English and Discourses of Identity in Japan

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Abstract

This paper situates the nature and role of English language learning, education and use in Japan, within Japan’s ongoing socio-historical negotiation of identity in response to its forced opening in 1858. From the time of the Meiji period, social, economic, political and educational discourses in Japanese society have served to construct a “Japan” and notion of “Japaneseness” that focuses on a juxtaposition of Japan and the West. English language education in Japan, guided by these dominant discourses in Japan and in concert with pervading discourses within globalized English language teaching (ELT), has emphasized a focus on the West, linguistically and culturally. There are however, within Japanese society, emergent discourses challenging these dominant constructions of Japan and being Japanese, and by proxy of English language ownership, learning, instruction and use. As globalization continues, so shall the negotiation of identity and the place of English in Japan.

Introduction

In the following paper, I will provide a brief account of the entry of English into Japanese society. I situate this account in the context of a Japan negotiating its identity -internally and internationally- and place on the global stage. In concert with this historical contextualization, I will describe some of the sociohistorically-situated discourses that have given shape to English language education and use in Japan since the Meiji period (1868-1912). In addition, I touch upon alternate constructions of Japan and Japaneseness both within Japanese society and ELT. I conclude by examining how dialogue concerning language, culture and identity is far from complete, as Japanese society continues to wrestle with globalization and by proxy, with conceptualizing the nature and role of English in Japan.

Framing the Nature and Role of English in Japan

According to Iino (2002), English likely reached Japan first in 1600 with the arrival of an English speaker in the south of the country. English as a subject of study, however, did not occur for another two hundred years with the beginning of contact with the British in 1808. It was the signing of a treaty related to ‘Amity’ and ‘Commerce’ with Commodore Perry of the United States in 1858 that set Japan on the pursuit of English (Kitao & Kitao, 1995 paraphrased in Iino, 2002). Japan then opened its doors to the West in 1867, ushering in the Meiji period (1868-1912). Following the opening of Japan to the West, social, political, economic and educational discourses within the country intensified around the subject of the nature of Japanese identity and culture and Japan’s relationship with the world beyond its shores. Japan was, ”suddenly and involuntarily faced with a need to define its place in the modern world” (Heinrich, 2012, p. 3). Such discourses fuelled Japan’s drive toward modernization and the rise of nationalism.

One discourse that emerged was that of ”Datsu-A-Ron.” In early 1885, an editorial appeared in the Japanese
though he had placed international realm. Datsu-A Ron, Fukuza there was no time to wait for an Asia-wide enlightenment, through which Asia might modernize and develop, philosophically, focusing its attention instead on what Western civilization was offering. Fukuzawa believed that the Second World War, during which English was relegated to the status of an enemy language taught by Japanese instructors, as the tide of nationalism began to rise against Westernization. This continued until 'securing Japan by neo-Confucianist thought firmly entrenched in Japanese society (e.g., Hawkins, 1998; Khan, 1997; Varley, 2000). Neo-Confucianism sought perfect moral and social order in the world, in humanistic fashion. This was achieved through the taming of one's 'ki': "a force governed by the passions and other emotions that produce evil" (Varley, 2000, p. 171), which in turn allowed for an individual's 'ri' -his or her inherently good principles or nature- to emerge (Varley, 2000). Neo-Confucianism experienced its most robust growth as an influential philosophy during the Edo period under the Tokugawa shogunate (Sawada, 1993), guiding moral and other forms of education. Its discourses focused primarily on "the conduct and affairs of people in the here and now" (Varley, 2000, p. 172). In the interest of maintaining social order and as a result conformity, neo-Confucianism focused on the five primary relationships of father-son, ruler-subject, husband-wife, older (brother) - younger (brother), and friends (Varley, 2000).

In the Meiji period, faced with the opening of Japan to the West, the Japanese government re-emphasized Confucianist thought in Japanese education via the Imperial Rescript on Education (1890). The Rescript reinforced the importance of morality and the relationships in which social order might be attained, and emphasized a commitment to the Emperor and the Nation (Khan, 1997). Neo-Confucianist therefore played a role in Japan's drive toward nationalism in and beyond the Meiji period (Hawkins, 1998).

During the Meiji period, Law (1995) notes that English, taught primarily by native speakers, served as a conduit for the transmission of Western knowledge and philosophy into Japan. English was the property of Caucasian Westerners and was as foreign as the individuals who spoke it. In the interest of fuelling Japan's drive toward modernization (Iino, 2002), of establishing a firm position vis-à-vis the West, and of preserving "Japanese civilization," English was a critical subject to study. By the early 1900's, however, English classes were being taught by Japanese instructors, as the tide of nationalism began to rise against Westernization. This continued until the Second World War, during which English was relegated to the status of an enemy language (Iino, 2002). During the early 1900's, English became an integral part of educational assessment in Japan:

"...English was widely adopted as a screening process for elite education. As a result, the so-called Juken Eigo (English for the purpose of the entrance examination) became the main goal of learners rather than English for communication. The focus of their learning was on the memorization of grammar and vocabulary for translating English into Japanese, with little attention paid to pronunciation or use" (Kitao & Kitao, 1995, paraphrased in Iino, 2002, p. 82).
In its newfound role as a gatekeeper within Japanese society and already a vehicle for the import of linguistic and cultural knowledge from the West, English was clearly property of the “Other.” That “Other” was White and Western.

Following World War II, neo-Confucianism fell under scrutiny, as it had been shaped in a manner that promoted nationalist sentiment (Hawkins, 1998). Indeed, the National Rescript on Education was repealed at this time. Yet neo-Confucianism continued to maintain a powerful influence on the Japanese education system; an influence that continues to present (Hawkins, 1998; Wray, 2008). Neo-Confucianism in Japanese education seeks to limit individualism (Nemoto, 1999) in the interest of uniformity and consistency both on the part of students and teachers (Hawkins, 1998). This is grounded in an Edo-era emphasis on the value and pre-eminence of the ‘expository lecture,’ first established in neo-Confucian education in Japan by Ansai Yamazaki (Sawada, 1993). As such, after the War, classes were (and at present are often) taught in the Grammar-Translation method, conducted largely in Japanese, working grammar and lexis from English to Japanese and the reverse (Gorsuch, 2000). In such a classroom, the teacher is the authority, imparting knowledge to students whose role is receptive in nature (Nguyen et al., 2006).

**Globalization, Identity and English**

During the years immediately following the War, Japan again found itself attempting to define its identity in relation to the ever-globalizing world in which it was situated. Japan focused its energy away from military affairs and set about a course of economic growth popularly referred to as the “Economic Miracle,” which lasted from around 1955 until the late 1970’s (Fujimoto-Adamson, 2006). During this period, business leaders called for the prioritization of English in the name of better communication in international business (Imura, 2003). Teachers from the U.S. entered Japan, and the government focused on English language education. Standardized testing, such as the STEP (Society for Testing English Proficiency) Test and later the TOEIC (Test of English for International Communication) test became commonplace in Japanese society (Fujimoto-Adamson, 2006). TOEIC scores became a common measure of the English proficiency of company recruits and employees. In addition, English became an integral component of high school and university entrance examinations (Kitao & Kitao, 1995).

Building upon social discourses in Japan that had sought to establish its position in the international realm vis-à-vis the West, new dominant discourses emerged related to Japan and globalization. Globalization, as in the Meiji period, related to Japan and its relationship with Western nations. Appearing immediately after World War II and building momentum in the 1960’s, nihonjinron (Befu, 1993, 2001; Sugimoto, 1999) sought to portray the “sociological, psychological and linguistic uniqueness” of the Japanese (Kubota, 1998, p. 300). According to Sugimoto (1999), nihonjinron “tends to use three concepts- nationality, ethnicity and culture- almost interchangeably” (p. 82). “Japanese culture” is the sole property of those deemed “ethnically Japanese,” which excludes not only “foreigners” but minority groups within Japan, such as the Ainu and Okinawans, who are not “ethnically Japanese” (Sugimoto, 1999). Noted politicians in the 21st Century continue to describe Japan in such a manner. In 2005, for instance, Aso Taro, then foreign minister and now a former Prime Minister, described Japan as “one nation, one language, one culture and one race” (Daily Yomiuri, 2005), unlike any other nation on earth. In addition, in 2008, Tourism Minister Nariaki Nakayama argued that Japan is an ethnically homogenous country that dislikes foreigners (Fukada, 2008).

Grounded in the discourses of nihonjinron, another discourse -kokusai, or “internationalization” (Kubota, 1998; Oliver, 2009) - emerged during the 1980’s in Japan as a result of the nation dealing with its status as a new world economic power. According to Kubota (1998):

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Japan as a world economic power experienced a need to communicate better with its international partners in order to ensure its economic prosperity while maintaining its own identity. A strategy that Japan employed in order to fulfill this need was neither to subjugate the nation to the West nor to seek a counter-hegemony against the West; it was to accommodate the hegemony of the West by becoming one of the equal members of the West and to convince the West and other nations of its position based on a distinct cultural heritage” (p. 300).

Kokusaika involved the perpetuation of nihonjinron as a projected identity to the West, with the purpose of carving out a unique place at the “global” table.

In 1985, again due to concerns regarding the ability of Japanese students to use English communicatively, MEXT (called the Ministry of Education or MOE until shortly after the turn of the century, when it combined with the Ministry of Science and Technology) began to promote communicative competence and with such, interest in Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) increased. The MOE established the Japan Exchange and Teaching Program (JET) in 1985 (Riley, 2008) , wherein native speakers of English are brought to Japan to work as Assistant Language Teachers (ALTs). Such was done with the goal in mind of fomenting and nurturing the communicative ability and international understanding of students (Koike & Tanaka, 1995, paraphrased in Riley, 2008) . According to current statistics on the JET Programme Website (2009) , 98% of participants in the JET Programme (the overwhelming majority of these being Assistant Language Teachers, or ALTs) are from Western, English-speaking countries (other language groups are represented within the statistics as well) . Of these individuals, nearly 63% are American. In addition, fuelled by kokusaika, English language conversation schools or “eikaiwa” spread rapidly across Japan (Mizuta, 2009) . In eikaiwa, or English conversation schools and their affiliates, NSs –typically Western (Kitao & Kitao, 1995; Kubota, 2011) and often white males (Kubota, 2011) - dominate. NSs were and continue to be the selling point of such institutions (Kubota, 2011) .

Once again, in 2000, debate regarding English language education emerged as a result of pressure from the business community who felt Japanese learners of English were yet ill-prepared to successfully engage in interaction (Yoshida, 2003). Such pressure, “culminated in the report of the Japan’s Goals in the 21st Century Committee (2000), in which a proposal was made to make English the second official language in Japan” (Yoshida, 2003, p. 291), though this proposal was rejected. During this period, scholars and officials discussed the study of English for purposes of taking entrance examinations vs. English for communicative ability (Butler & Iino, 2005), and an increase in English study in schools. There was much skepticism related to the potential harm an expanded role for English study would potentially perpetrate upon Japanese culture and the preservation of the status of the Japanese language (Tsui & Tollefson, 2007). In 2002, MEXT explicitly expressed its dissatisfaction with the state of English education, claiming that such instruction has not produced desired outcomes (MEXT, 2002). As such, the majority of the Japanese population studying English was unprepared for interaction with diverse populations using the language. In devising the plan, MEXT invited the input of experts related to English education, and held round-table committees which discussed the opinions of further visiting experts. These committees, “formed the basis for the attached strategic plan to cultivate “Japanese with English abilities” (MEXT, 2002).

In its ‘plan of strategy,’ MEXT (2002) revealed its intention to emphasize communicative ability in English, in order to adequately prepare the Japanese people for life in a ‘globalized’ community. In order to do so, MEXT recommended steps including increasing the number of ALTs working in schools, and increasing required Test Of English for International Communication (TOEIC) scores for Japanese teachers. The TOEIC test is widely used around the world to assess the English proficiency of its test takers, and Japan is no exception (ETS, 2009) , with particular relation to Japanese companies. In addition, the plan called for instruction to be carried out largely in English, and for English education at the elementary level to commence. Butler & Iino (2005) further point out
that in the Action Plan proposed by MEXT, the Japanese language is explicitly established as the foundation for intellectual activities, in the presumed interest of allaying fears of a loss of Japanese language and culture.

**English Language Education at Present**

As with a conceptualized globalization focusing on Japan’s relationship with the West, multilingualism in Japan equates with "English-Japanese Bilingualism" (Kubota, 2002, p. 12). Foreign language study in Japan is compulsory, from the 7th to 12th grades. English is the primary language offered around the country (Iino, 2002), however, as English is a major component on high school and university entrance examinations (Kitao & Kitao, 1995, paraphrased in Iino, 2002). Junior high and high school English education is meant to provide students with a grasp of written and spoken English, as well as exposure to the socio-cultural knowledge underpinning the language (Kitao & Kitao, 1995). According to Parmenter and Tomita (2001), guidelines for the contents of textbooks at the junior high and high school level are strictly outlined by MEXT, as is final textbook choices. Within these textbooks, the linguistic and cultural knowledge overwhelmingly corresponds to the West (Yamanaka, 2006). The goal of instruction at the junior high and high school level almost exclusively relates to students succeeding in passing the entrance exams. Many students, as a result, study in cram schools to supplement their secondary studies (Pettersen, 1993).

In 2002, English became an increasinglly common subject of study at the elementary school level in the 5th and 6th grades, finally becoming compulsory once-a-week subject at the elementary level (Fennelly & Luxton, 2011). According to Butler (2007), discussion of English at the elementary level, "began largely as a response to pressure from business and political sectors; they had repeatedly called for changes to Japan’s English education in order to be competitive in both business and politics globally" (Butler, 2007, p. 10). The responsibility for teaching English falls to the homeroom teacher, according to MEXT, though he/she may be supported by an ALT or member of the surrounding community. This has caused many elementary school teachers to complain of a lack of training and English skills to fulfill their language teaching duties (Fennelly & Luxton, 2011).

In public elementary, junior high and high schools, Japanese teachers comprise the majority of instructors, while Native Speakers largely participate as ALTs (Riley, 2008). Some companies act as intermediaries between schools and NSs, hiring "dispatch" teachers to teach in one or more locations during the week (Takahara, 2008). A small number of NSs work full-time at private schools, both Japanese and international in nature. Non-Japanese NNESTs are highly uncommon.

At the university level, departments choose the curricula in which their students will participate (there is no MEXT oversight). Students are often required by their departments to complete one to two years of language study. This may or may not include the study of another language as well; all depends upon the university and department in question (Kitao & Kitao, 1995). The primary concern of students at the university level is their achieving a "high TOEIC score" in order to secure the type of employment they desire. Studying for the TOEIC is a pursuit many employees embark on after graduation, whether in company classes or in private language schools (Kitao & Kitao, 1995).

In terms of full-time university professors teaching English, NSs are most often on limited-term contracts, with their Japanese colleagues more often than not on tenure (Aldwinckle, 1999). According to Hall (1997), there were more foreign professors tenured at George Washington University in Washington, D.C., than at the dozens of national public universities in Japan combined. Thus, the majority of faculty members are Japanese. In addition, universities rely heavily on the services of part-time NESTs and Japanese NNESTs (Aldwinckle, 1999). As with primary and secondary education, non-Japanese NNESTs are uncommon.
“Business” and English in Japan

The business community continues to promote the necessity of English in sustaining Japan’s ability to compete in the global business world, as it since the end of World War II. Grounded in the belief that without a large percentage of English speakers Japan is, “at risk of losing its competitive edge in the international business and political world” (Mori, 2011, p. 68), Japan-based, international companies such as Kyocera and Rakuten have prioritized the English proficiency of their employees.

In 2010, Rakuten president Hiroshi Mikitani, a Harvard Business School graduate with significant overseas experience, officially announced English as the new primary working language of the company (Neeley, 2011). Mikitani called his decision and philosophy “Englishnization,” which he explains in a book he has published on the subject (Mikitani, 2012). Mikitani’s expressed desire is not only to increase his company’s ability to grow and compete; he desires to change Japanese society as a whole, believing that Rakuten “can be the role model for a new Japan” (Neeley, 2011, p. 4). In addition to believing that English is the future for business, Mikitani also argues that English is a way to alter what he terms “the conservative customs and systems of Japan” (Neeley, 2011, p. 4). He asserts that Englishnization is a manner to do so as, “the Japanese language is a barrier to information that comes from outside Japan and to a more objective view of the world” (Neeley, 2011, p. 4). Though initially received with shock, Mikitani’s announcement has led for a push amongst employees to improve their English, both on their own and in language schools. The company uses the TOEIC test to assess reading/writing proficiency, and monitors the spoken proficiency of its employees via observations (Neeley, 2011).

Overall, the Japanese media has celebrated Rakuten’s flexibility in the global market, allowing the company to hire talented individuals from around the world and enter markets where other Japanese companies might struggle to do so (Neeley, 2011).

Another push toward “globalization” occurred in 2009, when the Japanese government, with encouragement from the business community, undertook the “Project for Establishing Core Universities for Internationalization” (Mori, 2011). The fundamental purpose underpinning the project was to establish English-medium university courses to attract international students and faculty to Japan, to play a role in the internationalization of Japanese society (Mori, 2011). English was chosen as the medium instruction due to its perceived status as the global language; the language of business and of research (Mori, 2011). The Japanese government initiated the program as a result of worries regarding Japan’s declining birthrate and its ability to attract international talent, both of which affect Japan’s ability to compete on the global stage (Mori, 2011). The government voted in late 2010, however, to “abolish” and “restructure” the program, due to budget cuts and issues with finding potential participating universities (McNeill, 2010).

The Japanese government and the business community are also, at the moment, discussing decentralization. This decentralization would reform the system of 47 prefectures within the country established in the Meiji period (Niikawa, 2006), replacing it with a regional government system (“doshusei”) comprised of seven regional blocs (Yokomichi, 2008). Proponents of decentralization argue that such a move would strengthen local autonomy, render the administrative system more efficient, and would make each region more globally competitive (Yokomichi, 2008). According to Furukawa (2002), “democratization, globalization, and public-sector reform have contributed most to decentralization” (p. 23), as the relationship between the local and the global becomes increasingly intertwined.

The discourses regarding Japan’s relationship with and role in a globalizing world are also connected to another issue that has lingered in Japan since the end of World War II: territorial disputes with Russia, China, South (and North) Korea and Taiwan. These disputes are constructed by a complex web of issues related to national sovereignty, Japan’s colonial past, and specifically that of national resources including fishing and natural gas and petroleum deposits (Sylvester, 2007). In the last decade nationalist sentiment within Japan has increased, fuelled...
in part by right wing groups and politicians, are challenging the Japanese government to defend Japanese sovereignty (Matthews, 2003; Bouthier, 2012; Fackler, 2012, MacKinnon, 2012). Tokyo Governor Shintaro Ishihara and Osaka Mayor Toru Hashimoto, two such influential politicians, are also integral participants in promoting decentralization in Japan (Ishihara, 2004; MacKinnon, 2012; Pulvers, 2012; Wagner, 2012).

The dominant sociohistorical discourses in Japan guiding sociocultural, political and educational approaches to identity have constructed an essentialized Japan, which has then been juxtaposed against the West. The borders around conceptualizations of what constitutes “Japan,” “being Japanese” and what is “other” have permeated Japanese society, essentializing who and what might be considered Japanese. The discourses both embedded within and shaping English language education are no different. In concert with the discourses of “us and them,” English language learning and instruction have prioritized the linguistic and cultural knowledge of an idealized, white, Western native speaker (Kubota, 1998; Oda, 1999), while reinforcing the gap between Japan and the world beyond, linguistically and culturally and eliminating space for individuals who do not fit the native speaker model and who are not Japanese (Rudolph & Igarashi, 2012).

**Reconceptualizing Language, Culture and Identity**

Indeed, essentialized constructions of language, culture and identity related to Japan and the world beyond, permeate business, politics and society in general. Yet such constructions have not gone unchallenged. These challenges shed critical light on Japanese society, being Japanese, and as a consequence, on the nature and role of English in Japan.

Perhaps the most powerful challenge to constructions of Japanese culture and identity, are embodied in the people who do not fit nihonjinron-inspired conceptions of who is Japanese. Sugimoto (1999) argues that, “Globalization has brought into view many kinds of Japanese of whom Nihonjinron lost sight and who pose a fundamental challenge to its core assumptions” (Sugimoto, 1999, p. 88). This includes the indigenous Ainu minority, the people of the Ryukyus who are ethnically and linguistically distinct from “the Japanese,” Koreans and Chinese who were forcibly brought or emigrated to Japan before and during World War II, and the Burakkumin or “defiled” who have, since the Edo period, been relegated to the fringes of Japanese society marked by their occupations, lineage and where they are from (Willis & Murphy-Shigematsu, 2008).

At present, marriages between Japanese and non-Japanese now comprise one out of twenty (Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare, 2010). These families are adding to the diverse fabric of what Japan is and what it is becoming. There are also over two million immigrants living in Japan, for the short and long term. Over 250,000 Brazilians and 50,000 Peruvians, with at least one family member on a Japanese ancestry visa, are currently living in the country. Over 500,000 Chinese and 300,000 Filipinos reside in Japan as well (Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare, 2010). In concert with other internationals and other members of Japanese society, these individuals are redefining the nature of Japan and Japaneseness.

As a result of the global flows of people, finances, technology, ideas and information (Appadurai, 2000), hybridization is occurring in Japan leading to “trans-local, Creole and creolized cultures” (Willis & Murphy-Shigematsu, 2008, p. 31). In their book “Transcultural Japan: At the Borderlands of Race, Gender and Identity,” Willis and Murphy-Shigematsu (2008) describe Japan in the following manner:

“The dividing lines between Japanese and Others, including conceptions of what is ‘pure’ and ‘impure,’ are no longer so clear as they were once assumed to be. These new and complex contexts reveal a transcultural world that is overlooked when we are preoccupied with conceptual dichotomies and dialectical oppositions. What we are seeing instead is a transcultural, transnational society with fluid boundaries, constant change, and often innovative cultural formations” (p. 5).
What is Japan? What is being Japanese? These are few of the questions that emerge in the deconstruction of the social discourses that have essentialized identity, language and culture in Japanese society.

Approaches to ELT seeking to move beyond the NS construct, are approaches that are concomitantly challenging essentializing discourses within Japanese society in general. Scholars have first and foremost questioned the necessity for such an intense focus on English study for the general population, as for the majority of these people English plays little or no role in their lives (e.g., Oda, 2007; Yano, 2011). Oda (2007) asserts that the “world” Japanese English learners are being prepared for is a myth; a myth that perpetuates the power of the NS construct. Other scholars including Kubota (1998, 2002, 2011) have connected the perpetuation of the NS construct in ELT to larger societal discourses related to Japan’s juxtaposition vis-à-vis the “world” (the West).

Recently, scholars have been critically examining language ownership (e.g., Matsuda, 2003a; Simon-Maeda, 2011), and language and identity (e.g., Kubota, 1998, 2002, 2011; Murahata & Murahata, 2008; Rudolph & Igarashi, 2012; Simon-Maeda, 2004, 2011; Willis & Murphy-Shigematsu, 2008), assessment grounded in a NS-centric approach (e.g., Matsuda, 2003b), curriculum and materials privileging the language and culture of an idealized NS and ignoring the Outer and Expanding Circles (e.g., Matsuda, 2003b, Yamanaka, 2006), and the NS-centric nature of some professional ELT organizations (Oda, 1999) in Japan. Scholars are also examining the effect of globalization on language policy in Japan, both in terms of Japanese and English (e.g., Heinrich, 2012; Sargeant, 2011). Such work is creating space for border crossing; for reimagining who Japanese learners, users and teachers of English might be or become. Yet within the larger social and academic discourses of ELT in Japan, such discussions and issues are far from mainstream and potentially threatening to those who might attempt to do so (Rudolph & Igarashi, 2012). Murahata (2008) notes that the overwhelming majority of discourse related to the NS/NNS binary takes place in the West and not in contexts such as Japan.

At Present, Into the Future

The debate over language, culture and identity in Japan is far from complete. As Willis and Murphy-Shigematsu (2008) argue, "Japan is moving in two seemingly contradictory directions at the same time, one of increasing isolation... and the other of opening more doors, symbolic and real" (p. 31). In this context, via discourses within Japanese society and those embedded within a globalized ELT, the nature and role of English continues to be negotiated.

Endnotes

1) The Confucianism that first entered Japan in the late Kamakura period (1185-1333) (Craig, 1998) is termed “neo-Confucianism,” as it was a reformed Chinese approach to Confucius’ original ideas (e.g., Hawkins, 1998; Khan, 1997; Varley, 2000).

2) The belief in and perpetuation of nihonjinron transcends social status and political affiliation in Japan. It is propogated both within and beyond Japan by Japanese and non-Japanese alike (Sugimoto, 1999).

3) The plan has been criticized, within the NS construct paradigm, for issues including its emphasis on TOEIC scores, which likely do not reflect an individual’s communicative proficiency (Yoshida, 2003) and for the fact that teachers and students alike may opt to focus on English for entrance examinations and tests such as the TOEIC, over communicative competence (Murphey, 2004).

4) Students may also take the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), a standardized test typically used by North American educational institutions for assessing international student applicants.

5) The commonplace nature of limited-term contracts for foreign teachers has been a subject of discussion amongst such individuals for many years (e.g., Aldwinckle, 1999; Hall, 1994, 1997; McCrostie & Spiri, 2008), something which Hall...
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(1994) has labelled ‘academic apartheid.’ This is a very complex matter that is beyond the scope of this literature review, though it is directly related to the social discourses juxtaposing Japan against the West. In an Asahi Newspaper article, Shinichiro Noriguchi, a University of Kitakyushu English professor described the logic of separate academic tracks for native speaker teachers, arguing, “native speakers who have lived in Japan for more than ten years tend to have adapted to the system and have become ineffective as teachers” (Noriguchi, 2006).

6) The discourse of ‘Nihon Chinbotsu’ or ‘Sinking Japan’ is a do-or-die discourse that, like nihonjiron, prevails in Japanese society. This discourse, which takes its name from a 1973 sci-fi movie, argues that, “Japan would sink, doomed unless it changed fundamentally” (Curtis, 1999, p. 42) as a result of the forces of globalization.

7) Kyocera is a company specializing in electronic parts and products, while Rakuten is a global market site where a customer can search for and purchase almost any kind of item.

8) As Arudou (2007) notes, the members of the “foreign” community in Japan, becoming increasingly visible, have been scapegoats at times for the ills plaguing Japanese society, including issues related to crime, employment and education.

9) In line with discourses shaping Japan’s relationship with the “outside world,” here are a couple interesting facts according to (Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare, 2010) : There are 570,000 Japanese in Western countries, while around 123,000 Westerners live in Japan. There are 1,371,000 Asians living in Japan, but only 193,000 Japanese living in Asia. 93% of Japanese permanent residents overseas live in North America.

10) Kachru (1985) proposed a three-concentric circle model attempting to explain the historical spread of English around the world and the development of new Englishes. Kachru (1985) describes an “Inner Circle” as consisting of native-speaking Western nations, the ”Outer Circle” as consisting of the former colonies of English-speaking nations, and the ”Expanding Circle” as including countries which had not experienced colonialization on the part of an English-speaking nation.

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