

Transition of Problems in Post-War German Language Education in Japan: Discourse Analysis of Academic Publications

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Discourse Analysis of Academic Publications

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Abstract

This study examines what problems in the post-war Japanese universities have been identified in German language education and how these problems have changed. It analyzes problems seen in academic publications on this topic between 1957 and 2004, and divides them chronologically into three sections depending on the characteristics of the problems. The data indicate that the character of these problems clearly changed in the late 1970s. The biggest change between 1957–1971 and 1979–2004 is that the perceived significance of German language education in university was fading. The causes of this transition, expanding enrollment in the university and the growing needs of English, are discussed.

Keywords: German / German language education / foreign language education / second foreign language / non-English foreign language

1. Introduction

The present study was undertaken in order to explore what problems in German language education in Japan have been identified after the Second World War, and to discuss causes behind the transition of problems over time. This study particularly addresses German language education that has been conducted as a compulsory non-English foreign language in the first one or two years in many universities.

In Japan, non-English foreign languages such as German have been learned mostly at the tertiary education level (Sakai, 2018). Among the non-English foreign languages, German traditionally held an important position in Japanese higher education (Sakai, 2011).

The modern Japanese education began in the *Meiji* era (1868–1912). As a background factor, it can be said that there was an overwhelming difference of national power between Japan and powerful Western countries at that time. Yamamoto (2014) points out that government officials had an intense sense of crisis regarding the lack of development in administrative organizations, the financial base, military power, industrial structure and so on, and Japan

国際文化研究 第27号/オンライン版第2号 論文

addressed the spread of education based on the school system in the *Meiji* era in order to solve those problems as an under-developed country. Accordingly, Japanese modernization meant Westernization and so naturally Japan aimed to absorb advanced academic knowledge of developed Western countries in order to catch up with them. Therefore, in higher educational institutions at that time, Japan needed to develop educated people who could serve as resources to introduce accomplishments of Western countries into Japan (Erikawa, 2018). For this reason, in the early years of *Meiji* era, the Japanese government invited instructors from Europe and America, and correspondingly students needed high foreign language proficiency to understand lectures in foreign languages and literature from Europe and America (Erikawa, 2018). Especially, in high schools under the old system of education (旧制高等学校), which were preparatory institutions for university, foreign language teaching was intensively implemented until the pre-war period (Iwasaki, 2007).

Additionally, Suzuki (1999) points out that in tertiary education institutions in the early years of the *Meiji* era, Japanese people emphasized not only English, but also German and French to develop and modernize Japan. Finally, he states that Japan succeeded in modernization through the language policy and the policy built the foundation of the modern Japan. Thus, German as well as English played important roles in the Japanese academic world. Additionally, it is pointed out that the political system of Prussia was compatible with the Japanese political system, both of which had the Emperor, and this political similarity also encouraged Japanese people to learn German (Erikawa, 2018). These historical aspects explain the traditional notion that German was considered important at Japanese universities.

After the Second World War, the situation of foreign language education at universities went through big changes (Iwasaki, 2007). The educational reforms were conducted, and then the hours of foreign language instruction sharply decreased at university compared to high school under the old system of education (Iwasaki, 2007). In the post-war period, however, in many universities, English and one non-English foreign language were being learned as compulsory subjects, regardless of students' majors, in a general education course. Yet, according to Iwasaki (2007) and Nakabachi (2004), this trend has been changing since 1991, when the Standards for the Establishment of Universities were amended.

Although German language education played an important role in Japan as explained above, problems concerning this traditional educational practice have been frequently pointed out. Moreover, the problems seem to have changed with time. Mori (1989) states the following problems that German language education in Japan had been confronted with up to that time:

Nowadays, German language education in a general education course at university is

in a crisis. Twenty years ago, the critical problems for German language education were "lack of enough hours of instruction," "difficulty caused by an increase of the number of university students," and "increase of the workload for German language instructors and decrease of research time caused by this increase." Even now these have remained as critical problems. However, German language education is confronted with a more serious problem. It is a matter of the significance of German language teaching. The significance of German language education, which was formerly obvious, is now unclear. (p. 11, author's translation)

Mori's argument can be summarized as follows: As of 1989, German language education in Japanese universities had a serious problem related to its role or significance, that is, its purposes were unclear. In contrast, around 1969, namely 20 years earlier, German language education had different problems. That is to say, at that time, there was a high demand for classes and the staff was too thinly spread to maintain sufficient teaching hours. What Mori (1989) points out may be correct, but his article is not based on an empirical approach; rather it just describes his feeling or impression about German language education in Japanese universities. Accordingly, detailed descriptions on the problems are not given in his article.

While Suzuki (1999) discusses the three-language educational policy for Japan's modernization, he also states that the tradition to emphasize this policy has been continued in universities, and it has not been fundamentally reviewed since the *Meiji* era, even after achieving its purpose. According to Suzuki (1999), since the significance of teaching English, German, and French in the general education course of Japanese universities has not been reviewed, the education of these three languages has lost its meaning and has become a burden on university.

Arguments of Mori (1989) and Suzuki (1999) show that there have been problems and criticism regarding non-English foreign language education in the post-war period, and lack of reviewing fully the tradition has likely caused some problems. It can be said that the study of the history and actual conditions of German language education in Japan will be significant for better understanding of the history of German language education in Japan, and the reasons why it has been faced with some problems. This understanding may well enable us to avoid some future problems concerning foreign language education.

The present study empirically examines what problems have been pointed out in Japanese higher education after the Second World War in the professional literature, and discusses causes behind the transition from one set of difficulties to another. In order to address the research task, this study uses the online database of the National Diet Library to collect materials for analysis that include discourses on problems in German language education at university. However, this study does not look at problems related to German language education for students specializing in German studies, literature, language, and so on, but only for students of German classes in the general education curriculum.

2. Method

Materials were gathered from the online database¹ (retrieved on April 10, 2020), and comprised the publications that include arguments pointing out problems in German language education. To collect materials related to the topic, this study adopted a Japanese keyword retrieval method and acquired articles and publications that include both of the phrases "German language education/teaching (ドイツ語教育)" and "problem (問題)" in their titles. As a result, 22 prospective materials were found. At first, all titles were checked; those that seemed to be unrelated to this study's interest excluded. For example, an article on the treatment of environmental issues in German language education was found on the database and excluded from the analysis since it is obviously unrelated to this study. Two articles were not available. Six articles that did not clearly include discourse indicating or implying problems about German language education in Japanese universities were excluded. In the end, 10 publications published between in 1957 and 2004, including nine articles and one book, were collected for analysis. The book has two articles (Ishimoto, Tsuneki, & Noda, 1971; Wakisaka, 1971) relevant to this study. Totally 11 items are analyzed, and furthermore, they are or, at least, seem obviously related to German language teaching in a general education course, regardless of students' majors.

3. Results

3.1. Overview of the findings

This study analyzes 11 items covering 47 years, from 1957 until 2004, and divides them into three sections depending on the characteristics of the problems: 1) arguments before the early 1970s, 2) ones in the early 1970s, and 3) ones from the late 1970s. The biggest difference between the first period and the third period is the perception of the necessity of German language teaching. In the arguments analyzed in the study, the problems in and before 1965 concerned the lack of instructors or proper facilities caused by the explosion of the number of university students, which are premised on the necessity and the significance of German language education. In contrast, the problems pointed out in and after 1979 are related to the necessity or the significance of German language education, due to the low motivation of learners, and the unclear purposes for learning. The second period, the early 1970s, can be

Transition of Problems in Post-War German Language Education in Japan MURAKAMI Naoya said to be the period of transition from the first period to the third one. The following sections examine the problems in the discourse of each period.

3.2. The first period: Before the early 1970s

The first period identified in this study included the following five items: Tsumura (1957), Abe (1958), Chishiro (1958, 1965), and Tanizaki (1962).

3.2.1. Tsumura (1957)

Tsumura (1957) includes discourse related to the problems, and its noteworthy arguments are as follows:

Regarding German language education, there had been little criticism, and the field enjoyed relatively peaceful period until the end of the war. Its greatest cause is probably that the absolute authority of instructors was predicated on the assumption that they would implement the necessary objectives, namely to begin with basic grammar and acquire the ability to read technical books in the three years of a high school under the old system of education. Additionally, students and instructors seemed to have a self-righteous view or misapprehension that German is a special language. Shortly after the Second World War, this non-criticized state continued, but recently German language education has been severely criticized, especially by some of the writers and German language instructors who have visited Europe. (p. 80, author's translation)

According to Tsumura (1957), it was after the Second World War that German language education in Japanese universities have faced criticism. Then, what problems did he point out? The title of the article is "Some problems in German language education" ("ドイツ語教育の諸問題"), but it does not actually clarify what the problems are. Instead, he explains some points to be improved and implies problems. Therefore, the content of the article is not easy to comprehend but the present study shows the following problems that his arguments imply:

- 1. Poor connection of high school with university,
- 2. Not enough hours of German learning in many universities for students who have not learned German at high school,
- 3. Few or no German language subjects for college entrance examination,
- 4. Not enough instructors in number,

5. Low-quality facilities, and

6. Too much emphasis on conversation skill by many foreign instructors

3.2.2. Abe (1958)

Abe (1958) states that teaching methods were not taken seriously, mentioning that "there seem to be reasons for not treating methods of teaching German as an issue hitherto" (p. 62, author's translation).

In addition, Abe (1958) points out the problems related to the attitude of instructors as follows:

Most of the instructors [at university] and their activities should be in the roles of instructors as well as researchers. However, they probably have been little aware of it, or have not considered it deeply until today. (p. 63, author's translation)

3.2.3. Chishiro (1958)

Chishiro (1958) points out the following five problems as blind spots:

- "a sharp drop of the absolute number of hours of German language instructions" (p. 39, author's translation)
- 2. "an insufficient number of German language instructors" (p. 40, author's translation)
- 3. "the university system of credit unit" (p. 41, author's translation)
- 4. "intermittent German language classes" (p. 41; i.e., not intensive and with no planned schedule, author's translation)
- 5. "negligence in methods of teaching German" (p. 41; i.e., indifference to whether the method of teach is effective or not, author's translation)

3.2.4. Tanizaki (1962)

Tanizaki (1962) also points out that problems about methods of teaching German are being shared by instructors and researchers in the German language field. Specifically, Tanizaki (1962) identifies two reasons for their reflection on methods. One is a significant decrease in the hours of German language classes compared to the old system of education. The other is that German language education at university at that time demanded development of skills for actual use, rather than previous teaching practice based on the humanistic education.

3.2.5. Chishiro (1965)

Chishiro (1965) points out two problems in German language education, as follows:

- 1. "an explosion in the number of German language learners and a lack of instructors," and
- 2. "an absolute lack of hours of German language classes and term of education" (p. 16, author's translation)

These problems are basically the same with those of Chishiro (1958).

3.2.6. Analysis of the arguments in the first period

In the post-war period before the early 1970s (1957–1965), the problems common in materials published at this time are related to the increase of learners in number and the decrease of the hours of instructions compared to high schools under the old system of education. Furthermore, the problems concerning the shortage of instructors caused by the explosion of university students after the war were recognized in some materials at this period. In addition, some point out that teaching methods was disregarded. Other problems were mainly related to the educational system at the time (e.g., Tsumura, 1957).

In any case, German language teaching at this time, regardless of students' majors, was itself beneficial, or at least non-problematic. Namely, it can be argued that German language teaching itself was acknowledged as important or necessary for all students. Moreover, the construction of the methodological problem means that at that time they thought that students needed to improve German language ability, and some arguments indicate that German language teaching at high schools under the old system of education would have been ideal.

Additionally, there is an argument that elitism or privileged status of German seemed to have faded (e.g., Tsumura, 1957). That is to say, the text excerpts can be seen as implying that at high school under the old system of education in the pre-war period and for a while after the Second World War, German was considered a special foreign language by both instructors and learners, but in the late 1950s, that view had become questionable. This also suggests that in the pre-war period, only a handful of people learned German at tertiary educational institution and they considered themselves as the elite, but in the post-war period, the number of university students increased, which changed students' and instructors' perception of the language.

In summary, in this initial post-war period (1957–1965), the authors of the aforementioned papers recognized that teaching German regardless of students' majors at university was considered a quite normal and expected part of the curriculum, and that university students

should be as skilled at German, ideally, as those in the pre-war period. This view was held despite the fact that German seemed to have lost its privileged status.

3.3. The second period: In the early 1970s

In the second period, this study collected and analyzed two items: Ishimoto, Tsuneki and Noda (1971); and Wakisaka (1971).

3.3.1. Ishimoto, Tsuneki, and Noda (1971)

Ishimoto, Tsuneki, and Noda (1971) explain that the situation of German language education was problematic at university under the new system of education after the Second World War. According to the authors, it is estimated that more than 500,000 students at that time (1971) learned German at universities; nevertheless, the facilities and the quota of instructors had not been improved or expanded. In terms of concrete problems on German language education, they quote a report by the Japan University Accreditation Association (Takagi, 1964) with regard to German language education problems. This study shows the problems and the explanations cited by Ishimoto, Tsuneki, and Noda (1971) as follows:

 "the explosion of the number of students and the problems of students' academic ability as university students" (Takagi, 1964, p. 22, author's translation)

Takagi (1964) explains that as the number of students enrolling at university grew explosively in post-war days, the number of students with poor academic ability increased and not a few students had insufficiently learned foreign languages at institutions of secondary education.

2. "the lack of hours of instructions" (Takagi, 1964, p. 22, author's translation)

3. "the number of students in a classroom" (Takagi, 1964, p. 22, author's translation)

Takagi (1964) states that "at that time a class of 50 students was viewed as a small class, and more than 70 or 80 students in a class was not uncommon" (p. 22, author's translation).

4. "the contents of classes" (Takagi, 1964, p. 23, author's translation)

Takagi (1964) states that German language courses had many students in a class and therefore tended to be focused on lectures or just instructor's explanation, not on students' practice; additionally, the materials tended to be literature.

5. "instructors" (Takagi, 1964, p. 23, author's translation)

Takagi (1964) explains that the operational capability of instructors is not paid attention to,

Transition of Problems in Post-War German Language Education in Japan MURAKAMI Naoya and accordingly the actual ability of language instructors is neglected in Japanese universities.

3.3.2. Wakisaka (1971)

Wakisaka (1971) points out a problem about instructors in charge of German as a compulsory non-English foreign language teaching at university. Specifically, Wakisaka (1971) argues that they should review the meaning or significance of teaching German to students who do not need it for their majors. He also asserts that it is irresponsible not to deal with sincere questions from students about reasons or meanings to learn German. Wakisaka (1971) does not refer to "the reasons or meanings to learn German" but it can be inferred from the context.

3.3.3. Analysis of the arguments in the second period

This period includes only two articles, but from the articles it can be said that the character of the problems is basically the same with that in the first period. Namely, German language teaching itself was acknowledged as important or necessary for all students, and the problems are premised on the necessity and the significance of German language education. However, at the same time, Wakisaka (1971) argues that instructors should review the meaning or significance of it. Therefore, it can also be said that there was a sign that the German language education in Japan would be facing problems caused by loss of necessity or significance of it before long.

3.4. The third period: After the early 1970s

In the third period, this study collected and analyzed four items: Hosaka (1979), Takata (1980), Mori (1983), and Kishi (2004).

3.4.1. Hosaka (1979)

Hosaka (1979) describes the situation of German language education at that time as follows:

In Japan, German language education (further, foreign language education in general) has been in a critical situation at present. . . . German language instructors do not have a consensus in their recognition of the current situation and the solution for this critical situation. This has made the situation worse. We now need to reflect on and consider educational practice deeply. (p. 91, author's translation)

More specifically, Hosaka (1979) discusses concretely three points of problems as follows:

- 1. "German cannot hold the attention of students in general education."
- 2. "The number of students who major in German/literature has decreased."
- 3. "The number of full-time instructors has not increased." (p. 91, all are translated by the author)

3.4.2. Takata (1980)

Takata (1980) introduces opinions of native German instructors who work in Japanese universities. Takata (1980) mentions that the opinions of native German instructors in his article are standard opinions that he knows from the experience in contacting as many German instructors as possible and exchanging opinions with them, and explains problems from their viewpoint:

They [native German instructors] were invited from their home country to teach German to Japanese students. While, at first, they were perplexed by the passive attitude of Japanese students toward classes, which is different from their own attitudes and strikes them as strange, they are deeply impressed to know that an estimated 700,000 students learn German throughout Japan. However, they soon turn disappointed and have some questions at the end. They wonder why Japanese universities waste so much time, effort and money in order to teach German to students who are not motivated to learn it. Only a small proportion of students want to. They also wonder if Japanese believe that it is worth teaching German to so many students. (pp. 111-112, author's translation)

Moreover, Takata (1980) reports the native German instructors' criticism of Japanese instructors as follows:

Another question for them [native German instructors] is that even Japanese professors, apart from students, often do not have an intention and the skill to have a conversation with foreign instructors in foreign languages. Japanese instructors of German even say that they are very skilled at reading but poor at speaking German. However, native German instructors listen to it dubiously and wonder if the Japanese instructors can read literary works, monographs, and philosophy books in German, since they cannot have daily conversations or express their short opinions. (p. 112, author's translation)

3.4.3. Mori (1983)

Mori (1983) points out students' weak enthusiasm toward German language learning. Moreover, Mori states that German language teaching is not successful with any teaching methods.

3.4.4. Kishi (2004)

Kishi (2004) points out the problems found in a particular university, Doshisha University, and his discussion is basically about education only in this university. In this respect, Kishi (2004) differs from other items collected in this study, since their discussion is not confined to a specific university. However, Kishi discusses German language education as a foreign language that students begin to learn regardless of their majors, which is common at Japanese university. So, this study also includes Kishi (2004) as an object of analysis.

Kishi (2004, pp. 145-151) problematizes unclear purposes of German language teaching and argues that it is not clear how proficient students should be after classes.

3.4.5. Analysis of the arguments in the third period

The problems discussed in this period have a different character from those in the first period; namely the problems are mainly related to the necessity or the significance of teaching German, regardless of students' majors. It was argued that since many students did not have enough motivation for German language learning and did not need it, teaching German to such students was a waste of effort and money (Takata, 1980). In this context Mori (1983) asserts that teaching German does not meet with success with any kind of teaching methods.

Moreover, this study finds out the problems related to Japanese instructors' attitude and ability. Native German instructors considered it as problematic that the ability of Japanese instructors was biased: They focused excessively on reading skill, yet the German instructors doubted how far their colleagues' reading skill extended.

In summary, the scholars of this period wrote on the problems related to the necessity, the significance and the purposes of German language education in Japanese university as a non-major subject.

4. Discussion

Excerpts from the collected publications show that some problems have been perceived in the post-war Japanese universities but the character of these problems has changed from one era to the next. The results of this study indicate that the nature of the problems clearly changed in the late 1970s: The biggest change between the first and second periods (1957–1971)

国際文化研究 第27号/オンライン版第2号 論文

and the third period (1979–2004) is the perception of the necessity of German, and the second period can be seen as the transition period. In this section, I would like to discuss the reasons or causes for that change. It can be presumed that one factor changing the perception of problems is the increase in the rate of enrollment in higher education institutions in Japan.

As explained in the Introduction, German was learned studiously at high school under the old system of education, and there the small elite group of students learned German. In the first period, as indicated in the Results section above, it can be said that German language teaching conducted at high school under the old system of education was deemed ideal, and the value of teaching German at university was recognized even though the language seemed to lose its elite status.

However, as university enrollment became more widely accessible after the war, university students lost their elite standing. According to Yoshida (2013), from around 1960 to 1975, Japan experienced mass higher education. This period coincides with the time that the character of the problems changed. It can be said that German language teaching, regardless of students' majors, lost its self-evident status in sought-after university education. It can also be said that since the late 1970s the German language education has not been able to attract a sufficient mass of participants in higher education.

In addition, the socioeconomic position of English may be conceived of as another factor. Between the 1950s and the 1970s, Japan experienced rapid economic growth and Japanese companies came to expand business overseas (Erikawa, 2018). According to Saitō (2007), the business world had required improvement of Japanese students' practical command of English since 1955. The growing needs of English for international communication may have decreased students' motivation to learn German.

It can also be said that the results of this study do not contradict basically the overview of the problem-transition at the post-war Japanese universities described by Mori (1989) in the Introduction, that is, that the character of the problems changed around 1969 as the results of this study indicate. However, the present study shows that the character of the problems analyzed changed clearly about 10 years later than what Mori (1989) describes. Further, this study indicates the three periods and clarifies the details of this change, which Mori did not point out or disclose.

In addition, it should be noted that the investigation could not find corresponding discussion of problems in German language education from 2004 up to the present day. The reasons are uncertain, but one explanation may be that recently non-English foreign language education has come to be discussed comprehensively, rather than German (or French, etc.) language education only. In recent years, there has been a great discussion about non-English foreign

language education from the viewpoint of the plurilingualism born in Europe (e.g., Haida, 2010; Ogawa, 2013; Ōtani, Sugitani, Wakita, Hashiuchi, Hayashi, & Miyoshi, 2010; Sakai, 2011), and several books have been recently published to discuss and promote non-English foreign language education as a whole in Japan based on this ideology (e.g., Ōki & Nishiyama, 2011; Morizumi, Koishi, Sugitani, & Hasegawa, 2016; Torikai, Ōtsu, Erikawa, & Saitō, 2017).

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国際文化研究 第27号/オンライン版第2号 論文

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Note

1 <https://ndlonline.ndl.go.jp/#!/>

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