
The Bear and the Honeycomb:

A History of Japanese English Language Policy

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This article examines the cause of poor English language ability among the Japanese. In so doing, an analysis of the history of Japanese foreign language policy over the past four hundred years is undertaken. It is argued that ambiguity and contradiction have been (and remain) the focus of policy initiatives and that these characteristics are the result of a conscious effort by policy-makers to ensure access to foreign ideas without sacrificing Japanese identity. Hence, reading, grammar, and translation skills have been emphasized while communicative skills have been ignored, or at least downplayed. It is concluded that more modern policy initiatives like the JET Programme and the 1994 Curriculum Guidelines which cite the development of “communicative abilities” as an objective do not represent any real change in policy-making patterns due to the existence of barriers which prevent this goal from being achieved.

Introduction

It has been a long-held view that Japanese speakers of English suffer from a low level of proficiency. In support of this belief, The Educational Testing Service, the body responsible for administering the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), announced that Japanese test-takers ranked a dismal 180th out of 189 countries in 1997. Theories abound to explain the failure of the Japanese to be successful L2 learners.

Koike and Tanaka (1995) cite geography as one significant factor. They argue that, being an island nation, Japan has historically had very little direct contact with speakers of other languages. Therefore, the opportunity for direct communication with peoples outside Japan has been minimal. It has also been suggested that the Japanese are poor English learners due to the linguistic distance between English and Japanese (Hughes, 1999). Clark (1998) credits the education system. He argues that the poor and incorrect pronunciation of Japanese English teachers, and a flawed methodology which concentrates on “conscious” rather than “acquired” learning accounts for the poor English language proficiency of Japanese students. The predominant methodology, i.e. grammar translation and a focus on language analysis rather than on communicative use of the language has also been identified as a cause (Helgesen, 1991). Other explanations include Japanese personality traits such as shyness, conservatism and a high degree of embarrassment at making mistakes. It has even been claimed that the unique working of the Japanese brain prevents the Japanese from learning English well (Clark, 1998).

But I would like to suggest a different reason for the Japanese failure to become more proficient English language speakers, namely the history of Japanese foreign language policy. As a Chinese proverb states: “To understand the present, examine the past; without the past, there would be no present.” (Bartlett’s, 2000). By examining Japan’s past it becomes clear that policy-makers have taken decisions which have attempted to insulate the country from foreign influences, including language.

Throughout its history, Japan has had a strange and interesting relationship with the outside world. One might describe its attitude as similar to that of a bear towards a honeycomb. The analogy works as follows: The bear (Japan) has a sweet tooth and desires the honey (the knowledge and goods) that the bees (a foreign country) may produce. However, the bear is also wary of the painful sting that the bees may inflict (the threat of colonialism and foreign philosophy). On occasion the bear is willing to risk being stung and eats the honey (Japan engages in trade and normalized relations with foreign countries) while on other occasions, the bear foregoes its cravings and eats something less dangerous and easier to access (Japan adopts a more isolationist position).

As a result of this attitude, the Japanese view of foreign languages has historically been ambiguous and contradictory. The simultaneous desire to embrace and repel foreign influence is a recurring theme. Moreover, an examination of contemporary foreign language policy illustrates that this attitude remains prevalent today.

Modern initiatives like the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Programme appear, on the surface, to represent a deep commitment to improved foreign language study. Yet, the success of these initiatives in raising English proficiency has continually been questioned. Entrance examinations incongruent with the objectives of JET have been a favourite target (LoCastro, 1996; Watanabe, 1996, Browne and Wada, 1998; Clark, 1998) as has poor teacher training (Sturman, 1992; LoCastro, 1996) and the textbook selection process (Gorusch, 1999).

This paper will suggest that the poor English proficiency of the Japanese is not best explained by geography, the Japanese education system, or the linguistic differences between Japanese and English. Instead, by analyzing policy-making throughout history, it will be argued that attitudes and beliefs about the outside world and foreign languages have changed little through the years and that present language policy, steeped in ambiguity and contradiction, is very much in line with historical precedents. It will be concluded that the Japanese commitment to becoming more proficient English language speakers is half-hearted at best and downright false at worst. This factor, more than any other, explains the poor English language abilities of the Japanese people.

English in Japan (1600–present)

It is accepted that the first Japanese contact with the English language occurred in 1600 when an Englishman, William Adams, was swept ashore on the southern island of Kyushu (Ike, 1995; Hughes, 1999). Adams was taken to the Bakufu government to meet with Shogun Tokugawa Ieyasu, an encounter that is said to have been positive and friendly (Hughes, 1999). This view is supported by the fact that upon hearing the news that an English citizen was living in Japan, King James I sent a letter to Tokugawa “precipitating the first English trading post (in Japan)” (Hughes, 1999: 559). Evidence of a positive Anglo-Japanese relationship is

further affirmed by looking at the life of William Adams himself who remained in Japan until his death working as both a teacher and shipbuilder.

Despite this positive first encounter, however, Japan soon became suspicious of foreign, especially Western, influences. As European imperialism spread throughout the world, this suspicion turned to fear. So much so that the country adopted an isolationist stance in 1638 and was, until 1853, effectively cut off from foreign contact.

During this time foreign language study was outlawed, sometimes on pain of death. However, with the expansion of the British and Russian Empires into Asia in the early nineteenth century, the Bakufu government wished to gain intelligence concerning the activities and plans of these Imperial Powers. As a result, six interpreters were ordered to learn English and Russian. "They were not, however, permitted to become literate in these languages, as the Bakufu was concerned about the possibility that they might be influenced by Western thought and religion, and that they may transmit these ideas to others" (Ike, 1995: 3). While it may seem illogical to order someone to learn a language without becoming literate, such a policy reflects the ambiguous attitude of the Japanese toward foreign language learning during this time. There is a desire to learn about the outside world, but at the same time, this is tempered by a genuine fear of the consequences that such knowledge might bring. As we will see later, this pattern of opposing objectives has become entrenched in Japanese foreign language policy.

In 1853, under threat of American invasion and Commodore Matthew Perry's proclamation that Japan be "opened for trade or trampled", the Japanese were forced to abandon their isolationist stance and the country was opened up to the rest of the world resulting in increased contact and trade, especially with the West. The exposure to Western ideology, culture and commodities during this period, referred to as the Meiji Restoration, had a profound effect on Japanese society.

From the 1860's until the early 1880's, there was a fascination in Japan with all things Western. The latest European fashions could be seen on the streets of Tokyo, people craved and bought Western goods from shops, and English even became the medium of instruction in many prestigious universities. Reflecting this attitude, the newly formed Ministry of Education included English language education as part of the national curriculum in 1871. Boys' Middle schools were required to provide six hours of instruction per week and until 1884, primary schools also offered optional English classes (Koike and Tanaka, 1995). It was also at this time that universities adopted an entrance examination system requiring intricate knowledge of English grammar and advanced translation skills, the same skills that are required on most modern examinations. On the surface, the commitment to English language education appeared firm.

But during this period of "westernization", a deep-seated anti-English attitude bubbled beneath the surface. By 1881 a backlash against Western influence had become evident, especially among academics and journalists. Many books and newspaper articles appeared warning against the dangers of the Japanese becoming too Westernized (Ike, 1995). Soon after, this anti-western sentiment became more widely adopted and spread to Japanese language policy.

In 1883, the Ministry of Education changed the language of instruction at Tokyo University from English to Japanese and in 1889 Mori Arinori, the Japanese Minister of

Education, was assassinated by an ultranationalist for his belief in using simplified English to improve the Japanese language (Ike, 1995). This trend continued until anti-Western, anti-English sentiment became the norm rather than the exception. By the early 1900's Japanese nationalism was surging as Japan pursued its expansionist foreign policy culminating with the outbreak of the Pacific War in 1945.

During this era of aggressive foreign policy, however, English language study was not abandoned as may have been expected. In fact, Koike and Tanaka (1995) state: "In the years following the Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905), the Ministry of Education aimed to increase the number of years of (English) instruction" (p. 17). At the same time, however, public opinion did not view the English language in a positive light. Because English was the language of the enemy, English speakers came to be viewed with hostility to the extent that the term *eigo-zukai* (English user) became pejorative (Hughes, 1999).

Also, throughout most of the beginning of the twentieth century there was heated debate about whether English should be changed to an elective rather than compulsory subject in the middle school curriculum. Moreover, a number of articles written in the Tokyo Asahi Press at the time expressed arguments in favour of abolishing English language study completely (Ike, 1995).

In keeping with the ambiguity of previous policy, in the midst of the debate over the teaching of English, the Japanese government invited Harold Palmer, a celebrated linguist and specialist in the teaching of foreign languages to come to Japan in 1922 in the hope that he could improve the state of English language teaching (Koike and Tanaka, 1995). He was provided with public funds to establish the Institute for Research in English Language Teaching in Tokyo. His research and ideas stressed the importance of the oral-aural method in the teaching of English and criticized traditional grammar-translation based methodologies for being ineffective in helping Japanese people to become proficient speakers of English. Prior to its abolishment following the outbreak of the Pacific War, Palmer's Institute for Research in English and the teaching techniques espoused therein, had a significant impact on the English language teaching community and his methods gained acceptance at middle schools throughout the country (Scholefield, 1997).

However, despite the success of his methodologies, no institutionalized reforms in areas such as curriculum, teacher training or testing, followed. Although Palmer was funded to come to Japan in order to improve English language teaching, and despite the fact that his methodologies were gaining acceptance and proving successful in Japanese middle schools, the Ministry of Education made no significant changes to English language education. This is a reflection of the ambivalence felt by the Japanese towards foreign languages that was plain 100 years earlier when the Bakufu sought non-literate translators. There is a recognition that foreign language study is valuable, but also a fear about how it may affect Japanese society.

Following World War Two, Japan was occupied by American forces and the United States exerted a great deal of influence over Japan's postwar restructuring. This influence extended to the Japanese system of government, economic policy and education policy. As far as English language teaching was concerned, US funded organizations like the English Language Exploratory Committee (ELEC), established in 1956, played a major role in introducing alternative methodologies to Japanese teachers of English.

ELEC consisted of 22 powerful Japanese academics and business leaders and its mandate “involved a radical change to English language teaching methods in Japan and the re-education of English teachers” (Scholefield, 1997: 16). Like Palmer previously, ELEC attempted to enshrine an oral approach which “stressed situational and natural practices with emphasis on the communication of meaning” (Scholefield, 1997: 17). The body was responsible for the in-service training of more than 10,000 teachers and the publication of 130 textbooks based on its beliefs. However, little changed at the classroom level as both teachers and students were generally unreceptive to the idea of abandoning the grammar-translation methodology (Koike and Tanaka, 1995).

It is likely that the dissatisfaction among students and teachers had much to do with an entrance examination system that failed to keep pace with changing classroom practices. While teachers were being trained to infuse more communicative techniques into their classrooms, the entrance examination system still focused entirely on reading, grammar and translation. It is, therefore, not surprising that due to waning interest in its work and minimal real impact at the classroom level, ELEC was disbanded in the late 1960's. Indeed, it would have been nonsensical to expect teachers and students to respond positively to methodologies that would not improve, and probably hinder, entrance examination scores. I say *hinder* because contact hours previously committed to addressing the skills needed for entrance examinations would be lost in order to allow time for study and practice of communicative skills. One wonders if the Ministry of Education ever wanted these new techniques to take hold. I would argue that they did not and that their reticence to do so is congruent with previous language policy which lacked full commitment to improving language proficiency beyond the scope of grammatical knowledge and translation.

Not until 1984 can it be said that any new significant change was made regarding English language education in Japan. In 1984 the government appointed Ad Hoc Committee on Education Reform. It compiled four reports between 1985 and 1987 and its recommendations had some influence on English teaching in Japan. The Committee carried out an exhaustive analysis of English language teaching in Japanese junior and senior high schools. Their reports concluded that ELT was not very effective due to a number of factors including large class sizes, insufficient contact hours, poor teaching techniques, and poorly trained teachers (Koike and Tanaka, 1995). In order to improve the situation the Committee made several recommendations including a more communicative approach to ELT and the hiring of more native speaking English teachers to work in Japanese schools. The impetus for the JET Programme arose partly out of these recommendations.

The next section will examine the JET Programme more closely and identify ambiguities and contradictions between stated objectives and practices. The aim will be to show that the JET Programme, like previous policy initiatives discussed earlier in this paper, is only a half-hearted commitment to improving overall English language proficiency.

JET

The JET Programme began in 1987 when 848 young, university graduates from the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand were invited to work in Japanese schools, boards of education, and government offices as teachers, translators, advisors and

cultural informants. Since 1987 the program has grown significantly to include more than 6,000 participants from 37 countries (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2000). Three categories of JETs exist: Assistant Language Teachers (ALTs) who are employed at local schools and whose main duties relate to teaching. There are also Coordinators for International Relations (CIRs) whose main duties involve translation and public relations and Sports Exchange Advisors (SEAs), who work largely as coaches. 90% of all JET participants are ALTs and their work will be the focus here.

Kokusaika-Impetus for JET

Over the last twenty years, there has been an increasingly important movement surrounding the discourse of *kokusaika* (internationalization). *Kokusaika* has influenced how Japan has positioned itself within the international community and how the Japanese see themselves domestically. The concept of *kokusaika* has proven difficult for non-Japanese to conceptualize and define. Some define the term simply through its treatment of the West: “*kokusaika* affirms the urgent need for Japan to emerge from cultural isolation and assimilate a set of Western values” (McConnell, 1996: 447). However, this definition ignores how the discourse of *kokusaika* promotes Japanese cultural heritage as well as Westernization. As Kubota (1999) puts it: “*kokusaika* thus harmoniously embraces both Westernization through learning the communication mode of English *and* the promotion of nationalistic values” (p. 300). This has been accomplished through an accommodation of the hegemony of the West by attempting to become an equal member with the West, rather than seeking to establish an Asian counter-hegemony. It stresses that Japan’s position of power is based on its unique cultural heritage while at the same time demonstrating an acceptance of the West (Kubota, 1999).

The JET Programme is a result of Japan’s embrace of *kokusaika*. As Kubota states: “The discourse of *kokusaika* constitutes the backbone of recent education reform” (Kubota, 1999: 300). Many hold the JET Programme up as evidence that the Japanese are serious about improving the communicative ability of students and about “internationalizing”. The objectives of the JET Programme as they appeared in a press release in 1986 support this claim:

The Japan Exchange and Teaching Programme seeks to promote mutual understanding between Japan and other countries including the U.S., the U.K., Australia, and N.Z. and foster international perspectives in Japan by promoting international exchange at local levels as well as intensifying foreign language education in Japan (McConnell, 2000: 47).

While this may be the stated objective for public consumption, there is evidence to suggest that the impetus for the JET Programme arose from quite different motivations.

As the Japanese economy strengthened in the 1980’s and poised itself to surpass the US economy, Japan was criticized in the international community for being an “economic animal” feeding off larger and larger annual trade surpluses (McConnell, 1996). In response to its declining image in the international community, an Action Programme was created to outline a plan for liberalizing trade and promoting imports. However, American critics complained that the plan failed to promote international understanding among people by stressing only material goods (Furukawa, 1997: 30). The JET Programme was a response to

these concerns:

It (JET) was generated by pressure from the outside and carried the goal of demonstrating Japan's commonality with other countries in order to protect ... Japan's vulnerable security system and international economic encirclement (Inoguchi, 1987 as cited in McConnell, 1996: 448).

This view is substantiated by Kuniyuki Nose, the Home Affairs Ministry official who wrote the original proposal for JET and stated the following:

The purpose of the JET Programme was never focused on the revolution of English education or changing Japanese society. Frankly speaking, during the year of the trade conflict between Japan and the US ... what I was thinking about was how to deal with the demands of the US that we buy more things such as computers and cars. I realized the trade friction was not going to be solved by manipulating material things, and, besides, I wanted to demonstrate the fact that not all Japanese are economic animals who gobble up real estate (McConnell, 1996: 456).

Despite this admission, the objectives of the JET Programme have changed little since they were first drafted in 1986. The 2000 JET goals are to "intensify foreign language education in Japan, and to promote international exchange at the local level by fostering ties between Japanese citizens (mainly youth) and JET participants" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2000). Clearly there is a large disparity between JET's stated objectives of improving foreign language education and those voiced by the actual policy-makers. The lack of success in "improving the communicative ability of Japanese students" is therefore no surprise as this was never the true intention. Moreover, as the analysis of the history of foreign language study in Japan presented earlier in this paper illustrates, communicative skills have never been viewed as important or valuable by the Japanese. Or rather, if communicative skills have been stressed, they have not been supported by the curriculum or education policy.

Three Barriers to Communicative Teaching

To demonstrate the gap between stated objectives and practice, an examination of recent policy follows. It will become evident that the entrance examination system, the textbook selection process, and teacher education act as barriers to achieving the curricular goal of improving communicative abilities.

The Ministry of Education held a conference in 1987 to decide on the curricula of secondary schools and to address the influx of ALTs. A revision of the Course of Study (National Syllabus) was also undertaken. As far as the teaching of English at the high school level was concerned, it was decided that "international communication should be the primary objective and that more emphasis should be placed on developing all four basic language skills" (Koike and Tanaka, 1995).

In 1994 the Course of Study was updated again and the recommendations presented at this time closely mirror those given in the earlier 1987 reforms. The 1994 Monbusho (Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture) curriculum guidelines "require teachers to attend to speaking and listening skills in lessons, thereby placing greater emphasis on the attainment of communicative language ability by the learners" (LoCastro, 1996: 40). This was to be achieved through a greater commitment to Communicative Language teaching (CLT) (LoCastro, 1996). According to Browne and Wada (1998), these reforms, "for the first

time in Japan's history, emphasize the development of a student's communicative ability in English" (p. 98). Also, it was decided that, starting in 2001, English language education would begin at the elementary school level rather than the junior high school level. Furthermore, more opportunities for Japanese teachers of English to participate in overseas teaching exchanges have been provided in order to improve their English language ability and expose them to foreign approaches to language teaching.

The overall objectives of the new guidelines according to Misao Niisato, a senior curriculum specialist in the Elementary and Secondary Bureau of the Monbusho, as referenced in Amano (1995), are to:

- a) develop students' communicative competence in a foreign language
- b) foster a positive attitude toward communicating in a foreign language
- c) encourage international understanding through foreign language education

In light of these goals one would expect that measures would be taken to ensure that they are achieved. However, this is not the case. Entrance examinations, textbook selection, and teacher training all act as barriers to the realization of these goals.

The continuing importance of the entrance examination system in determining the future of Japanese students cannot be underestimated. According to Brown (1995), "entrance exams are used to make important decisions—decisions that will affect the children of Japan for the rest of their lives" (p. 277). The pressure to perform well on these exams is enormous. As Browne and Wada (1998) point out: "Competition among students for entrance into the few prestigious national universities is fierce and based almost solely on entrance examination scores" (p. 97). Also, in citing White (1987), Browne and Wada (1998) go on to point out, "for parents and students alike, getting good grades on the entrance examination is important above all else" (p. 97). And LoCastro (1996) states: "passing examinations is the greatest source of motivation for English language study" (p. 47). Without exaggeration, it may be said that entrance examinations have been (and remain) the prime motivation for English study for Japanese students.

Teachers, too, are subject to tremendous pressure from these exams as their success as teachers is measured largely by how well their students perform on them. LoCastro (1996) states, "the entrance examination system can be said to have deleterious washback effect on methodologies and teacher education; classroom teachers are under pressure to teach 'exam English'" (p. 47).

Davies (1990) defines this kind of situation as an example of *excessive conservatism* wherein progress in teaching is not matched by an equivalent advance in testing. Davies (1990) provides the following example which is easily applicable to the situation in Japan: "The adoption of a communicative curriculum in a school may have little effect on students' communicative competence if their end-of-course test requires them to write a literature essay" (p. 102). This is exactly the situation at present in Japan. While new curriculum guidelines and the JET Programme stress the development of communicative abilities, the entrance examinations do not measure these skills.

To illustrate this point, Brown and Yamashita (1995) undertook an analysis of the content of university entrance examinations in 1993 and 1994. Their findings are worth noting:

A contradiction has also developed between what is included on these university entrance examinations and the Monbusho guidelines.... The guidelines advocate the addition of listening and/or speaking ... but our analysis indicates that only six universities (out of 21) in 1993 and four (out of 21) in 1994 included even a listening component (p. 98).

As a result of this situation, teachers are forced to choose between meeting curricular objectives and delivering the kind of English skills that will help their students succeed when they take their entrance examinations. With the immediate pressure of students and their parents always present, it is not surprising that curricular goals end up being sacrificed.

The second barrier arises from the textbook selection process. In short, textbooks have not been adapted to reflect a more communicative classroom. All English language textbooks in Japan must be scrutinized and approved by the Ministry of Education. No other textbooks are permitted inside classrooms. The Ministry of Education reserves the sole right to alter or ban textbooks which do not meet with its approval. Interestingly, although not surprisingly, it has been shown that the Ministry does not approve textbooks which reflect the commitment in the 1994 Course of Study to develop students' communicative abilities (Gorusch, 1999; McConnell, 2000). Most textbooks stress reading and writing more than speaking and listening (Gorusch, 1999). As a result, of course, teachers end up stressing these skills, communicative abilities suffer and stated curricular objectives are not met.

Teacher training is the third barrier that lies in the way of meeting objectives. Due to lack of training, teachers are much more comfortable with grammar-translation than they are with communicative methodologies. To become a high school English teacher in Japan one is required to have a degree in English literature, international communication or another English language related field. In most cases, candidates must pass an English language proficiency test after which they are placed for a two-week practicum in a public high school (LoCastro, 1996). Certification requires no training in education, second language acquisition theory, or methodology. In referencing Leonard (1994) and Stoda (1994), Scholefield (1997) describes the training that JTEs receive as follows:

During their tertiary education, teachers of English receive no formal training with respect to team teaching and little attention on how to implement communicative teaching on a regular basis in all of the various skill areas. (Also, Monbusho appears not to target preservice teacher education (p. 21).

It is also important to remember that many teachers are not confident about their own communicative skills in English (McConnell, 2000) and because the majority of Japanese English teachers have been "schooled in rote memorization and grammatical expertise, their own conversational skills are quite limited." (McConnell, 1996: 451). Since they are not sufficiently trained in communicative teaching methodology, a more familiar grammar-translation approach is then considered "safer" by many of them.

Entrance examinations, textbook selection and teacher training all conspire against the fulfillment of stated curricular goals. The fact that these barriers are allowed to exist is consistent with Japanese foreign language policy throughout history. It reflects the attitude of the bear towards the honeycomb. While desperately wanting to eat the honey, the bear remains wary of being stung. Recent policy confirms that these barriers are meant to protect society from suffering a loss of what might best be called "Japaneseness" as a result of increased multilingualism.

Over the past few years, there has been a new wave of explicit criticism levied against those who wish to see the attainment of a higher level of communicative skill among Japanese students of English. It is argued that a focus on communicative skills will re-enforce the dominance of English and lead the Japanese to reject their own linguistic and cultural identity (Kubota, 1998). The Ministry of Education has also introduced new curricula at the elementary and junior high school level to ensure that English language competency does not also result in the espousal of Western views and ideals. The 1994 curriculum stresses a love for cultural tradition and the Japanese identity (Kubota, 1999). It is believed that the patriotic values promoted in the new curricula will relieve the identity crisis of the younger generation which the government believes is torn between traditional Japanese values and Western ones (Kubota, 1999).

The growth of the JET Programme and the hiring of foreign teachers no doubt contributes to the dilemma as more and more Japanese children are exposed directly to Western influence. Indeed, these new curricula may be intended to act as a counterweight to the “Western” influence to which Japanese children are exposed through interaction with ALTs. Once again the contradiction between supporting internationalization and foreign language study on the one hand and insulating Japan from foreign influence at the same time is evident.

Conclusions

The study of English in Japan has been supported on a number of grounds: as a means to encourage personal and intellectual growth (Ike, 1995); as a contributing factor towards national economic prosperity; as a tool with which to keep abreast of cultural and technological advances thereby hastening the process of modernization (Koike and Tanaka, 1995; Shuji, 1999); and more recently, English has been heralded as paramount in allowing Japan to participate in the present computer and information age (Inoguchi, 1999).

In short, the study of English has been viewed as a means to learn more about knowledge created in foreign countries. The main objective behind the study of English has not been to engage in dialogue with the outside world by communicating Japanese thoughts and opinions, but rather, to use English as a sponge to soak up the knowledge created in the wider world. Shuji (1999) states, Japanese attitudes towards English language study have been decidedly focused on “reception rather than transmission” (p. 6). Moreover, in reviewing Japanese linguist Takao Suzuki’s book *Nihonjin wa naze eigo ga dekinai ka?* (Why Can’t the Japanese Speak English?) (1998), Shujii (1998) argues that since rejoining the international community in the Meiji Era, the Japanese have concentrated on deciphering foreign texts, but have focused little attention on articulating Japanese views to the rest of the world. Put another way: “... we could say that the purposes of teaching foreign languages ... were practical and cultural. Understanding advanced cultures and technology were the first and foremost requisite to the island people of Japan” (Koike and Tanaka, 1995).

The reality is that two-way communication via a foreign language is not a goal that the Japanese have historically sought to achieve. Moreover, up to now, the Japanese believe that their method of studying foreign languages via translation has served them well. As Shuji (1999) states: “we need to recognize that this effort (to decipher foreign texts) has honed

Japanese people's ability to read English, which has borne great fruit" (p. 7).

While the rhetoric of *kokusaika* (internationalization) encourages the promotion of foreign language education and the fostering of international perspectives, actual policy points toward only partial acceptance of this creed, an acceptance which is not at all different from how foreign languages have been viewed over the past four hundred years. While stated objectives stress the commitment to the development of communicative skills, barriers exist to prevent this from happening. The reason for the existence of these barriers is clear: they satisfy the bear's craving for honey, but ensure that it will remain protected from being stung.

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