

## Book Reviews

### **Language Policy in Japan: The Challenge of Change**

*By Nanette Gottlieb*

*Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. (2012). xiv + 207 pages*

Nanette Gottlieb's (2012) book, *Language Policy in Japan: The Challenge of Change*, is a work that explores three very specific areas of language policy in Japan: policy related to teaching Japanese as a second language (JSL) to immigrants; policy related to teaching foreign languages other than English; and policy related to the use of kanji characters in Japanese. She argues, quite convincingly, that due to language ideology in Japan, these three policy foci are administered differently. Gottlieb maintains that while the national government is very much involved in the setting of policy regarding kanji character use, it is largely absent in the establishment of policy related to either the provision of JSL support for immigrants or to the teaching of foreign languages other than English. As such, this book is an important work that contributes to our understanding of the connections between language ideology and language policy in general, as well as how these connections play out in Japan more specifically.

Gottlieb begins by discussing different definitions of language ideology. She then explains how current language ideology in Japan has been used to create the impression of a monolingual, mono-ethnic nation, equating the Japanese language with both Japanese culture and the nation state, something that reinforces people's attitudes about the Japanese language. She continues to explain the connection between language ideology and language planning and policy, pointing out that language ideology informs but does not produce government language policy and that language ideology is more long-lasting than language policy. Gottlieb also discusses private sector language policy (for example Rakuten's decision to make English its "official in-house language" in 2012 (p. 19)) and covert language policy, that is, "those [policies] which are not explicit and have no policy documentation but may be widely entrenched in the public mind" (p. 19), and then goes on to suggest ways these types of policy are influenced by language ideology. Finally, in this introductory chapter, she touches on the connections between

Japanese language policy and the three afore-mentioned issues that are the focus of her book.

In chapter 2, Gottlieb takes up several language issues related to immigrants living in Japan. She begins with a discussion of how public schools in Japan attempt to meet the needs of immigrant students who require JSL instruction, pointing out that the national government provides schools with very little support. Gottlieb then explores some of the difficulties that adults needing JSL instruction face, especially the lack of appropriate materials, the need for literacy, and, again, the fact that the national government provides little support or funding. Following this, Gottlieb details the challenges faced by foreign nurses and care workers who come to Japan, and the nursing test, written in Japanese,<sup>1</sup> that these people are required to pass within three years of arriving.

In the third chapter, Gottlieb presents a discussion related to the place of foreign languages other than English in Japan. She initially takes up the issue of community languages, pointing out that not only are they overshadowed by English, but also that, due to the erroneous belief that Japan is a monolingual nation, the importance of teaching these languages so that Japanese people may be able to speak with non-Japanese speaking foreigners in Japan is lost. Much of the difficulty in getting these other foreign languages taught in Japan, Gottlieb states, is that in Japan foreign language is strongly associated with English. By way of comparison, she shows how other Asian countries, such as China and South Korea, do not seem to face the same difficulty in teaching other foreign languages as Japan does.

In chapter 4, Gottlieb turns her attention to the issue of how technology has affected the perception of kanji knowledge in Japan, as well as people's actual use of kanji and the government's List of Characters for General Use. She begins by questioning the foundations of the widely-held belief that literacy rates and kanji knowledge in Japan

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<sup>1</sup> Gottlieb's point here is that, although they are already qualified in their home countries, the foreign nurses and care-givers have difficulty passing this test due to the arduous nature of learning to read kanji in the three years provided. Gottlieb states that adding furigana would benefit the foreign nurses but that the government resists this change due to language ideology (pp. 53-54). While this was true at the time Gottlieb published this work, in the few months since, the government has decided that beginning in 2013, furigana will be included on these tests ("Foreign Pass Rate," 2012).

today are deteriorating. Furthermore, she shows how these perceptions are, at least in part, tied to the belief that current technology (including word processing programs, computers, electronic dictionaries, cell phones, and the Internet) has created an atmosphere in which people are less likely to be able to produce or recognize kanji. She then proceeds to explain why this is not the case, arguing that while Japanese people may be less likely to read books, they are more likely to read using these new technologies. Moreover, she points out that these technologies provide people with access to more kanji than had been available when all kanji were hand-written. This last point is further illustrated by a discussion of the government's decision in late 2010 to increase the List of Characters for General Use.

Gottlieb uses the fifth chapter and the conclusion to tie together all she has discussed about language policy and language ideology in Japan. She points out that while language policy in Japan regarding character use is top-down, language policy related to providing JSL support for immigrants and language policy regarding teaching foreign languages other than English are bottom-up. She argues that one of the main reasons for this is that the dominant ideology in Japan erroneously sees Japan as a monolingual, mono-ethnic nation.

*Language Policy in Japan: The Challenge of Change* is a well-written, easily accessible work. For readers unfamiliar with the concept of language ideology and how it affects language policy, Gottlieb provides detailed background, explanation, and examples to aid in understanding. Moreover, Gottlieb provides important background information regarding the three language policy issues discussed. This information, and the way it is presented, allows anyone who may be new to the field of language planning and policy to easily follow along the discussion. This book is highly recommended for anyone interested in language planning and policy in Japan, or elsewhere.

## References

- Foreign pass rate for national nurse exam triples (2012, March 27). *The Japan Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.japantimes.co.jp>
- Gottlieb, N. (2012). *Language policy in Japan: The challenge of change*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.

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## **English in Japan in the Era of Globalization**

*By Philip Seargeant (ed.)*

*Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, (2011). X + 208 pages*

This volume builds on Seargeant's (2009) book *The Idea of English in Japan*, and addresses the role of the English language in contemporary Japan in an era of globalization. It will be of interest to those researching symbolic and ideological aspects of English in EFL environments, as well as those involved with English education in Japan more generally. The book is divided into two parts: English in the Education System (chapters 1-5); and English in Society and Culture (chapters 6-9). Given the social and cultural implications of schooling, this division may appear somewhat arbitrary, and one theme that can be seen to unify most chapters is the tension between two ideologies and the discourses they are manifested in. The first ideology promotes English as the global language of science and technology and economic progress, and as such, compulsory English education is therefore seen as an unproblematic, liberating force of progress. The second ideology resists English on the grounds that the Japanese often have little need for it in daily life, and what need there is for English takes the form of institutional barriers such as university entrance and TOEIC test score requirements. Ironically, it can be argued that these barriers are produced by the first ideology.

Readers of this journal are likely to be familiar with the first ideology and its associated discourse promoting English. Here, then, are some of the observations raised by the authors of key chapters of this volume which, directly or indirectly, challenge the legitimacy of this ideology:

- English proficiency holds limited economic value for only a relatively small elite in an affluent country such as Japan (Matsumoto, chapter 2).

- Even in international manufacturing companies, the proportion of employees using English is relatively low (10%), and many employees use it primarily to read and respond to emails rather than for verbal communication (Kubota, chapter 5).
- Very few job advertisements require English skills for part-time employees (only 1.4% in Tokyo) (Kubota, chapter 5).
- Japan's population is far less multicultural than many societies. In addition, the linguistic profile of the country is, so far as statistical data reveal, extremely Japanese dominant (Seargeant, chapter 8).

I now offer a brief critical overview of each chapter. Yamagami and Tollefson (chapter 1) examine how globalization is represented in public discourse. They identify two prominent discourses: *globalization-as-opportunity*, which is associated with English speakers, and *globalization-as-threat*, which is associated with groups speaking languages other than English or Japanese. This categorization, well-supported by reference to Japanese Diet transcripts and university English program promotional materials, serves to remind us that English is far more than a value-free tool; it has a privileged status as part of a particular political and ideological conception of globalization.

Matsuda (chapter 2) investigates students' and teachers' beliefs about English teaching in the Japanese high school context. In Matsuda's case study, student opinion can be seen to be in line with the dominant, pro-English discourse, while teachers are seen to hold a more cynical position. English learners are, Matsuda argues, simultaneously both advantaged and disadvantaged by English. Her recognition of the complex nature of English as a social phenomenon, as well as her reluctance to reduce such matters to linear cause and effect is gratifying, and by no means true of all of the papers within the collection.

Stewart and Miyahara (chapter 3), for example, perhaps paint a somewhat stereotypical picture of the progressive foreigner vs. the conservative Japanese teacher in the context of a prestigious university in Tokyo. While one of their claims is that foreign instructors' "efforts are simply not regarded as serious academic work..." (p. 70), their contribution is undermined by the absence of perspectives from Japanese instructors and a tendency to take participant statements at face value.

Breckenbridge and Erling's (chapter 4) study of JET teachers might elicit similar reservations. Given the relatively high salaries paid to JETs despite their lack of qualifications (of an official nature, at least), the authors' argument that JETs are villainized within applied linguistics discourse might at least be tempered by a consideration of the perks of the job. JET teachers may be "...commoditized as English-language resources in order to promote national objectives focused on advancement in a global economy" (p. 98) (such is the nature of capitalism), but to what extent is this an outrage? While presenting data from a narrative or phenomenological perspective may be unproblematic in itself, going on to draw global judgments of right and wrong—in this case the JET teacher as victim and the system as exploiter—is a more problematic undertaking.

In a key chapter, Kubota (chapter 5) uses Foucault's (1980) idea of a 'regime of truth' to characterize the powerful ideology promoting English in Japan. Making use of numerous Japanese language sources, she notes that the majority of foreign residents in Japan, many of them blue-collar non-English speakers, are excluded from the dominant discourse promoting globalization/English.

In the first of the chapters dealing with the nature of the interaction between English and society, Yano (chapter 6) initially asserts that "Japan...depends heavily for its survival and prosperity on foreign trade, which makes it vital for the Japanese to be able to use English" (p. 133). Yet, in the very next paragraph, he states that:

...the majority of people do not feel the need to learn English. Do they have opportunities to use what they have learned? No. English is never used among the Japanese, while a language must be used if it is to be effectively learned (p. 133).

Yano claims that a pernicious belief in the native model is responsible for Japanese students' failure to acquire English. This claim seems to be destabilized by the sidestepping of the 'lack of daily need' argument, and is insufficiently supported by either empirical data or a convincing rationale.

Kameda (chapter 7) investigates how children of mixed ethnicity are marginalized within Japanese society by disempowering discourses of 'halfness' or 'otherness', and

how they respond to this by embracing more empowering alternative discourses of ethnic and linguistic diversity. Kameda offers a unique and interesting perspective on dual-heritage children. However, her argument might have been strengthened by a more explicit inclusion of her own standpoint as a parent of a mixed-ethnicity child.

In an enjoyable venture into the realm of English and Japanese television, Moody and Matsumoto (chapter 8) address the way in which 'language entertainment' programs promote a particular ideal learner characterized by the four traits of competence, courage, self-effacement and enthusiasm. It might be worth adding, though, that these categories (especially the last) are likely also typical of people appearing on television in general.

The final chapter by Seargeant (chapter 9) is written with clarity and insight. He uses interviews to investigate the paradox between the visual predominance of English and the lack of need for fluency in everyday life for most citizens. Seargeant argues that such language use has a localized symbolic value drawing on "the conceptual status and implications of English as a global language" (p. 188). To put it glibly from an imaginary Japanese perspective: 'We couldn't care less if you think the English on our T-shirts is funny!'

The reservations noted above are relatively minor. As a whole, *English in Japan in the Era of Globalization* is a welcome addition to the field, comprising an eclectic collection of research foci and approaches resulting in a stimulating, holistic overview of this fascinating area of applied linguistics.

#### **References:**

- Foucault, M. (1980). *Power/Knowledge: Selected interviews and other writings 1972-1977*. New York, NY: Pantheon.
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