advertising, official documents and spoken French. Although this extremist view stems from the historical imperialistic rivalry with England, and its purpose is not simply to purify the French language, but to promote French as an international language, the effort to maintain a high level of French language proficiency nationwide may benefit the country, although the anti-English movement may cause France to suffer economically.

Countries can implement policies to purify their language and increase linguistic standards without allowing anti-English sentiment to hinder economic and political progress. The reasonable response should be the promotion of quality in both Japanese and English. To be concerned about English linguistic hegemony, or the explicit or implicit values, beliefs, purposes and activities, which contribute to the maintenance of English as a dominant language, is not a nationalistic or aggressive act. There is such a fear of nationalism in post war Japan that the nation has discarded patriotism as well. Hegemony is not 'the enemy', and does not imply a conspiracy theory, but rather a competing and complementary set of values and practices (Phillipson). If thoughtful and well-implemented language programs balance the external influences, then the needs of Japan will be well served. Japan can learn how to prevent language erosion from the experiences of other non-English speaking cultures, particularly Scandinavia, which have embraced English as the means to global competitiveness. The English programs have been successful, but currently there is concern about the academic level of the first language. A Swedish parliamentary language committee has suggested that law must protect the Swedish language. It has recommended a new authority be founded to guard language use in society. There is a general fear that Swedish is being abandoned in favour of English, even in some schools.

There are many differences between the way in which children and adults learn a second language. The amazing dexterity and rate of learning exhibited by children acquiring their first language reflects the optimum situation that teachers of second languages would like to recreate. The substantial psycholinguistic research to date also promotes learning a second language before puberty. S.D. Krashen points out the concept of the LAD (Language Acquisition Device) in the brain that enhances language learning before puberty, but virtually shuts down after puberty. Although the rate and quality of language learning may be significantly greater before puberty, certainly there are other factors that educators and government policy makers should consider. Children may be more susceptible to acculturation. This is a serious issue, because at an early age children are still learning and acquiring their own cultures. There should be no interference with a child's first culture acquisition. Research shows that there is no hindrance to first language when a child is learning two languages at an early age. Canadian studies have shown that children in immersion programs achieve the same academic performance rates as children in a single language environment. It is cultural identity that may be at risk. If young children are to be taught two languages then it is very important that both languages be taught through one culture, otherwise acculturation, not the second language may be the negative factor. J.H.Schumann in his research on acculturation uses the concept of acculturation when referring to the social and psychological integration of the learner with the target language group, stating that second language learning is directly related to how the learner views the culture and language of the target group.

A positive attitude will produce better results. Certainly it is optimum if children want to learn the second language, but it is dangerous if children want to mimic the second culture to the detriment of their first culture. E.J. Rosansky has studied the critical age for language acquisition and points out that adult cognitive ability seems to interfere with second language acquisition. When the child learns the first language he is highly centred and is not aware of the social values and attitudes surrounding the language. Most adult second language learners may be too consciously aware of all the above factors, and higher cognitive ability simply exaggerates this awareness, thus inhibiting second language acquisition. This same research points out the dangers of young children learning two languages if acculturation is not seriously taken into consideration. The second language is not the danger, as extensive bilingual research has shown; the second culture poses the possibility of first culture erosion. One only has to enter a video shop, or view the coming attractions at a local movie theatre in Japan today, to see the power of second culture influences.

Any study of human activity cannot be complete without considering the affective or emotional domain. Emotions include empathy, self-esteem, extroversion, inhibition, imitation, anxiety, attitudes and many other factors. It is easy to see that these factors change dramatically from childhood through adolescence to adulthood. Guiora et al. in their studies of ego status and pronunciation, go as far as to coin a term called 'language ego', explaining that one's self identity is inextricably bound up with one's language. Adolescents and adults have grown very comfortable and secure in their own identities, so therefore, there is far less chance of acculturation or erosion of the first culture and identity. In some countries, this may be a sound argument for beginning second language teaching at a later age. In Japan, however, if the school system waits until junior high school to begin English language classes, then Japanese cultural rituals and language form will inhibit the student's ability to focus on the message rather than the form of their English communication attempts.

In conclusion, Japanese children should begin acquiring English at as early an age as possible, to reach them while they still exhibit freedom from rigid Japanese style and form. At the same time, educators must be fully cognisant of the content through which English is being taught, making it relevant to the child's cultural environment. Foreign teachers should be chosen carefully and trained fully in cultural sensitivity and classroom techniques. Japanese teachers should also be trained in reversing the 'form over message' techniques, although this will not be successful unless the evaluation system for university entrance exams is revised with regard to English. Teachers cannot be expected to change their pedagogy if their students must continue to write grammar-translation style English entrance exams or give formal, rote-memorized speeches.

The dynamic multiculturalism resulting from globalisation in the past few decades offers young people worldwide the opportunity to interact in ways never imagined a generation ago. English literacy, as well as computer literacy, are tools that open the doors to this global plurality. Periphery countries must determine how to embrace this reality while using it to their intellectual and economic benefit. Adaptability and speed are the key words of the new millennium. The specific challenge for Japan is to loosen the traditional constraints, which emphasize the form of communication rather than the explicit message. This would allow educational institutions to make the necessary changes quickly enough to help Japanese citizens maintain a dominant economic role globally, and develop a more prominent political stature worldwide. At the same time, reasonable measures can be implemented to maintain kanji literacy, cultural traditions and national identity.

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