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Abstract

This study examines how English-only foreign language teaching in high schools has been constructed as a problem, based on a constructionist approach. It analyzes the discourse produced by a research society, and shows the ground, warrants and conclusion of the discourse (Best, 2017). In this paper, the ground is that many high school students learn only English, the conclusion is that some non-English foreign languages should be compulsory in all high schools, and the warrants are classified into three categories: “only English is not enough to respond to the real world,” “only English teaching has harmful effects on the Japanese mind,” and “English has limitations as a foreign language.” Rhetorical issues such as vagueness and language selection are discussed.

[Keywords: language education / non-English foreign language / English / social problem]

1. Introduction

The present study was undertaken in order to comprehend how English-only foreign language teaching in Japanese high schools has been recognized and constructed as a problem, based on a constructionist approach. To understand it, this study addresses the discourse in 1) a proposal¹ (hereafter cited as *The Proposal*) sent in 2014 by a research society² in the Japan Association for Language Policy (JALP), to the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), and 2) a book (Morizumi, Koishi, Sugitani, & Hasegawa, 2016) written by members of JALP to encourage teaching several foreign languages in high schools.

In recent years, it has often been pointed out in discussion that foreign language education in Japan has concentrated on English, especially at middle education institutions (e.g., Erikawa, 2017; Kakiyama, 2012; Kawamata, 2014). According to Sakai (2018), since the *Meiji* period non-English foreign languages have been taught normally in higher education. Consequently, foreign languages that are taught at institutions of secondary education have been mostly English. Some refer to this situation as “complete devotion to English³” and consider it as problematic

(e.g., Kawamata, 2014; Yamazaki, 2013).

In this context, the research society of JALP argues that we should provide all high school students with the opportunity to learn a non-English foreign language (one of the following: Arabic, Chinese, French, German, Korean, Russian or Spanish⁴), in addition to English. In the argument, some discourse states that learning only English is harmful to Japanese students or Japanese society. In addition, Morizumi, the chairman of JALP (as of 2014), mentions that “[we] want to ameliorate the current situation that predecessors created even a little for future generations” (Morizumi, 2016, p. 13). Therefore, we can understand that the situation where only English is taught is recognized as a social problem by some persons concerned, and this study refers to it as the English-only foreign language teaching problem (hereafter the EOT problem).

The EOT problem can be regarded as a kind of social problem, as indicated above, and J. Best provides us with an interesting viewpoint on social problems. Best (2017) explains that “we can define social problems as efforts to arouse concern about conditions within society” (p. 10). This study relies on this idea, called the constructionist approach⁵, assuming that the EOT problem is not a state which exists objectively, but rather is an effort to argue that it is a problem⁶. Accordingly, in order to understand the effort, this study analyzes the content of these efforts, that is to say, the discourse produced by the members.

What benefits can we gain out of this constructionist approach while examining the EOT problem? Namely, what are advantages to assuming that social problems are efforts, which Spector and Kitsuse (2001) describe as claims-making activities? First of all, we can avoid answering a difficult question of whether the EOT problem actually exists or not. Moreover, the discourse will be analyzed relatively easily in an objective manner, based on the constructionist approach as shown below in this paper. Furthermore, this approach can offer a viewpoint that the EOT problem may be subjectively constructed by persons concerned in recent years. To begin with, it can be said that in history, non-English foreign languages have been learned normally at universities as second foreign languages (Kunieda, 2017; Sakai, 2018). After the Second World War, non-English foreign languages were compulsory subjects at many universities and departments for a while. Nakabachi (2004) points out that it was normal to learn a non-English foreign language in addition to English at universities before the Standards for the Establishment of Universities were amended in 1991. That is, the state that the members of the research society aim at was, in fact, implemented in the past, to a certain degree, at higher education institutions. Nowadays, however, it can be said that the scale of non-English foreign language teaching as a compulsory subject has decreased in higher education, although the tradition seems to remain to a certain extent (Nakabachi, 2004; Sensui, 2018).

Some reasons for this reduction can be supposed, namely that some people thought that it is problematic to force students to learn non-English foreign languages as a compulsory subject, even when they were students or teachers of other fields. Therefore, what can be problematic about non-English foreign language education depends on what one thinks of as problematic. Accordingly, the EOT problem ought to be understood as a subjectively constructed effort or activity.

According to Kitazawa (2017), in the field of sociology of education, constructionist studies have been seen from the 1980's, including areas such as juvenile delinquency, bullying, gender, child abuse and developmental disorder. As far as I know, however, little attention based on the constructionist approach has been given to non-English foreign language educational policy in Japan. Therefore, this study is expected to show a new idea and viewpoint to the field of foreign language education and lead us to the better understanding of educational discourse on foreign language teaching in Japan.

The study will analyze the discourse by members of the JALP research society, some of whom address the EOT problem. As stated above, the research society published *The Proposal* in 2014 and then some of the members published a book (Morizumi et al., 2016). The book can be considered to be a gathering of discourses to have the same intention: to persuade us of the necessity of several foreign languages being taught at high schools. Morizumi, one of the editors of the book, says that this book was compiled based on the idea that we need to provide students with the opportunity to learn several foreign languages (Morizumi et al., 2016, p. iii). The reason to analyze the discourse by the JALP research society is that it can have a big influence. Not only was the book published but also a newspaper article⁷ refers to the JALP activity. Moreover, since *The Proposal* was sent to MEXT, they have been making an effort so that the problem will be shared within our society, and Haida (2017) suggests the possibility that JALP activities and another research society⁸ have actually influenced an educational policy document by the Central Council for Education. Therefore, this present study assumes that some of the discourse produced by the members is part of the effort to arouse our concern about the EOT problem and can be influential to Japanese society. Accordingly, I think it is significant to clarify how they have constructed the EOT problem and discuss rhetorical issues if necessary.

2. Analytic framework for the rhetoric of claims

This study, as stated above, addresses efforts or claims-making activities related to the EOT problem, and it means that this study will analyze discourse. For the framework of analysis, this study adopts the rhetorical structure that Best developed. Best (2017) explains the nature

of the rhetoric of claims thus:

Every social problems claim makes a persuasive argument; it is an effort to persuade others, to convince them that a particular troubling condition ought to be recognized as a social problem, that that problem has certain characteristics, that the problem demands attention, and that it should be addressed in a specific way. (p. 30)

Best (2017, p. 30) points out that convincing claims tend to have a similar structure with persuasive elements. Moreover, to analyze claims, that is to say, rhetoric of claims discourse, Best (2017) decomposes rhetoric into three fundamental elements: grounds, warrants and conclusions. According to Best (2017), *grounds* “usually are assertions of fact; that is, they argue that the condition exists and offer supporting evidence” (p. 31); *warrants* “explain why something *ought* to be done” (p. 36) and “argue that the condition identified in the grounds is inconsistent with what we value, and therefore we need to do something about it” (p. 36); and *conclusions* “specify what should be done, what action should be taken to address this social problem” (p. 38). This present study utilizes the framework of the social problems claim in order to analyze the discourse related to the EOT problem.

3. Analysis of claim rhetoric in constructing the EOT Problem

As stated above, this study considers that the EOT problem is not an objective state but subjective claims-making activities. With regards to the rhetoric of the EOT problem, we can easily understand the ground and conclusion. Namely, the ground, or assertion of fact, of the rhetoric is a description of the current situation that only a few students learn non-English foreign languages at high schools. In addition, the conclusion is also straightforward: It should be, as stated above, the discourse to argue that all high students ought to learn a non-English foreign language in addition to English. Therefore, this study will mainly investigate warrants of the rhetoric, the reasons or rationale for the claims.

3.1. Ground and Conclusion

In this study, the ground is considered that many students at high schools are not provided with the environment in which they can learn non-English foreign languages. And the conclusion is that one of non-English foreign language—Arabic, Chinese, French, German, Korean, Russian or Spanish—should be learned by all high school students as a compulsory subject. However, *The Proposal* says that it is desirable that the language options offered should be about four languages depending on the situation of each school or area (p. 4). In

addition, Morizumi (2016) points out that the number of languages taught can be chosen by each school.

3.2. Warrants

As stated above, warrants are descriptions to explain why the problem is problematic, and show the rationale for taking action. Therefore, warrants tend to have values which we normally cherish such as freedom, justice, equality, protection of vulnerable groups, humanity and human rights (Akagawa, 2012; Best, 2017).

In this study, warrants will be answers to the questions: Why should our society not have only-English teaching system at high school?, and Why should we give all high school students opportunity to learn non-English foreign languages as a compulsory subject?

The warrants found in this study are roughly divided into three types: “Only English is not enough to respond to the real world,” “Only English teaching has harmful effects on Japanese mind” and “English has limitations as a foreign language.” We will look at them in detail below.

3.2.1. Only English is not enough to respond to the real world

Among the arguments claiming that Japanese cannot respond to the real world if Japanese students learn only English, an easily understandable and simple argument is one related to economic activities. Kamimura (2016) says, in the Morizumi, et al. book:

Considering the current situation of free trading system expanding between two or more countries, we tend to postulate English monolingualism with regard to the relationship between company and language. However, in global economic activities, the languages which companies should consider are not necessarily only English. Under the globalization of economic activities, the viewpoint of multilingualism is in even greater demand. We should notice that simply associating globalization with English will make invisible the intrinsic diversity of globalization and maximize only a part of globalization, leading us to ignorance of the non-EOT benefits for consumers and users who need global diversity. (p. 40, author’s translation)

This kind of argument presupposes the practical usage of non-English languages for economic activities, and indicates that only-English is not enough for global economic activities, and that non-English foreign languages should be a compulsory subject at high school.

We can see more abstract arguments in this category as well. Mizuguchi and Hasegawa (2016) state:

Although we cannot avoid strengthening English education, to live in the 21st century global society, the ability to cooperate and solve problems with those with various backgrounds is required. Therefore, it is indispensable to provide students with the opportunity to be exposed to various languages and cultures, not “only English.” (….) To aim at genuine globalization and activate various foreign language teaching in high schools, big changes at the national level and the drastic reform of educational system are by all means necessary. (pp. 187-188, author’s translation)

In addition, Sugitani (2016, p. 238) also points out in the same volume that only-English is insufficient to develop the ability to respond to cultures and society with various values. This kind of argument indicates the two bases: We are required to cooperate and solve problems with people with various backgrounds in the 21st century, and to acquire the ability for it, we need to learn various languages and cultures, not only English.

Based on these perceptions, the proponents of non-EOT have problematized the current situation, and we can find a similar argument in *The Proposal* as follows.

To live in the 21st century global society, we need to have the ability to cooperate and solve problems with people with various backgrounds. In order to do that, it is indispensable to understand the thought of others with backgrounds of various languages and cultures, and to respect each other. (….) this research society thinks that in order to develop genuine global human resources with a wide perspective, creative problem-solving ability, and global competitiveness, it is necessary to make “the second foreign language” a compulsory subject, rather than only to intensify English education, so that students can experience various languages and cultures in the world. (p. 6, author’s translation)

Not only global society, but the Japanese domestic situation is pointed out as the rationale to problematize the EOT problem. *The Proposal* says that only Japanese and English are not sufficient to allow Japanese society to realize a multicultural symbiosis (pp. 2-3). Moreover, it mentions that multilingual education is essential in order to realize a multicultural symbiosis society where people with different nationalities or races can respect the cultural differences, build an equal relationship and live as a constituent of a community (*The Proposal*, p. 3).

3.2.2. Only English teaching has harmful effects on Japanese mind

This study found claims to argue that the EOT problem has negative effects on Japanese mind. It is a discussion to assert that only-English teaching leads students to believe in the

prejudiced thought that English is absolutely valued (*The Proposal*, p. 3) . In addition, *The Proposal* points out that the recent trend toward buildup in English education can give students an (false) impression that one could be a global human resource if one only knows English (p. 6) .

In the Morizumi, et al. volume, Koishi points out a similar matter. Koishi (2016, p. 20) asserts that the current foreign language education policy in Japan makes Japanese people assume that we can do anything and comprehend the world only in English, naming the situation “English supremacism.” Koishi (2016, p. 21) says that this English supremacism causes a misunderstanding, namely that only in English we can understand each other from all over the world. Moreover, Koishi (2016, p. 21) argues that under the current foreign language education we have the misperception that proficiency in English could determine the value of a person.

3.2.3. English has limitations as a foreign language

The third warrant is the argument that English has limitations as a foreign language. We can find the claims that point out the limitations of English as a foreign language. Hasegawa (2016) makes this point:

It is thought that in current secondary education, many students do not come to feel attached to English because English does not have sufficient connections with cultures of particular regions and thus does not help them understand different cultures well. English has limitations because it is considered important as an international language rather than a language with cultural backgrounds of the English-speaking countries. Therefore, it can be said that non-English foreign languages have great possibilities to compensate for the limitations, stimulate students’ curiosity, make them feel the pleasure in learning, and enrich their lives. (pp. 201-202, author’s translation)

This kind of argument assumes that English is not considered a foreign language. Sugitani (2016, p. 244) also mentions that there is an opinion that English as an international language is not a foreign language anymore.

3.3. Overview of the rhetoric

In the previous section, we have looked in detail at the rhetoric of claims-making activities. In this section, I would like to show the overview of the structure of the rhetoric of claims-making activities in the texts examined.

Ground:

- Many students at high schools are not provided with the environment in which they can learn non-English foreign languages.

Warrants:

- Only-English is not enough to respond to the real world.
- Only-English teaching has harmful effects on Japanese mind.
- English has limitations as a foreign language.

Conclusion:

- One of non-English foreign language—Arabic, Chinese, French, German, Korean, Russian or Spanish—should be learned by all high school students as a compulsory subject.

4. Discussion

In the previous section, we have looked in detail at the rhetoric of claims-making activities, or how the EOT problem has been constructed in the *JALP Proposal* and the 2016 Morizumi et al. book. In this section, I would like to view the characteristics of and point out problems of the rhetoric.

Overall, it can be said that the rhetoric found in this paper reflects strong public interest. It is natural since social problems can be considered to be efforts to arouse concern. Emphasizing strong public interest should attract many people's attention affecting their views, compared to not emphasizing it. For instance, the EOT problem can be discussed as an issue of employment of non-English foreign language teachers⁹ but it may well arouse only concern of non-English foreign language teachers and future teachers, not the general public. Therefore, I can say that it is reasonable that the rhetoric is related to Japan, Japanese people and even people all over the world.

In addition, the rhetoric can be said to have highly abstract and vague expressions in it. The example that is easily understood is "genuine globalization"¹⁰. It is not easy to comprehend what it really means but it conveys feelings that Japanese society or people have some problems and need to deal with them. However, since the words "genuine globalization" are very abstract, it can be interpreted in any way. If students who have learned only English as a foreign language cannot respond to genuine globalization, whether students who have learned English and a non-English foreign language will respond to it or not depends completely on the meaning or definition of "genuine globalization."

I would like to point out another problem on the rhetoric. According to *The Proposal* (p. 3),

one of the reasons why all high school students should learn a non-English foreign language in addition to English is that students may misunderstand that English is absolutely valued when they learn only English. But it is questionable as to whether it solves a fundamental problem with the biased thought with compulsory non-English foreign language teaching. Suppose that seven languages—Arabic, Chinese, French, German, Korean, Russian and Spanish—are learned as a compulsory subject. How will students think about other languages? Do not some of them assume that English and the seven languages would be more valued than other foreign languages such as Indonesian, Swedish, Swahili and so on? Thus, the same fundamental problem remains¹¹. To take it to the extreme, we would need to treat all languages around the world equally in the curriculum to solve this kind of problem.

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注

- 1 “グローバル人材育成のための外国語教育政策に関する提言：高等学校における複数外国語必修化に向けて” <<http://jalp.jp/wp/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/c62f1c06c99e0f810541b5c1a3235f721.pdf>> accessed September 15, 2019.
- 2 JALP 多言語教育推進研究会
- 3 “英語一辺倒” in Japanese
- 4 This paper puts these languages in alphabetical sequence.
- 5 For detailed account of this approach, e.g., Akagawa (2012), Best (2017) and Spector & Kitsuse (2001) are available.
- 6 Note: This idea does not deny the existence of the EOT problem.
- 7 “(学びを語る) 外国語教育 グローバル化、英語以外にも視野に 白山利信さん,” published July 30, 2014, the *Asahi Shimbun*, morning edition. This study used the *Asahi Shimbun* database “Kikuzo II Visual.”
- 8 Japan Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (日本外国語教育推進機構)
- 9 Indeed, the *Asahi Shimbun* carried an article to point out an issue of employment of non-English foreign language teachers at universities in 2008 (“変わりゆく「第二外国語」 英語以外は縮小傾向” published May 26, 2008, morning edition).
- 10 “真のグローバル化” in Japanese
- 11 Segawa (2013) points out a similar problem in the context of a European language policy.

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