English-Medium Instruction in Japan: Discussing Implications for Language Teaching

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Over one third of Japanese universities offer undergraduate content classes taught in English. These classes are often designed for domestic students and serve less than 10% of the student body in most cases. Generally, these classes do not form full-degree programs taught in English; rather, most English-medium instruction (EMI) programs are a part of students' mainly Japanese-medium degree. For language teaching and teachers, EMI seems to have implications in 4 areas. First, language teachers may have new roles as language programs implement EMI classes. Also, due to EMI, domestic learners engage with English differently, implying changing needs for language students. In addition, growing EMI also implies both more need and potential for communication between language and content faculty. Finally, the rising popularity of EMI in higher education may lead to positive washback on language teaching in secondary schools.

日本国内にある約3割以上の大学が英語による学部専門科目（EMI）を提供している。その多くは主に日本人学生を対象とし、受講者数が全学生の１割未満の小規模なもので、通常、ほぼ日本語で行われる学位取得プログラムの一部である。言語教育におけるEMIの拡充は次の4つのエリアへの影響を示唆する。まず、言語プログラムがEMI授業を実施する場合、言語教員が新たな役割を担う可能性がある。また、日本人学習者がこれまでとは違う形で英語と関わるため、言語教育の内容を変更する必要性があるだろう。さらに、言語教員と専門科目教員との連携が今まで以上に必要になると思われる。最後に、高等教育におけるEMI認知度の高まりは、中等教育における言語教育への積極的な波及効果となることを示唆している。

English-medium instruction (EMI) of content classes is spreading at Japanese universities and has become a priority in government plans to internationalize higher education. Drawing on both government figures (MEXT, 2015) and the researcher's own nation-wide survey (Brown, 2014; 2015) of 258 EMI programs in Japan (response rate 46%), the purpose of this paper is to outline the scope and development of EMI in Japan and discuss its implications for language teaching: changing roles for language teachers, evolving student needs in English-language classes, an increasing need for collaboration between language and content teachers, and emerging washback on secondary school English education. Although these implications may seem positive, they are by no means inevitable. Some serious structural and cultural issues remain to be addressed before the impact of EMI on language education can be fully felt.

The Scope of EMI in Japan

Government figures show that in 2013, approximately one third of Japan's nearly 800 universities offered undergraduate EMI classes, a nearly 50% increase since 2005. Although Japan has been somewhat slower in EMI development than Europe and some other Asian countries, it has grown steadily since the late 1990s. Overall, many national universities adopted EMI first, and much recent growth in EMI is in private universities (MEXT, 2015). However, unlike in Europe and elsewhere, full-degree English-taught programs (ETPs) are relatively rare in Japan, offered at approximately 30 undergraduate universities and 70 graduate schools. These numbers are rising due to ongoing government funding programs for internationalization; however, in most Japanese EMI programs, students take only some of their courses in English, as part of a mainly Japanese-medium degree program (Brown, 2015).

In terms of program size, more than three quarters of EMI programs serve less than 10% of students, with most serving fewer than 5% (see Table 1). All or most students take EMI classes at only 8% of responding universities (Brown, 2015).

Table 1. Numbers of Students in EMI Programs (*n* = 92)

Proportion of student body	Responses (%)
5% or fewer	53
About 10%	24
About 25%	14
About 50%	2
All students	4
Most students	4

In addition to being small, nearly three quarters of EMI programs are either ad hoc or semi-structured. Well-structured EMI programs, integrated into the wider curriculum, are seen at only one quarter of responding universities. However, the general trend is towards larger, more integrated programs. More than 75% of responding universities reported recent or planned expansion of EMI programs and 16% recently formalized EMI and integrated it into the wider curriculum (Brown, 2015).

Results also indicated that EMI students are largely domestic (see Table 2). Fewer than 20% of EMI programs serve solely, or predominantly, international students but two thirds of the programs serve solely, or predominantly, Japanese students (Brown, 2015).

Table 2. Breakdown of Students in EMI Classes (*n* = 77)

Category of students	Responses (%)
Predominately domestic	55
Balance of international and domestic	16
All domestic	12
Predominately international (in a degree program)	6
All international (short-term)	5
All international (in a degree program)	4
Predominately international (short-term)	3

Similarly, survey respondents prioritized needs of domestic students in EMI (see Table 3). Preparing students for global job markets and improving language skills were the top rationales (Brown, 2015). This is consistent with current government discourse on guroubaru jinzai (global human resources). Attracting international students was not among the top five rationales. Early EMI programs served short-term international students (Kamibeppu, 2012), but current expansion seems to be primarily aimed at domestic students.

Table 3. Rationales for Implementing EMI (*n* = 82)

Reason given	Mean (*SD*)
Prepare domestic students for international markets	4.4 (1.6)
Improve English skills of domestic students	4.4 (1.2)
Attract domestic students	3.4 (0.9)
Offer content better taught in English	3.4 (1.2)
Improve profile of the university	3.2 (0.9)
Respond to government push for internationalization of education	3.2 (1.2)
Attract foreign students	3.1 (1.2)
Compete with rival universities	2.9 (1.1)
Improve position on university ranking lists	2.6 (1.3)

Note. Likert scale results: 1 = not important, 5 = very important.

Implications for Language Teaching

As seen above, EMI programs in Japan tend to be small and somewhat peripheral, but they are growing in both size and number, and most of this growth is focused on domestic students. As this trend continues, the position of English at universities is changing. Although English was once exclusively an object of study, it is now becoming a working academic language for an increasing subset of students. This has implications for language teaching and the role of English-language teachers.

Changing Roles: From Language Teachers to EMI Faculty

One significant implication of EMI in Japan is the possible changing role of language teachers as they take on content classes taught in English. This can give them a new position in the university community but also raises questions about their qualifications.

As Table 4 indicates, current programs seem to be staffed roughly equally by Japanese and international faculty. Approximately one third of universities have primarily Japanese EMI faculty and one third have primarily international faculty. Approximately one quarter of universities report a balance of international and Japanese faculty in EMI (Brown, 2015); however, in many of these cases, multiple EMI programs developed independently, one staffed by international faculty and the other by Japanese (Brown, 2014).

Table 4. Breakdown of EMI Faculty by Nationalities (*n* = 75)

Nationalities	Responses (%)
Primarily Japanese	36
Primarily international	36
Balance of Japanese & international	24
All Japanese	3
All international	1

This faculty breakdown is one indication of an apparent parallel development of EMI programs. In one model, EMI develops in an existing Japanese-medium content program, most often in the humanities or social sciences (see Table 5). Although some foreign content specialists teach in these programs, the faculty is primarily Japanese (Brown, 2015). (See Honma, 2003, and Harshbarger, Morrell, & Riney, 2011, for examples of this kind of program.)

Table 5. Breakdown of Fields in Undergraduate EMI (*n* = 82)

Program	Responses (%)
Humanities	36
Social sciences	24
Natural sciences	16
Education	10
Technical / professional fields	8
Medicine, dentistry, nursing, etc.	6

The Japanese faculty in these programs often hold foreign graduate degrees (Hashimoto, 2005), which may limit the expansion of EMI because the number of such faculty members is relatively low. Only approximately 10% of university faculty in Japan attended graduate school abroad (IHEP, 2009; Ishikawa, 2011), so large-scale EMI programs of this kind may be difficult without significant changes in faculty makeup.

Other EMI programs develop differently, evolving out of language-teaching programs. Content-based instruction (CBI) or content and language integrated learning (CLIL) classes are repurposed, or new classes are developed, for EMI programs staffed by language teachers. They may continue to be primarily language teachers, while teaching EMI classes as well. (See Sekiya, 2005, and Carty & Susser, 2015, for examples of these programs.) Language teachers may see this kind of EMI program as an opportunity to expand their professional repertoire and develop a new identity in the university community (Brown 2014). However, there are also concerns about qualifications in these cases. If language teachers take on EMI classes without appropriate specialist content knowledge, both internal and external stakeholders may question the legitimacy of the EMI program (Brown, 2014).

Changing Needs and Growing Engagement

Another possible implication of EMI involves changes in how students engage with English on campus. EMI development is creating new opportunities for students; however, some question their readiness. Survey respondents (Brown, 2015) identified English-language proficiency of domestic students as the largest issue in EMI and Tsuneyoshi (2005) reported that Japanese EMI students may feel unable to keep up due to language-proficiency issues. However, although English for academic purposes (EAP) classes have become more common in Japan recently, they are not currently linked to the needs of EMI students. More than 70% of responding universities have no language-proficiency entry benchmarks for EMI programs and only 8% have EAP classes linked to EMI (Brown, 2015). There is a clear need for better language preparation for students, either pre-sessional or concurrent with the EMI program itself.

As EAP is currently commonly taught in Japan, there is little acknowledgment of the needs of EMI students. Rather, EAP is generally offered as a general-education class or in connection with study-aboard programs. EAP classes often use commercial materials that have broad topic coverage and western orientation and focus on what Jordan (1997) calls English for general academic purposes (EGAP). EAP tends to be taught with an eye to western academic norms rather than the domestic context of EMI programs (Brown & Adamson, 2012).

Brown and Adamson (2012) explored this issue and found a need for change in several areas. EAP students preparing for EMI need (a) longer-term work on a single topic; (b) greater focus on transferable academic skills, not just language proficiency; and (c) more acceptance of the students' L1 in translanguaging, the strategic and complementary use of use of both L1 and L2 to achieve goals (Blackledge & Creese, 2010).

The growth of EMI can also be an exciting development in terms of students' engagement with English. Japanese students face some motivational issues when studying English and many lose their motivation by the end of high school (Falout & Mauyama, 2004), possibly due to poor facilities and materials, noncommunicative teaching styles, and the excessive focus on testing common in many high schools (Kikuchi & Sakai, 2009). This demotivation can carry over into university English programs, particularly required language classes.

EMI can potentially address demotivation, at least for some students. EMI is associated with improved motivation for language learning in many contexts including Taiwan (Chang, 2010), Turkey (Kirkgoz, 2014), and Austria (Londo, 2012). This can be due to motivating effects of content relevant to students' interests (Edsall & Saito, 2012) or perhaps because EMI offers authenticity of purpose (Pinner, 2013).

However, EMI may also be challenging in this regard. Language educators in Japan have not yet fully transitioned from viewing English as an object of study to seeing it as a communicative tool. EMI is now calling for another paradigm shift: for teachers, students and others to see English as a tool for learning. Changing the paradigm in this way may require a great deal of effort and time.

Growing Need and Potential for Collaboration

EMI not only changes how students engage with English, it also has the potential to change how faculty members interact with each other. Relationships between content and language teachers can be problematic, characterised by the "rough ground that can sometimes separate ESL and mainstream teachers" (Arkoudis, 2006 p. 415). Differences in their priorities for students' outcomes and how they view the curriculum can sometimes hinder communication and collaboration. In some cases it leaves language teachers, lacking their disciplinary-specialist colleagues' "clearly defined propositional knowledge base" (Creese, 2002, p. 612), in a less authoritative, lower status position.

EMI has the potential to change this. The way that many EMI programs are developing in Japan seems to call for collaboration. As discussed above, although some EMI classes are taught by foreign language teachers, many are staffed by Japanese content-specialists with little or no training in dealing with L2 students. Also, as discussed above, domestic students' language proficiency is an acknowledged issue facing EMI.

These two challenges imply a need for collaboration between language and content faculty. However, survey results indicate that this is not happening at most universities (see Table 6). Nearly half of responding universities reported little or no communication between content and language teachers. Fewer than 10% of universities reported such communication as a regular feature of EMI programs (Brown, 2015). However, this lack of communication may not be a particular feature of EMI programs. Rather, there seems to be an overall lack of effective interdisciplinary communication in Japanese education (Adamson, 2010; Sato & Kleinasser, 2004).

Table 6. Communication Between Language and Content Faculty (n = 76)

Amount of communication	Responses (%)
Little or no communication	49
Some (or all) EMI faculty are language teachers	24
Regular, informal communication	16
Regular, coordinated communication	9
Occasional communication	3

Although effective communication is generally not occurring, EMI programs could facilitate it. This could start with modest, cross-disciplinary information sharing. For example, in Brown and Adamson (2012), language teachers reached across disciplinary boundaries to gather information on their content-specialist colleagues' expectations in order to better plan EAP classes. In Iyobe, Brown and Coulson (2011), content-specialists reached out to learn about EMI students' actual language proficiency from language teachers.

More ambitiously, language and content-specialist faculty could engage in interdisciplinary collaboration in program development, course planning, and even team-teaching. Although such collaboration is rare in Japan, there are successful examples in the literature. Aloiau (2008) and Honma (2003) described a successful EMI program jointly developed by language and content faculty and noted the benefits of such collaboration for both the faculty and students. At the classroom level, Iyobe and Li (2014) discussed team-teaching as part of a successful EMI class and found that the collaboration has pedagogical benefits for both members of the team and may have long-term influence

on their teaching practice. Perry and Stewart (2005) also discussed how an effective team-teaching partnership in EMI can lead to professional development and personal growth for both members of the team, and Stewart (2001) noted that language and content teacher team-teaching can raise the status of EAP teachers, giving them a professional voice and a connection to the disciplinary community.

However, it should be noted that achieving this kind of ambitious interdisciplinary collaboration is often difficult in education. Even with the best intentions, interdisciplinary relationships push participants into what Lemert (1990) called "shadow structures" (p. 6): zones between disciplines where clarity is difficult and cooperation is problematic. Participants' ideas about curriculum and communication may simply be too different.

Potential Positive Washback

As was the case with the changing needs of undergraduate learners discussed above, EMI has potential positive implications for language classes in Japanese secondary schools. EMI may directly inspire changes, as secondary teachers see new challenges that students face in university. However, washback from entrance examinations seems a more likely route of influence.

The National Center Test for University Entrance, the current standard test for university entrance, is being replaced as of 2020. One possible replacement is the Test of English for Academic Purposes (TEAP) created by the Eiken Foundation and Sophia University (Eiken Foundation, n.d.). This test has been designed considering recent university-level developments in EMI and CLIL. It tests students' ability to use English as an academic language rather than solely their knowledge of English. If the expected washback (Green, 2014) occurs, there is a potential for changes in English-language teaching at secondary schools, as the use of English takes precedence over its study.

However, expecting large-scale washback from changes in entrance exams may be optimistic. Previous changes in exams have not had widespread effects. According to Mulvey (2001) and Guest (2008), significant changes in the National Center test did not influence high school language classrooms. Teachers may not know about changes in the test (Watanabe, 2013) and even the most up-to-date textbooks may not reflect the lexical or conceptual complexity of current exam questions (Underwood, 2010). Change, it seems, is not easy in high school language programs. Cook (201Audio-lingual, and Grammar Translation (Yakudoku2) argued that high school language programs in Japan are conservative and change-averse, being dominated by older teachers in a rigid hierarchy. She found that younger teachers, even after receiving training in alternative techniques, are pressured to emulate the conservative approaches used by older colleagues.

However, positive washback may be expected in some schools and is, in fact, already seen in a few programs. As part of the overall trend towards EMI in Japan, CLIL is being introduced in some high schools (Lee & Chang, 2008) and even some elementary schools (Yamano, 2013). In fact, the influential Japanese publication *English Teachers' Magazine* dedicated an entire issue to school-level CLIL programs in 2013, showing that EMI in universities and CLIL in schools is becoming part of the mainstream discussion of language education.

Positive washback from EMI may also be seen at private cram schools (*juku)*. At higher grade levels, these are primarily for university entrance-exam training. As such, they are more responsive to changes in entrance-exam design than high schools. Cook (2013) reported that some *juku* are seen as more innovative and willing to adopt alternative approaches than high schools. If the needs of EMI programs are reflected in entrance exams, washback may be seen first in *juku*.

Conclusion

The growth of EMI is a significant trend in higher education in Japan, allowing both students and faculty to engage with English in new ways. Drawing on the results of a nationwide survey of all known EMI programs, the researcher has identified several possible implications of this new trend for language teaching. There are opportunities for language teachers to take on content classes, but their qualifications for these classes may be questioned. Additionally, EMI is leading to a new role for English in education, but a wide-reaching change in how English is perceived will not be easily achieved. EMI also creates potential for interdisciplinary collaboration but such collaboration is not without challenges. And finally, EMI may lead to positive washback on language teaching, but this should not be assumed to be automatic. Thus, EMI can best be seen as a possible impetus for positive change in language teaching in Japan. However, stakeholders may face difficult challenges in making that change a reality.

Acknowledgments

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Bio Data

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