

HIROSHIMA UNIVERSITY広島大学

Reflection Sheet: Class 6

FOREIGN LANGUAGE ACQUISITION AND COMMUNICATION II

外国語習得とコミュニケーション II

**Submission Information**

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1. Introduction

This session focused on how ideologies influence foreign language learning, especially in Japan. It explored how beliefs about language affect how people learn, communicate, and view themselves. For example, in Japan, there’s a strong focus on speaking English like a native speaker, which can create both opportunities and challenges for learners. The main paper discussed was Kubota and Takeda (2020), which examined how globalization, classroom practices, and cultural expectations shape language learning.

1. **Ideologies in Language Learning**

Language ideologies are beliefs about language that influence society and education. In many parts of the world, including Japan, English is seen as the ideal language for achieving success. However, the emphasis is often on learning “perfect” English. This creates a situation where learners feel pressure to meet unrealistic native-speaker standards, even though real-world communication is far more flexible.

## Cultural and Historical Influences

Japan’s unique history and culture play a big role in its language learning approach. Because Japan has never been colonized, its national identity is strongly tied to the Japanese language. Schools focus on teaching Japanese as the foundation of national identity, while English is taught as a foreign language to be mastered. The goal is often to speak like a native, which can make students feel their English needs to be 'fixed' to succeed.

## Criticism of Japanese English

In fact, popular books and media reinforce this mindset. Titles like “*How Your English Sounds to Native Speakers”* and “*Embarrassing Made-in-Japan English”* suggest that Japanese English is full of mistakes that must be corrected. But in reality, many Japanese speakers successfully use English to connect with people worldwide, even if their English isn’t perfect.

# Neoliberal Communication

## Neoliberalism and Global Jinzai

Kubota and Takeda (2020) examined how Japan’s English education policies and globalization shape language learning. To summarize, using insights from the MIC report (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications) and interviews with Japanese workers abroad, they identified two key trends: fixity and fluidity. Fixity refers to the emphasis on teaching standardized English, often measured by tests like TOEFL or IELTS. Fluidity reflects how people adapt their communication in real-life situations, as revealed in interviews with Japanese workers in countries like China, South Korea, and Thailand, where they use a mix of languages, gestures, and teamwork to achieve understanding.

## Flexibility Over Fluency

For instance, a Japanese transnational worker in Thailand might rely on basic English, local phrases, and visuals to explain technical concepts, showing that professional knowledge matters more than perfect grammar or native-like fluency. Additionally, speaking the local language is seen as an added advantage. Kubota and Takeda argue that Japan’s education system should focus more on preparing learners for flexible, real-world communication rather than just aiming for high test scores.

## Transmission Model of Communication

Prof. Shibata introduced the transmission model of communication, which views communication as a one-way process where the speaker is responsible for clarity. This model often leads to a deficit ideology, where any communication breakdown is attributed to the non-native speaker’s lack of language skills. The professor also explained how this perspective ignores the shared responsibility between speakers and listeners in achieving mutual understanding.

# Conclusion

While Japan’s education system often focuses on standardized English, real communication requires flexibility and adaptability. Teachers and educational institutions could play a key role in creating inclusive classrooms where learners feel confident to communicate, even if their English isn’t perfect. This can be achieved by focusing on practical skills and mutual understanding rather than standardized tests.

# References

Kubota R., & Takeda, Y. (2020). Language-in-education policies in Japan versus transnational workers’ voices: Two faces of neoliberal communication competence. TESOL quarterly, 55(2), 458-485.