



OLE after the university reform in Japan

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Reference Data

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This paper is presented as a preparatory study in order to better analyze how 2FLs have fared under the university reform and to determine what positive aspects exist. First, conditions and observations for such a study are discussed after which quantitative Monkasho data and my own qualitative data are compared. The measures taken so far are classified and discussed briefly. Foreign language learning is then placed in a global context of school FL education, with some final statements that concern the present situation and possible future developments.

本論考は、大学改革において、第2外国語が辿った経路と、あるかもしれないその積極的な側面を解明するための予備考察である。最初にこのような研究の条件と広範に行われた観察に言及し、次に文部科学省の量的なデータと我々の質的なデータを示す。これまでに行われた施策を分類し簡潔に論評する。さらに外国語学習分野を学校の外国語教育の包括的コンテクストに位置づけ、最後に現状と将来の展開の可能性について述べる。

This paper attempts to explore ways to research what consequences the recent reforms at Japanese universities have on the teaching and learning of languages other than English (other language education = OLE) and how the present situation can be grasped, and whether any and then which suggestions can be made for the future. The contents of the paper can also be considered a case study along the lines of Soy (1997). It tries to, although minimally and only temporarily, answer the question: What changes does the university reform have on OLE? In the following part, the case and its preconditions, the changing conditions for OLE, are considered. The next part contains the preparation and the collection of data (two sets) and an analysis. The results are then seen in a global view before final considerations to conclude the paper.

As a societal phenomenon, the recent developments concerning OLE can be considered a kind of new institutionalism, only with committees and universities as a whole acting instead of individuals who “instead of acting under rules” (such as to provide a higher education at a university) or based on obligation (e.g.

to keep requiring a certain level of education including knowledge of foreign languages) “act because of conceptions” (e.g. that classes have to be made easier, or education be competitive etc.). Accordingly, compliance (in this case OLE reduction) “occurs in many circumstances because other types of behavior are inconceivable” (Scott, 2001, p.57), such as requiring a full course of other languages as at Kyushu (Kasjan, 2006) and Shimane (Nishiwaki, 2006) universities.

As the situation is still very much in a state of flux, empirical data with validity of more than one term are hard to obtain, as will become clear below, and these can only be used as demonstrative examples and not interpreted from calculations. Meanwhile, tendencies of students’ choices, administrative decisions etc. can be made out, as will be shown below, and it is important to take note of them, for example in order to help with the decision process at universities, where a change may still be possible. Thus, in the following part we consider what can be observed widely, even before looking at data. In order to warrant these observations, the next part briefly presents the most recent quantitative data on OLE at national universities (Monkasho, 2006) and qualitative data from universities in one area of Japan. This is followed by a basic discussion of several recent developments and how OLE in Japan appears from a more global point of view. Finally, a few statements are made on the present situation and how the good aspects can be made fruitful for improving OLE at Japanese universities in the future. Since this paper partly concerns delicate matter, individual names can not be given. If necessary, the reader should contact the respective university homepages or the administration

directly. The homepages of all universities mentioned in this paper are given in alphabetical order in the references.

The changing overall conditions for Other Language Education (OLE)

Even before undertaking surveys, many observations can be made about the situation of OLE at the university level in Japan. These observations form a kind of extremely broad, somewhat unstructured *general knowledge* which, however, influences decision making as much as knowledge that is based on *scientific data*. And of the most important observations is that for the first time in memory, there are almost as many (or more) openings (at universities) as there are students wanting to enter. This situation can lead to dramatic changes in the system.

Data collection

Due to the large number of openings and in order to grasp as many students as possible, the OLE teaching and learning conditions vary considerably across universities in Japan. This situation can hardly be grasped by a simple grid or system, such as a questionnaire, and any quantitative data have to be supported by qualitative data as in the next part. There is, however, the simple fact that either a certain number of courses take place and there are students taking these, or this is not the case. In between, there is space for variety and development. Accordingly, safe data cannot be given at this point. The situation is in a state of flux, so that data obtained at one point in time may well be outdated by the time they become published.

Administrative, syllabus and contents issues

Syllabuses and curricula have to be kept constant at least for the time between high school graduates' university application (for most universities some time in fall) and the students' entry into the university for the first term around April the following year. Nevertheless, due to the fast changing situation, students in subsequent years sometimes start with quite different conditions for units, contents and graduation. Beyond that, students rarely seem concerned with what happens afterwards as long as studies and graduation do not get harder or stricter.

As always in cases where offers considerably outnumber needs, user friendliness becomes a, if not the, main topic, and in learning institutional contexts this simply means reducing complexity and amount of contents in order to facilitate entry, studies, and graduation. In the extreme for example, it is not the university anymore who can determine the requirements, but those who the university wants to admit, and whom it is then supposed to serve. At first sight, this situation should lead to ever older students coming to the university, and this age group will have to be addressed (Kelly, 1998).

The need to facilitate curricula and graduation can also (but has not yet throughout the world) lead to another phenomenon: A reduction of requirements and classes disliked *and* thought useless by a strong faction within the university. This double condition leads to the reduction or even abolition of foreign language requirements (sometimes even including English), but not that of courses concerning vectors, matrixes or long equations, which are probably disliked even more. Some universities, however, seem to

have taken exactly the opposite course by increasing the difficulty of their curricula if only to increase reputation and thus enrollment. At most universities, committees work on curricula, but the often predetermined direction seems to be towards the abolition of 2FLs, so that the committee work appears only to be for alleviation purposes.

Effects on studying

In particular this situation means that it cannot be assured students will study, since their payment to the institution should guarantee grading (and graduation) without even coming to class, the latter being the liberty of the student, as can be seen from part of the discussion in the *shimamura kurume* list (Shimamura, 2006a and b) part of the official mailing list of the German Teachers' Association. Probably similar reasons, have lead American institutions of higher education to have students sign contracts that they actually study. A general description can be found at <http://www.readwritethink.org/lessons/lesson_view.asp?id=141> and an example at <http://www.readwritethink.org/lesson_images/lesson141/contract.pdf>.

The following example is from the University of Chester, England, "aimed at clarifying any ambiguity concerning the obligations on the part of both the university and its students," (Enquirer, 2006) including

"3. Your Obligations. You agree as follows:

3.1 to comply with your obligations under these conditions;

3.2 to study diligently, and to attend promptly

and participate appropriately at lectures, courses, classes, seminars, tutorials, work placements and other activities which form part of the Programme as required (subject to absence authorized in accordance procedures applicable to the Programme, in respect of which you agree to undertake all additional study and other activities which may be necessary to catch up on missed work);

3.3 “to fulfill all the academic requirements, including submission of course work and other assignments, and attendance at examinations, of the Programme on time and in accordance with conditions imposed by the University;”

(Student Contract Conditions, n.d.).

OLE issues

The deterioration of OLE would probably not take place if there were a definition on a higher level of the required contents to be taught at a university, such as a requirement for universities to require FLs for graduation. In fact, this requirement has already been abolished in the ministry of education's 1992 order (Reinelt, 1993, p. 3). At that time the abolition of FLs (including English) can only be delayed by the factors below:

- by the usual slowness of administrative processes (such as at Shudo University, personal communication).
- by a strong university policy, which can even outlast the financial hardships in the wake of a possible decrease in student enrollment. Consider for example,

the Ehime university answer to a student who did not see the relevance of a general studies course. The university's answer simply stated, it has no intention of abolishing the general studies part (Ehime University, 2006).

- if the university is likewise dedicated to introducing students to new, unfamiliar and therefore work-intensive knowledge and skill areas such as the world beyond English, OLE can survive and be offered continuously.
- by the emergence of fashionable subjects. Presently, many students attend Chinese and Korean classes. Note, however, that this shift may be temporary. A similar shift happened in the early 1990s, but it temporarily abated in the late 1990s, when Korean and Chinese teachers started to grade more strictly.

In the following parts, we will try to support the observations somewhat by briefly presenting results from two surveys. Because the general situation is changing rapidly as many universities are in the midst of a reforming process, all results have to be approached with due skepticism because of their very limited duration validity and relevance. Two reasons, however, warrant the effort:

1. To a certain degree the general tendency can be grasped, and a university might want to deviate from this in order to demonstrate its individuality.
2. Good examples in the sense of retaining other FL education surface and can be used by committees, if it is necessary to prove that abolition of 2FLs is not the only way or that there are alternatives around.

Survey results: Temporary quantitative and qualitative data

Quantitative data: Monkasho 2006

Two sets of data, both having become available only hours before the deadline of this paper, are used. The first comes from answers to one question in a questionnaire sent out to universities by the Ministry of Education and Science (Monkasho) from Sept. 2005 (Monkasho, 2006). The second set of qualitative data was gathered in the area around where the author lives, because it is easier to collect such data from people known to the researcher, especially in the case of peril to jobs and salaries.

Monkasho (2006) was made available to the author by the time of deadline of this paper. (Oct. 15. 2006). The data are from the 83 ex-national universities as of Sept. 30, 2005 at: <http://www.zkai.co.jp/z-style/eyez/0310_1.asp>. Only question 12 is about FL education in general and thus including other FLs as required for graduation. See Figure 1 for the responses.

As for taking foreign languages, please choose one of the following	
1. English only is required (one language).	7.1%
2. Taking one of a number of foreign languages is required (one language).	3.6%
3. English is required and a second is required as an elective (two languages).	41.1 %
4. Any two languages are required (two languages).	9.8%
5. Mainly in the humanities, English is required as is one more elective.	0.9%
6. Mainly in the humanities, any two languages are required.	0.0%
7. Foreign languages are not required anymore.	0.0%
8. Others.	37.5%”

Figure 1. Question 12 (translated RR)

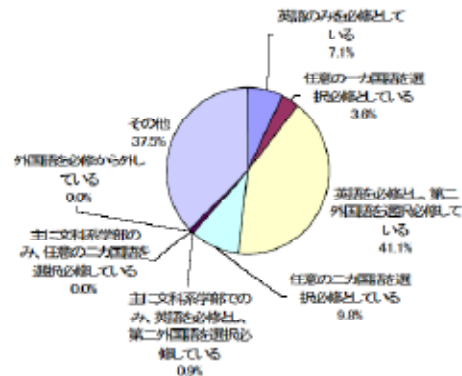


Figure2. Foreign language requirement (Monkasho 2006, p.45)

The results (p. 45) indicate that most, i.e. 41%, still continue the traditional system of English plus one elective FL. About 20% (1, 2, and 4) have abandoned this traditional system. At least in this respect there seems to be no significant difference between FL requirements for humanities and science majors. Note that Monkasho (2006) gives 37.5% for other combinations, none of which is made explicit nor easily imaginable.

Overview of Chugoku-Shikoku

Introduction

In order to get some backing for the Monkasho data, we tried to obtain qualitative data. On this sensitive matter, they were best available from a limited area and from interviewees familiar with and trusting the researcher.

Including the 87 ex-national and prefectural, city, etc. and private universities, Japan has about 700 such institutions (2004: 709; 2005: 726; 2006: 744 Aizawa 2005; Monkasho 2007). The Monkasho questionnaire, sent out only to the ex-national universities, only grasped one part of the actual situation, as private and other universities, who outnumber eightfold those asked, were not included.

Since the Monkasho data are from Sept. 2005 and facts may have changed in the meantime, we considered a small survey incorporating more recent results from (almost) all universities, national, private or other, in the limited area of Chugoku-Shikoku, Western Japan, with Okayama and Hiroshima as its centers and including the island of Shikoku.

Finally, although students belong to a university, their studies are ruled by the faculty they belong to, and faculty

requirements can be quite different even within one university. These could only be taken in consideration very marginally in our survey.

Since our inquiry concerned partly delicate matter, individual names can not to be given. If necessary, the reader should contact the homepages or the administration directly.

Data gathering

Data gathering for this part started in early October 2006, i.e. long before Monkasho (2006) became publicly available, and has continued until the final submission of this contribution on Dec 15. The method was personal conversation and telephone interviews, especially if homepages by the respective university were not informative enough or inconclusive.

The reason for this method is that while questionnaires are easily standardized they usually have a low return or fill in rate (see the 37.5% others above) for sensitive matter, especially compared to personal or telephone interviews which are rarely turned down and where information is given more readily and can be clarified if necessary. Of course, time and other work constrains limit the number of possible answers considerably, but then, as shown above, conditions may change again very soon and thus the data be of only very limited validity anyway. Accordingly, we can only present the tendencies that have become apparent so far, and have to leave more succinct research to the future at a point in time when reforms have come to a standstill or an end.

Questions

We asked whether required FLs and 2FLs

- 1 are fixed (e.g. determined by the faculty or department),
- 1 selective (1 or more from a choice of languages have to be taken), or
- 1 elective (none have to be taken, but may be chosen from the offered courses) requirements,

and which 2FLs are offered (usually Chinese, Korean, German, French, and a few others).

Results

We were able to contact 20 universities, 9 of which were ex-national, 10 private, and 1 prefectural, all of which have regulations differing from faculty to faculty.

Ex-national universities occupy both ends of the spectrum equally: 4 require their students to take a second FL almost throughout, while 4 others do not require any 2FL or only at a few of their faculties and one has a completely mixed system presently undergoing changes.

Private universities cover the whole spectrum, from three universities using the traditional system of English plus 1 other FL for one or two years to two requiring no FL at all, not even English. Five require one FL out of a choice of usually 3 or 4 including English. At first sight it is obvious that OLE has been reduced compared to earlier levels, but is still quite present, with many universities and/or faculties still requiring 2FL courses.

A basic discussion of recent developments

This part, based on results and information from the preceding part, can present only a basic discussion of important recent developments. Three kinds of approaches are distinguished, followed by a look at Japanese and overseas teachers' positions and at centers. Considered from the viewpoint of OLE, the measures taken by universities can be classified into three approaches:

Three approaches

The quiet disappearance

In steps and reforms during the last ten years or so, teachers of other FLs have become distributed over some or all of the various faculties of a university (Shinshu University). Very often, this person is then the only representative of that or any other 2FL at that faculty. Without a lobby, such persons can offer little resistance to the technical and natural science departments' pressures aimed at abolishing such courses. Thus, without a system in place for continuation of OLE in this position, there will be no 2FL teaching successor and the position is filled with a specialist of that faculty when it is vacated. Eventually, no course for this 2FL will be offered, and over time, OLE at that faculty (and university) dies out naturally.

The best case scenario

At very few universities, taking a second foreign language has been made obligatory (Kyushu University). A system for this has been installed at Shimane University (Nishiwaki, this volume), preferably before any abolition pressures ever arose. At others, the changes taking place at university

have not yet led to an overall reduction of 2FLs, so students without them do not number more than 10% as at Kochi University. As can be expected, there are a host of varieties, sometimes even within the same university, but the common characteristic is that students have to be introduced to a language beyond English.

The changeling

A third way, which in part and at times incorporates characteristics of a) and b), is taken in many universities. In the following we take Ehime University, the institution where the author is employed, as an example, but there seem to be numerous similar cases. Of course only part of the story can be told, especially since developments are still under way, and access to documents and decisions is not only limited but also sensitive and perilous.

The story in short, with no legal binding to any truth of the timing of the individual steps, was as follows:

1. Until the late 80s, all students had, with some liberty, to take a (predetermined) second FL course for two years, and gradually for only one year.
2. In the nineties, fixed classes were abolished (especially after the '92 abolition of the university graduation requirement of a foreign language), and students were given a choice of FLs to choose from.
3. In the late 1990s and early 2000s most FL courses, especially for technical and natural science students, were cut to one term.
4. The final development reminds us of the opening of the Berlin Wall. At first, probably all students, and

certainly not a few teachers started courses with the understanding that they would be obligatory for one year (as in b). Since no other classes were scheduled in that time frame, classes were full to the brim.

However, when students came back after the summer break in October, they found that the wording on taking courses said:*kudasai*. This phrase usually leaves few alternatives to doing what is requested, especially in hierarchical or formal contexts, such as creating or submitting papers as in the following case of course registration data (in order to check for attendance): About attendance book: “*kaku tantoukyouin de shutsuryoku shite kudasai*” meaning “every teacher please download the course registration data yourself” (Tebiki, Handbook, 2006 p. 9).

Few teachers would not follow this, because they would then have no data on who takes the course. Strictly speaking, however, the phrase does leave an ever so slight liberty of not conforming to its request. Probably because of a recent tendency to first question before following instructions (Yoshitake, 2006, p.1), a few students inquired deeper and it turned out that 2FL courses were not required anymore, leading to a sharp drop in participants. Whether in the next term we can welcome more than the few interested ones that show up anyway has yet to be seen. If course frequency is low, this will provide another reason for further course reductions without much opposition from teachers or students (as in a). Again, 2FLs could die of a lack of interest.

Whatever the reasons for this configuration and process, be that the need to give in to pressure from technical and natural science subjects, or even the need to make the studies at university as easy as possible without putting

any onus on students in order to attract more entries, in the end the overwhelming number of students will have no guided entry to the world outside of English and this in fact limits FL skills and intercultural understanding (nr. 10 of the pronounced teaching aims of the general education part, Tebiki (Handbook), 2006, p. 1) at Ehime University to English learning. It remains to be seen whether the time made free by such courses is better used by the students for their other studies, for more part time work, or yet other activities, and whether more students will (apply to) enter the university.

Teaching positions (oversees teachers)

To some degree, the developments in course design are mirrored in the kind of positions given to teachers, with two tendencies (resembling a and b in the preceding point) standing out:

1. Universities give, much as in the case of English, tenure, although often with severe side-conditions such as reduced pensions etc., to a limited number of OLE teachers usually already in place for a long time, well published and active in research and on various levels of education and beyond, who the university can expect to contribute considerably in the future.
2. A variety of considerably less favorable conditions holds for those foreign lecturers employed for the rest of the other FL courses. While some have the traditional limited term 2FL contracts, others do part time courses from outside institutions as part of outsourcing (Toritsu University), with, again, wide differences from university to university.

Teaching positions (Japanese)

Even for Japanese 2FL teachers two tendencies can be observed:

1. Some universities try to cover all courses with their own personnel and thus to avoid hiring part-time teachers from outside (Ehime University) as much as possible.
2. In the exactly opposite direction, other universities try to outsource 2FL courses as much as possible (Toritsu University).

Centers

According to Monkasho (2006, p. 14), 22 ex-national universities have set up a (foreign) language center (=26%). Centers are blessed with mixed success, again resulting in a mixed blessing for OLE: Ehime University abolished the 2FL requirement, while Shimane University installed a new program before any pressure could gather.

Global view and local developments combined

The changes taking place at Japanese universities are single developments as far as the respective university is concerned. They do, however, take place within the area of educational reform with its global relevance. In order to assess them properly, a means of comparison would be helpful.

The following vastly oversimplified scale tentatively attributes numbers, increasing with degree of difficulty, to the amount of FLs required. For simple comparisons, this allows to locate every university on a scale of foreign

language taking difficulty, even taking into account required length and units (by multiplying for every term required), and varying faculty requirements, if intermediate points are made use of. Note that the bottom line, no FL at all, results from the then ministry of education guideline of 1992, stating that a FL is not necessary for university graduation (Reinelt, 1993, p. 3).

diff.	2.5	2 FL required (E included as choice)
	2	2 FL required (E + 1)
	1.5	1 FL required (E included as choice)
	1	E only required
easy	0	No FL required at all (taking the 1992 MED order by word)

Figure 3. Scale of FL taking difficulty

Thus, forbearing mistakes, for example at the moment, Hiroshima Shudo University would gain 5 points for requiring all students to take a second language (2,5) for 2 terms, while Kochi University of Technology and Naruto University of education would receive 0 points because FLs are completely elective, i.e. not required at all. If we match the scale in figure 4 with a global list of school system foreign language requirements, we can see that the Japanese system tends to be easier than e.g. the German school system in terms of OLE.

Age - 6	10	18	22	Points
School				
year K	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12	U1 U2 U3 U4		
ex.:	Germany: 2FL required for HS graduation more FL as required =>			5 5+
	Japan: 1FL(E) for university entry (partly E + one other)			1 1,5 >2
at universities in Japan:				
not required by the system, but 2 FL still widely required				4/5
2 FL required (E + 1)				4
FL required (E incl. as choice)				5
E only required				1
FL required (E included as choice)				1,5
No FL required at all (according to MED 1992)				0

Figure 4. Graduation requirements

In fact, under such conditions, most Japanese students would in some countries in Europe such as Germany not even be considered high school graduates, since they have not had two FLs. Note that, vice versa, probably the same could be said about mathematics education in some countries in Europe.

Final considerations and suggestions

Since most new courses, syllabuses and curricula have started only recently under the new conditions and new plans are still being developed, it is difficult to make more than a few concluding statements. Below are some factors that are adverse to OLE:

- Pressure comes not only from technical and natural science majors.
- Since there are as many openings as there are students, universities will have to make studies ever easier, and in the absence of a contents definition of *university* in Japan, reduce learning, etc. requirements of students to barely recognizable levels in order to enroll enough students.
- Clearly, the education of international acts is difficult as discussed in Monkasho 2006 p. 65.
- Whether globalization will then be anymore than just learning English may be doubted.
- If globalization is not attained, and language education reduced to English teaching, withdrawing back to one's own culture may result.
- While 2FLs are on their way out in most places, forfeiting this chance to introduce a wider world can be considered coming close to giving up an educational duty (Nishiwaki, this volume).

In some regards, factors and developments are ambiguous:

- The very fact that 2FL teaching and learning is going to extremes with such courses being required at most universities and their requirement being abolished at many others, shows the present insecurity.
- The position of 2FL teacher employment mirrors the split: Both tenure and outsourcing can be found simultaneously.

However, there are also factors and developments supporting OLE. The fact that despite all the outside pressure and the

vastly deteriorating conditions with OLE being reduced considerably, it is still kept up at many universities, proves that OLE may be quite tenacious unless it is made an elective, and that there may still be slight chances of survival. The multilingualism panel at JALT 2006 also proved that early, fast, and convincing action, as at Kyushu and Shimane universities, can even lead to the development of new and strong 2FL courses. Promulgating at least these few positive developments of OLE may help committee members and others in decisive positions overcome the reduction concept and make them see that other types of behavior are well conceivable.

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Appendix A.

Homepages of universities mentioned in this paper in alphabetical order (all retrieved 23 April 2007)

- Ehime University: 愛媛大学: <www.ehime-u.ac.jp/>
- Kochi University of Technology: 高知工科大学: <www.kochi-tech.ac.jp/kut_J/index.html>
- Kochi University: 高知大学: <www.kochi-u.ac.jp/JA/>
- Kyushu University: 九州大学: <www.kyushu-u.ac.jp/>
- Naruto University of Education: 鳴門教育大学: <www.naruto-u.ac.jp/>

Shimane University: 島根大学: <www.shimane-u.ac.jp/>

Hiroshima Shudo University: 広島修道大学: <www.shudo-u.ac.jp/>

Shinshu University: 信州大学: <www.shinshu-u.ac.jp/>