

**THE PERVASIVENESS OF THE NEOLIBERAL AGENDA AND
LINGUISTIC INSTRUMENTALISM IN JAPAN'S ENGLISH
EDUCATION POLICY "ENGLISH EDUCATION REFORM PLAN
CORRESPONDING TO GLOBALIZATION"**

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Abstract

Governments are challenged with pursuing macro-level interests for the good of the group, while also needing to accommodate and to acknowledge the needs and preferences of people at the micro-level. Japan's Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology's (MEXT) "English Education Reform Plan corresponding to Globalization" policy appears to promote English in terms of linguistic instrumentalism while also recognizing the interests of people in the education sector at the micro-level. Our intention is to discuss MEXT's promotion of English as linguistic instrumentalism and to present an analysis of the EERPCTG policy document in an effort to suggest that MEXT's macro-level pursuit of English as linguistic instrumentalism actually trumps its efforts to accommodate micro-level preferences of English education. Overall, our intention is not to condemn the current social and educational situation dominated by neoliberalism, but to demonstrate that the use of words with positive discourse prosody in English education policy in Japan still results in neoliberalism, and to provide policy makers and practitioners engaged in English education with viewpoints to see the current situation from wider perspectives.

Keywords: English education policy, Japan, linguistic instrumentalism, Critical Discourse Analysis

Introduction

Governments are often faced with the challenge of pursuing macro-level goals that are often based upon economic-related interests, while also needing to accommodate micro-level interests of the people. In the case of MEXT, Japan's ministry of education, at the macro-level, the promotion of English corresponding to globalization is characterized by neoliberal goals from the Abe Administration. However, at the micro-level, the promotion of English in the education sector is characterized by teachers educating students in a nurturing environment. MEXT's macro-level neoliberal goals are pervasive to the de-

gree that the micro-level promotion of English is still suggestive of linguistic instrumentalism. However, MEXT relies upon teachers at the micro-level to implement macro-level policy and curriculum in order to achieve its neoliberal goals. In this paper, we are interested in understanding the relationship between MEXT's macro-level neoliberal pursuit and its attempt to appeal to the micro-level education sector through the language of English education policy. We begin from a broad and perhaps global perspective, by defining linguistic instrumentalism and citing examples in a global context. We then narrow in on the EERPCTG policy document and use Critical Discourse Analysis to analyze the policy text to show that even though MEXT uses verbs with illocutionary force and positive discourse prosody, the EERPCTG policy still results in promoting neoliberalism through the scheduled implementation of English in a very short period of time. Finally, we discuss five concerns about linguistic instrumentalism in an effort to provide policy makers and practitioners engaged in English education with viewpoints to see the current situation from wider perspectives.

Linguistic instrumentalism in a global context

Linguistic instrumentalism is defined as an ideology that emphasizes utilitarianism of learning English for sustaining economic development of a society or increasing social mobility of individuals (Guo, 2012). In this sense, English is a tool that supports a nation's competitiveness in the global market which results in the utilitarianism of learning English at the society level for the purposes of sustaining the economic development, and at the individual level for the purposes of social mobility (Kubota, 2011; Wee, 2010). English as linguistic instrumentalism is particularly evident in education policies in Japan (and in other nations) and has resulted in an emphasis on English Language Teaching (ELT) and English curriculum reforms.

Kubota (2011) suggests that linguistic instrumentalism underscores the importance of English skills for employment opportunities in terms of economic success, and has influenced Japanese language and teaching in Japan, suggesting the notion of human capital (i.e., skills deemed necessary for the knowledge economy) and the employment conditions of a neoliberal society. Neoliberalism can be defined as a revisionist approach to transform the welfare state into a post-welfare state that relegates all aspects of society to the wisdom of the market. Neoliberalism usually adopts a trickle-down hypothesis in which economic benefits gathered to upper groups of the society will benefit poorer members of the society by improving the economy as a whole. Neoliberalism has been a dominant paradigm for social reform for the past few decades mainly in the world of economy, but it is expanding in terms of its influence in other areas including education.

Examples of linguistic instrumentalism or neoliberalism permeating into areas of English education around the globe are reported by an increasing number of scholars. For example, in South Korea, English implies a promise

of social inclusion in the sense that reaching certain goals of measurable competence in the language is assumed to provide economic and social advancement (Park, 2011). Similarly, teaching English has become a commodity in Japan aimed at creating profits for businesses including publishers, schools, the testing industry and agencies that sell study-abroad programs (Kubota, 2011). In China, the unprecedented marketization of English education has resulted in the relationships between teachers and students as being like those between businesses and clients (Guo, 2012). In Singapore, a country with racial and linguistic diversity, the emphasis on the economic value of the language rather than the role of the language user in preserving traditional values is creating tension among the people (Wee, 2010). Even in the Nordic countries, which possess a long tradition of emphasizing the cultural and social motives of higher education, students with experience studying abroad have come to be regarded as more valuable for the national economy upon their return (Stensaker, Frolich, Gornitzka, & Maassen, 2009). Many Intensive English Programs (IEP) featuring English for Academic Purposes (EAP) in the United States are creating websites with images that allure international students and textbooks that often contain content that fits well in a neoliberal society (Chun, 2009).

Despite incisive criticism from many researchers, however, the current neoliberal logic of capitalism is too deep-rooted to stop the English frenzy. In many Asian countries, English teaching reform has been intensely prompted by the government with strong influences from the business sector. Large corporations look at the workers' competence in English as a criterion for employment and promotion, and emphasize the importance of English in the globalizing world. For example, the domestic market of South Korea is much smaller than many Asian countries, so the government and businesses began English education reform much earlier to compete in the globalizing world. As a result, many students and workers have invested much time and money in developing their skills in the language (Park, 2011). In Japan, the Japan Federation of Economic Organization (Keidanren) and the Japan Association of Corporate Executives (Keizai Doyukai) have proposed that the government improve oral communicative skills of students in primary, secondary, and higher education, and the plans and policies released by MEXT have reflected these corporate demands (Kubota, 2011). We will demonstrate these pervasive neoliberal sentiments in our analysis of the EERPCTG.

Critical Discourse Analysis in the context of the EERPCTG

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is used to identify power relationships between texts and social contexts (Fairclough, 2003). In the following sections, we identify the use of discourse strategies, such as positive self-portrayal through the use of verbs because verbs carry illocutionary force, which can suggest positive self-representations of the doer of the verbs. Because the implementation of English language and education policy has the potential to be

seen as an imposition of new mental structures (Phillipson, 1992), MEXT uses specific verbs to promote a positive image of itself and its policy through mitigation (Wodak, 2001). For example, as we will see, the verbs “reform” (i.e., to make changes for improvement), “promote” (i.e., to further the progress of something), “enhance” (i.e., to further improve the quality of something), “ensure” (i.e., to make sure or provide certainty), and “empower” (i.e., to make someone stronger or more confident) are used to present MEXT and its implementation of the EERPCTG in a positive light. Presenting itself and the EERPCTG (i.e., the macro-level) in a positive light is important because MEXT relies upon schools and teachers at the micro-level (i.e., community level) to bring macro-level (i.e., government level) measures of reform into fruition. However, MEXT policy is motivated by neoliberal goals from the Abe administration, i.e., “Abenomics,” and the subsequent promotion of English in terms of linguistic instrumentalism, which is contrary to micro-level realities where the classroom is often a learning environment aimed at educating students and not necessarily at promoting a neoliberal agenda.

Abenomics is a neoliberal approach characterized by, “accelerated low taxation, deregulation, reduction of fiscal deficit, and free trade,” (Tokunaga, 2015). Essentially, in these terms, Abenomics is a conservative economic model based upon the philosophies aligned with conservative moral politics (Lakoff, 1996). For example, the “strict father” philosophy of conservatives suggests that people are generally self-reliant, get what they deserve, ultimately responsible for themselves, and not dependent on the government. In contrast, the “nurturing parent” philosophy is a politically liberal perspective (different than philosophies in support of a liberal economy) that suggests people are not always rewarded for their efforts and sometimes require assistance (e.g., from the government). Interestingly, people generally subscribe to both philosophies depending upon the issues. Education at the micro-level is a sector that tends to align with a “nurturing parent” philosophy, which is why, although Abenomics is characterized as having a conservative or “strict father” neoliberal agenda for creating economic stimulus through deregulation and free-trade, the Abe administration, through MEXT, strategically utilizes the discourse of the “nurturing parent” through the illocutionary force of verbs that have positive discourse prosody to appeal to people in the education sector at the micro-level. As Lakoff (1996) suggests, conservative politicians have been more successful at influencing voters because they are able to effectively utilize discourse with positive discourse prosody that appeals to people at the micro-level.

We view language policy as a discourse and as “every public influence on the communication radius of languages, the sum of those “top-down” and “bottom-up” political initiatives through which a particular language or languages is/are supported in their public validity, their functionality, and their dissemination” (Wodak, 2005, p. 170). Policies tend to operate top-down (i.e., from macro to micro), and bottom-up (i.e., from micro to macro), as a result of interpretation and implementation (Ricento & Hornberger, 1996). There are

degrees of discourse prosody in the language of policy, in terms of the way that neutral words can be perceived as having positive or negative meanings as a result of the relationship of words with the attitudes and beliefs of speakers and hearers (Baker, 2006, p. 87). As stated above, the use of the verb “empower” in the EERPCTG is a macro-level attempt by MEXT to address the need for teachers to become “empowered” and “improve” their ability to teach English. MEXT could have used a more neutral verb such as “train” to indicate the processes of preparing teachers for English education, which would have been a more neutral choice because “training” is part of employment. However, MEXT chose the verb “empower” because of its positive discourse prosody value, because the reality is, that when teachers successfully implement this policy reform, MEXT’s (neoliberal) goals are more likely to be achieved.

For the purposes of this analysis, we suggest that the speaker, MEXT (in terms of what the policy says at the macro level) promotes English education as a positive step toward aligning Japan with the goals of globalization, and for the purposes of achieving its neoliberal agenda of boosting the economy. However, this view is highly controversial. Additionally, we suggest that the plan is accelerated to the degree that it only suits MEXT’s neoliberal economic interests in promoting English as linguistic instrumentalism. We aim to demonstrate this through discourse analysis and by connecting policy with discourses. In particular, we aim to show that this policy document demonstrates the disconnection between macro-(governmental) and micro-levels (school) of language policy.

Methodology

In Table 1, we present our approach of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (Wodak, 2001), which includes identification of discourse markers that are also discourse strategies used by MEXT to present its reform plan in a favorable way. Such markers include mitigation through modifications of illocutionary force, positive self-portrayal through references to self in the third person and modification of verbs with illocutionary force, vagueness through ambiguous lexical content, unification through inclusive lexical references, and unreal scenarios aimed at persuading the public through ambiguous spatial and temporal references. These markers are useful for identifying relationships of power between the speaker (MEXT) and the hearer (the public of Japan) and the degrees of discourse prosody as the meanings of the texts have implications that are evident in the discourses of Japan. As a result, we use these discourse markers to identify macro-level views (e.g., lexical descriptions) and micro-level accommodations (e.g., mitigated verbs).

Table 1
Discourse markers/strategies

Strategy	Objectives	Devices
Mitigation	To modify the status of a proposition	Intensifying or mitigating illocutionary force through verbs
Positive self-portrayal	To create a positive self-image	References to self in the third person
Vagueness	To convince the public of programs and ideas	Ambiguous lexical content
Unification	To promote solidarity and unity	Inclusive lexical references
Unreal Scenarios	To persuade the public	Ambiguous spatial and temporal references

(Source: Wodak, 2001)

Concerning translation

We were concerned with the potential of the text being lost in translation. As a result, we compared the verbs in English and Japanese with the intention of finding variance, and we found high degrees of synonymy between Japanese and English translation, which led us to feel comfortable with an analysis in English.

Texts

The whole policy text is titled, “English Education Reform Plan corresponding to Globalization,” (EERPCTG) and it is the English translation of the MEXT policy document that describes the English education reform plan (MEXT 2013). There are four parts of the document which include: Introduction (which we label Text 1a & 1b); Part 1: New English Education corresponding to globalization (which we label Text 2a, b, c, d); Part 2: Constructing Necessary Frameworks for New English Education (vigorous promotion from FY 2014) (which we label Text 3a, b, c, d, e); and Part 3: Schedule (provisionary) (which we label Text 4). We selected the text because it was specifically created by MEXT to describe the intentions and processes of the English Education Reform Plan in the context of globalization and in preparation of the 2020 Tokyo Olympics. As demonstrated by the title of the text, “English Education Reform Plan corresponding to Globalization,” the illocutionary force of verbs in the text suggest positive discourse prosody that enables MEXT to present itself in terms of positive self-portrayal through “we vs. you” discourse. For example, in the title MEXT uses the word “reform,” which means to change something for the purpose of improvement, and sug-

gests it is improving the existing English education policy and program, while many scholars and practitioners (teachers at the micro-level) disagree and believe that MEXT is simply promoting its neoliberal interests in using English education to boost the economy.

Analysis of texts

In the following we present an analysis of the EERPCTG text according to the discourse markers/strategies described above in Table 1, which include positive self-portrayal and mitigation, vagueness, unification, and unreal scenarios. Compared to other discourse markers/strategies in this analysis, our analysis reveals significant use of positive self-portrayal and mitigation makers/strategies which are complementary (and thus presented together) since mitigated verbs are often used to modify the status of a proposition through positive discourse prosody. Thus, our analysis begins with a presentation of several examples of positive self-portrayal and mitigation in the EERPCTG text.

Positive self-portrayal and mitigation

Beginning with Text 1a, in this section we present several examples of texts in which MEXT appears to present itself in a favorable way by using positive self-portrayal and mitigation strategies to describe its efforts to reform English education in Japan.

Text 1a

In order **to promote** the establishment of an education environment which corresponds to globalization from the elementary lower/upper secondary education stage, MEXT **is working to enhance** English education substantially throughout elementary to lower/secondary school **upon strengthening** English education in elementary school in addition **to further advancing** English education in lower/upper secondary school.

In the opening statement of Text 1a, MEXT declares its intentions. The strategy of MEXT is to positively present a plan to reform English Education corresponding to globalization. The use of the verb “promote” in “to promote the establishment of an education environment,” suggests positive self-portrayal as MEXT declares itself as being capable of establishing a reform.

In the independent clause, “MEXT is working to enhance English education substantially throughout elementary to lower/secondary school ... ,” MEXT declares itself in third person as doing the present continuous/progressive verbal phrase “is working to enhance,” which suggests continuous effort to “enhance” English education (strategy of mitigation), which

is modified by the adverb “substantially” to suggest a high measure of enhancement, and used to demonstrate a positive self-portrayal of MEXT as having an ability to improve the English program, which is not consistent with the history of English in Japan and the micro-level realities of language policy in Japan.

The independent clause is followed by a verb phrase, “upon strengthening English education (in elementary school),” where “strengthening” (strategy of mitigation) supports the macro-level view and is a positive-self portrayal by inferring that MEXT can improve English education in elementary schools. However, efforts to build or improve the elementary school program that began in 2008 (more than 7 years ago), have been tremendously challenged and the curriculum is based upon English “activities” that have been ineffective and difficult for instructors to teach, especially the majority of elementary school teachers who have not been trained to teach English.

In the verb phrase, “in addition to further advancing English education in lower/upper secondary school,” “further advancing” demonstrates the macro-level view where the adverb “further” modifies the present continuous verb “advancing” (strategy of mitigation) to suggest positive-self portrayal in terms of the inferred competitive (e.g., as demonstrated in the collocation “advancing to the finals”) and perhaps militant intentions (e.g., as demonstrated in the collocation “advancing the troops”) of MEXT to do whatever it takes to achieve its neoliberal goals, which may be contrary to the micro-level realities of educational environments.

Text 1b

Timed with the 2020 Tokyo Olympics, in order for the full-scale development of new English education in Japan, MEXT will incrementally promote education reform from FY2014 including constructing the necessary frameworks based on this plan.

In Text 1b, similar to Text 1a, the independent clause, “MEXT will incrementally promote education reform from FY2014,” which suggests positive self-portrayal through the use of the verb “promote” (strategy of mitigation) where MEXT declares it “will incrementally promote” (future tense), which is modified by the adverb “incrementally” to suggest the steps or stages of the EERPCTG in the developmental process of its reform. The restrictive relative clause, “including constructing the necessary frameworks based on this plan,” which is essential information referring to the infrastructure of the EERPCTG, includes the adjective “necessary” to describe “frameworks based on this plan,” which suggests certainty and positive self-portrayal that MEXT understands how to implement the EERPCTG to achieve its goals by 2020, which is in contrast to the actual realities at the micro-levels of educational environments and the findings and opinions of English education scholars of Japan (Kubota 2011).

Text 2a

Elementary school (Third and Fourth grade):

English Language **Activities** classes **1-2 times a week**

-**Nurture** the foundations for communication skills.

-**Supervision** by class teacher.

In Text 2a, MEXT presents English in third and fourth grade elementary school education as “activities classes 1-2 times a week” in contrast to “English Language Subject classes” which is the term used to refer to fifth and sixth grade elementary school classes (see Text 2b). The verb “nurture” (strategy of mitigation) suggests MEXT’s macro-level plan will be implemented at the micro-level with care and encouragement, even though “nurturing” is actually dependent upon the teacher and may not be consistent with the 4 to 6 year rapid pace. “Supervision” suggests that additional teachers, such as ALTs will be brought in to teach English Activities (as we will see in Text 3c).

Text 2b

Elementary school (Fifth and Sixth grade):

English Language (Subject) classes 3 times a week (also utilize module classes)

-**Nurture** basic English language skills.

-In addition to **class teachers with good English teaching skills**, actively utilize specialized course teachers.

In Text 2b, MEXT presents English in fifth and sixth grade elementary school education as “English Language (Subject) classes 3 times a week” (in contrast to “English Language Activities” in Text 2a, mentioned above). The mitigated verb “nurture” (positive-self portrayal) is used to identify the delivery of “basic English language skills” and to suggest that the delivery will be done at the micro-level with care and encouragement. MEXT distinguishes “class teachers with good English skills,” where “good” is determined by passing Grade pre-1 in the Text in Practical English Proficiency (EIKEN), or scoring over 80 on the TOEFL iBT test or achieving equivalent scores (as we will see in Text 3b). This dependency upon testing is a characteristic of linguistic instrumentalism (Kubota, 2011).

Text 2c

Lower Secondary School:

-**Nurture** the ability to understand familiar topics, carry out simple information exchanges and describe familiar matters in English.

-Classes will be **conducted** in English in principle.

In Text 2c, MEXT uses the verb “nurture” (strategy of mitigation) which is a positive self-portrayal suggesting the caring and encouraging delivery of English education at the micro-level in “Lower Secondary School,” in terms of acquiring the “ability to understand familiar topics,” “carry[ing] out simple information exchanges,” and “describe[ing] familiar matters in English.” MEXT also suggests that classes will be “conducted” in English “in principle” which is an acknowledgement that classes may not be carried out in English.

Text 2d

Upper Secondary School:

-**Nurture** the ability to understand abstract contents for a wide range of topics and the ability to **fluently communicate with English speaking persons**.

-Classes will be conducted in English with high-level linguistic activities (presentations, debates, negotiations).

Similar to Text 2c, in Text 2d MEXT uses the verb “nurture” (strategy of mitigation) to suggest positive self-portrayal in describing the delivery of English education at the micro-level as resulting in “the ability to understand abstract contents for a wide range of topics,” and “the ability to fluently communicate with English speaking persons.” “Classes” are described as being conducted “with high-level linguistic activities.”

Text 2e

-**To ensure nurturing** English communication skills by establishing coherent learning achievement targets throughout elementary and lower/upper secondary school.

-**Enrich** educational content in relation to **nurturing** individual’s sense of Japanese identity (focus on traditional culture and history among other things).

In Text 2e the verb phrase, “To ensure nurturing (English communication skills)” (strategy of mitigation) is an example of positive self-portrayal at the macro-level in terms of suggesting that MEXT’s plan is capable of ensuring the nurturing of English communication skills “by establishing coherent learning achievement targets.” The verb “enrich” (strategy of mitigation) is used to describe the delivery of “nurturing” the Japanese identity of Japanese students.

Text 3a

Empower teachers in elementary school

- Create** measures for the additional posting and training of English education promotion leaders in elementary school.
- Improve** teaching skills of specialized English course teachers
- Improve** English teaching skills of elementary school class teachers.
- Develop and provide** audio teaching materials for training.
- Improve** teacher training program and teacher employment.

In Text 3a, the verb “empower” is used to present a positive self-portrayal of MEXT “empowering” (strategy of mitigation) teachers in terms of “creating” (strategy of mitigation) measures for “additional posting” and “training of English education,” while also suggesting that MEXT will “improve teaching skills” (strategy of mitigation), “develop and provide” audio teaching materials, and “improve” (strategy of mitigation) teacher training and teacher employment. In this case, “empower” is the operative verb that is used in place of neutral verbs such as “training” which suggests positive discourse prosody.

Text 3b

Empower teachers in lower/upper secondary school

- Nurture** English education promotion leaders in lower/upper secondary school.
- Improve** teaching skills of lower/upper secondary school English subject teachers.
- Utilize** external language exams to periodically inspect English levels of achievement for teachers posted within each prefecture.
- All English subject teachers must prove English capabilities** by passing Grade pre-1 in the Text in Practical English Proficiency (EIKEN), scoring over 80 in TOEFL iBT test or achieving equivalent scores.

In text 3b, similar to Text 3a, verbs such as “empower”, “nurture”, and “improve” (strategies of mitigation) are used by MEXT to promote a positive self-portrayal in terms of assisting teachers and leaders. “Utilizing” external language exams to “periodically inspect English levels” of teachers is consistent with the test-centered focus of linguistic instrumentalism as described by Kubota (2011). Emphasis upon such testing is demonstrated by MEXT stating that “capabilities” are verified by passing scores in Grade pre-1 in EIKEN and TOEFL tests.

Text 3c

Promoting utilization of external staff

- Expand** placement of Assistant Language Teachers (ALT), **promote** utilization of community members (formulate guidelines for such external staff use, etc.)
- Strengthen and enrich** ALT training programs.

In Text 3c, similar to other sections, MEXT uses the verbs “promoting,” “expand,” “strengthen” and “enrich” (strategies of mitigation) to present a positive self-portrayal of itself and its intentions at the micro-level in terms of its efforts (from the macro-level) to promote utilization of external staff, expand the ALT program, and to strengthen and enrich ALT training programs.

Text 3d

Developing Guidance Teaching Materials

-**Prepare** teaching materials for early implementation.

-**Develop and prepare** Information and Communication Technology (ICT) teaching materials for module classes.

In Text 3d, the verbs “developing” and “prepare” are used to suggest a positive self-portrayal of MEXT in terms of its ability to develop and prepare teaching materials for “early” implementation.

Text 3e

Enrich English education throughout each stage in elementary, lower/upper secondary schools and **improve** student’s English ability (aim to pass Grade 2 or above in the Text in Practical English Proficiency, score over 57 in the TOEFL iBT test, etc.)

→**Examine** student’s English abilities **by utilizing** external language exams and **expand** the utilization of such exams which measure all four skills for university entrance including the Test in Practical English Proficiency and TOEFL.

In Text 3e, the verbs “enrich”, “improve”, and “expand” (strategies of mitigation) are used to promote a positive self-portrayal of MEXT in terms of its ability to “improve student’s English ability” determined by test scores (Kubota, 2011), and to use exams to assess all four skills.

Vagueness

In addition to the several examples of positive self-portrayal and mitigation, there are also instances of vagueness which appear to be aimed at convincing the public of programs and ideas using ambiguous lexical content. For example, in Text 1a the reference to “educational environment” (strategy of vagueness) demonstrates the macro-level general view, while educational environments at the micro-level are actually specific to the personal needs of the students and the teacher’s interpretation of such needs. This is followed by a restrictive relative clause, “which corresponds to globalization from lower/upper secondary education stage,” where “globalization” is a strategy of vagueness

because the term can describe language, culture, and economy (among other things) in a global context, where “globalization” is viewed as a macro-level concern which contrasts the micro-level realities students and teachers in actual educational environments that are mainly focused upon community and state-level issues.

The prepositional phrase, “in order for the full-scale development of new English education in Japan,” begins with the compound preposition in the prepositional phrase “in order for...,” which is also an idiomatic expression used in policy discourse to state purpose and to recognize contingency (see “in order to form a more perfect Union...” in the Preamble of the Constitution of the United States), and to indicate the strategy to implement the “full-scale development of new English education” policy of the EERPCTG. “Full-scale development,” demonstrates the macro-level view of the goal and is a strategy of vagueness as it suggests the massiveness of the operation of reformed English education in Japan, which is no small feat, and as stated, is suggested to occur in a very short period of time.

Unification

In Text 1a, the independent clause is followed by a verb phrase, “upon strengthening English education (in elementary school),” where the inference that MEXT can improve “education in elementary school” is a strategy of unification that demonstrates a macro-level view of homogeneity of elementary schools throughout Japan.

In Texts 2e and 3b, “Lower/upper secondary school/education” is a unification strategy from the macro-level perspective which suggests homogeneity where all lower/upper secondary education environments are seen as “corresponding to Globalization,” when in fact the reality is that lower and upper secondary environments are unique in terms of the personal needs of students and capabilities of teachers at the local level in various locations throughout Japan.

In Text 2e, “Enrich educational content in relation to nurturing individual’s sense of Japanese identity (focus on traditional culture and history among other things)” English education is suggested to be a means to promoting “Japanese identity” which is a unification strategy where students will be taught in English about Japanese “traditional culture” and “history” which suggests the potential for homogenous Japanese identity. Given that the 2020 Olympics is a “trigger” to promote tourism in Japan (Matsutani, 2014), MEXT aims to equip students to become capable of presenting Japan identity to the world in a type of “we vs. you” discourse, which is consistent with the discourses of *nihonjinron* (Befu, 1993) and *kokusaika* (Kubota, 2002) that suggest that Japan is a unified nation and that Japanese culture, tradition, and identity are unique to citizens of Japan. On these terms, English is intended to be the medium used to promote the uniqueness of Japanese identity to the rest of the world, which is contrary to the inclusiveness and recognition of diversity that is often pro-

moted in multiculturalism discourses such as in the Canadian Multicultural Act (1988) where Canada aims to recognize diversity to varying degrees.

Unreal scenario

In addition to unification strategies, unreal scenarios are also evident in the EERPCTG. For example, in Text 1a, “Lower/upper secondary education stage” is a metaphor (i.e., education is a process) suggesting that education occurs in small and steady increments. However, when compared to other descriptions of the program in this document (e.g., Text 1a, “further advancing English education”), we see an unreal scenario since the progress of the reform cannot be both steady and rapidly occurring as MEXT intends to rapidly grow the English program in a relatively short period of time from 2014-2020 in preparation for the 2020 Tokyo Olympics, as demonstrated in Text 1b and Text 4.

Text 4: Schedule (provisionary)

- Around January 2014: **Establish** expert council
- 2014-2018 Establish teacher **empowerment frameworks**, **expand** advance implementation through support by the Regional Core Project aimed to Enhance English -Education and Schools with Special Substitute Curriculum
- Revise** the Course of Study upon examination by Central Education Council, advance incremental implementation from FY2018.
- Full scale **implementation** from FY2020 timed with the 2020 Tokyo Olympics

In Text 4 we see the expedited and provisional schedule of a six year period in which they intend upon “establishing expert council,” establishing “teacher empowerment frameworks,” and expanding “advance implementation” through the Regional Core Project.” MEXT aims to “revise the Course of Study” beginning in 2018, which suggests only a four year period is given to begin the Reform Plan while “full scale implementation” throughout Japan is expected to begin in 2020 with the intention of being “timed with the 2020 Tokyo Olympics,” where the Olympics is a “trigger” for the implementation of the program aimed at achieving economic growth (Matsutani, 2014).

Discussion

In our analysis of the EERPCTG, we have intended to identify the pervasiveness of neoliberal macro-level intentions in the “English Education Reform Plan corresponding to Globalization” policy. Whereas MEXT and its policy vis-à-vis the Abe administration (i.e., Abenomics) embodies a conservative or “strict father” neoliberal agenda through its attempt to rapidly implement Eng-

lish education reform in only 4-6 years, English education at the micro-level is a sector that tends to align with a “nurturing parent” philosophy (Lakoff, 1996). In the EERPCTG, we have seen the pervasiveness of the macro-level neoliberal agenda in terms of rapidly promoting English as linguistic instrumentalism, and efforts to appeal to people and teachers in the education sector at the “nurturing parent” micro-level through the illocutionary force of verbs that have positive discourse prosody. This demonstrates the way that MEXT uses positive discourse prosody in macro-level policy to achieve its neoliberal goals in micro-level contexts. Overall, we see that macro-level policy that concerns micro-level contexts must use language that appeals to people in the education sector at the micro-level in order to achieve macro-level goals.

This six year period is particularly short when considering the history of English education in Japan, where English proficiency and retention has been a historic struggle, especially when compared to other countries (e.g., Japanese ranks 40th out of 48 countries in the TOEIC (Hongo, 2014). Terasawa (2012) suggests that while many Japanese are not proficient in English, they are not at the lowest level on a global scale. Yet, even after nearly 30 years of increased efforts, i.e., the implementation of the JET program in Japan in 1987, English education in Japan has been comparatively unsuccessful, and yet, as we have seen in Text 1a, MEXT suggests that “further advancing” can take place in only six years. In Text 1b, we read, “(EERPCTG) timed with the 2020 Tokyo Olympics,” which is a dependent clause that explicitly indicates the significance of the time and the rapid pace (unreal scenario) in which the EERPCTG has been set to unfold as part of MEXT’s macro-level neoliberal agenda. As it is explicitly stated, reform of the EERPCTG is directly linked to the 2020 Tokyo Olympics, which was announced by the IOC (International Olympic Committee) in 2013, shortly before the EERPCTG was implemented. Along with an improved status on the global stage as a host of an event meant to bring the global community together, perhaps more importantly for the Japanese government, economic growth is expected and it is the motivation for hosting such an event. As reported by Matsutani (2014) in the Japan Times, “Since Tokyo won the bid to host the 2020 Summer Olympic Games last September, various think tanks have announced their estimates of the economic effects of the Olympics, with figures ranging from ¥3 trillion to ¥150 trillion...As part of the growth strategies in Prime Minister Shinzo Abe’s “Abenomics,” the government is aiming to increase the number of foreign visitors per year to 20 million by 2020 and 30 million by 2030.”

As stated, MEXT’s plan to reform English education is motivated by Abenomics’ growth strategies and neoliberal goals that include using the 2020 Tokyo Olympics as an opportunity for economic growth through emphasizing tourism in its “Discover Tomorrow” slogan, which is similar to the way that the 2012 Olympics in London were used to promote economic growth beginning with the following five promises that were made in the original Olympic bid: “To demonstrate that the UK is a creative, inclusive and welcoming place to live in, to visit and for business” (Renton, 2012, emphasis mine). To

demonstrate the neoliberal agenda in which English is the lingua franca, Executive member of the Mori Memorial Foundation's Institute for Urban Strategies institute, Hiro Ichikawa, suggested that, "the institute estimates 1.21 million jobs will be created because of the Olympics, or about 170,000 new jobs a year" (Matsutani, 2014). While the Olympics has not always resulted in economic stimulus (e.g., Greece went bankrupt after the 2004 Olympics; Winter Olympics in Nagano in 1998 did not result in stimulation), the 2012 Olympics in London did result in a stronger economy (Matsutani, 2014), and this is the hope of the Japanese government. Additionally, Ichikawa stated that the projected economic stimulus in Japan is contingent upon deregulation (a characteristic of neoliberalism) (e.g., 50 new headquarters of foreign companies and 500 new foreign companies by 2016), and in terms of Japanese hospitality, both of which indicate the need for English, where according to Text 2e in the EERPCTG, MEXT expects students to use English to tell the world about Japanese culture and history, which is why he stated, "The Olympics is the trigger for them to come to Japan. They will learn about Japan and keep visiting. That's our strategy" (Matsutani, 2014).

Conclusion: Five concerns over linguistic instrumentalism

While neoliberal goals may be evident in the EERPCTG indicating that English education in Japan is in fact linguistic instrumentalism and a manifestation of the neoliberal agenda of the Abe Administration, the reality is that nobody knows whether neoliberalism or its adoption in English education will contribute to making Japanese society better in the long run. It might work, but there are several concerns about the ongoing reform. The aim of this paper and analysis has been not to condemn the current social and educational situation dominated by neoliberalism, but to demonstrate the pervasiveness of neoliberal goals in English education policy in Japan, and as we will see, to provide policy makers and practitioners engaged in English education with viewpoints to see the current situation from wider perspectives. In the following, we present five concerns about English instrumentalism that may be important points to consider.

First, we have to realize that we can be manipulated to desire something; in many cases we do not desire something but are made to desire something. Motha and Lin (2014) made an important argument on this issue. They argue that if a state seeks to strengthen its economic power by increasing the number of fluent English speakers to compete in the global marketplace, the desire can be reflected in English teaching curricula. The students taught through the curricula are made to desire English communicative fluency. A ready-made workforce for the economy can be produced in this way. Teachers' desire is also subject to be manipulated, as we have tried to demonstrate through the pervasiveness and sophistication of language aimed at producing positive discourse prosody in the EERPCTG, and they might be assisting the neoliberal ideology unconsciously or unknowingly not by educating human beings, but

by creating human resources to develop the economy. Kubota (2011) indicated that it is not only an instrumental desire, but the mixture of leisure, consumption, and romantic desire that has created a huge industry of English education in Japan, which is also problematic if people are manipulated by macro-level power structures.

Second, required 'skills' are also manipulated. For example, TOEIC used to be the test of choice for many corporations in South Korea in 1990s, and a large industry was created including material developers and private schools. Once it was found that a high TOEIC score did not translate into good competence in English, corporations began to abandon TOEIC as an assessment tool (Park, 2011). This change occurred over a 10-year period. This example shows that the definition of 'skills' can be ideologically controlled by power. These days, it is 'communicative skills' that are presented as being required skills, although as we have seen in the EERPCTG, 'communicative skills' are not clearly defined. Who knows how the 'communicative skills' will be regarded in 10 years? The power that reproduces the structure of the linguistic market continues to revise the concept of 'skills,' which leads students or workers to perpetually pursue the imagined skills they believe they need at a given time.

The third concern is educational inequity. Guo (2012) reported widening disparity in the allocation of educational resources including public investment, qualified teachers, and school facilities in China. Fees that students pay and salaries that teachers are paid are much higher at prestigious schools than others. Lamb (2007) argued through an Indonesian case study that many Indonesians invest in English as a form of symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1991) in the hope of gaining cultural and economic capital in the future, but they also need to already have a certain level of social status to have a good chance of success. What we need is a more careful analysis and criticism to understand the mechanisms of the linguistic market and how the structure is reorganized to maintain or accelerate the social inequalities it supports.

The fourth concern is related to motivation to learn. As we have seen in the EERPCTG verbs such as "reform" (i.e., to make changes for improvement), "promote" (i.e., to further the progress of something), "enhance" (i.e., further improve the quality of something), "ensure" (i.e., to make sure or provide certainty), and "empower" (i.e., to make someone stronger or more confident) are used by MEXT to appeal to the "nurturing parent" beliefs of teachers at the micro-level because teachers understand that teaching English requires a "nurturing" approach as students do not simply acquire English by bootstrapping. It is only a limited number of students who are motivated by the neoliberal logic who are able to acquire an additional language such as English. The majority of students are not motivated or rather demotivated by the neoliberal logic. Lamb (2007) indicated that studies of change in motivation of senior high school students revealed a fall in enthusiasm for language learning in every Asian country, and he presented one possible reason using two terms: the "ought-to L2 self" and the "ideal L2 self." Those who already have eco-

conomic and cultural advantages can imagine their future-selves succeeding with English proficiency. This is called the ‘ideal L2 self.’ Those without enough resources tend to have difficulties in finding ways to be a strong user of English, but are made to believe that English is indispensable for future success. This is called the “ought-to L2 self.” Some students in the latter group are unconsciously and unknowingly demotivated.

The last point is how teachers in the frontlines can fill the gap between the realities at the micro-level and the macro-level top-down policies. In reality teachers in Asian countries who have typically acquired only a reading comprehension ability in English have to prepare students to pass English exams. However, students, parents, and school principals often demand that teachers produce exceptional results. On the other hand, at the macro-level, governments in many non-English-speaking countries have issued policies aimed at improving oral communicative skills by calling for the use of English for instruction and hiring more native English speakers as assistant English teachers (ALT), as we have seen in the EERPCTG, or by encouraging students to study abroad by offering financial aid. If teachers on the ground follow the policies, they have to prepare many supplementary lessons, which are typically for reading comprehension and not usually aimed at improving oral proficiency. Not all English teachers can do so because school teachers have many other obligations to do. In that case, many students may have to go to a cram school or hire a tutor to win competitions to enter prestigious universities or go abroad by way of government sponsored programs. Students who cannot afford supplementary support are likely to be left behind.

In conclusion, we would also like to point out that linguistic instrumentalism does not always contribute to individual economic success despite high English proficiency gained by spending enormous amounts of time and money, such as in the case of the EERPCTG. In most cases the promise of English is illusion. For example, Kubota (2011) reported in a case study in Japan, that a female worker who gained high English proficiency with a large amount of investments ended up working as an English instructor for children at a private school that paid only 750¥h. Further, almost all workers engaged in English-related clerical work are temporary staff in spite of their good command of English. In Japan, employers who are required to negotiate in English are often limited, and professional knowledge and skills in one’s specialized field rather than English skills are regarded as being essential by corporate executives. Park (2011) also reported a similar situation observed in South Korea. As a result, although MEXT intends to promote English and use the 2020 Olympics as a “trigger” to promote a reformed English education program in Japan, the value of English as linguistic instrumentalism is difficult to determine and may not produce the results that the Abe Administration is hoping for.

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