

社会歴史的に見る受験英語に関する一考察

A socio-historical inquiry into Juken Eigo

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Introduction

University examinations, and *juken eigo* (examination English), an extension of it, seem to lack a positive reception among various circles of English educators in contemporary Japan. In fact, both researchers and practitioners have condemned various elements of the exam, including the so-called washback effect, its reliability and/or validity (or lack thereof), as well as the difficulty of the reading passages and vocabulary (see e.g. Gorsuch, 1998; Hasegawa, Chujo, & Nishigaki, 2006; McVeigh, 2002). However, many of these studies have viewed the items and aspects of the test in isolation, perhaps missing the bigger picture or alternative meanings of the exams. The current study will explore the historical and political roots of *juken eigo* during the Meiji Period (1868-1912). Specifically, I will examine how post-1880 nation building established and shaped the role of examination English using Anderson's (2006) notion of an "imagined community as a framework. It is critical to understand the political atmosphere and landscape of education during this period of time. With this in mind, I will provide a brief overview in the following section.

Historical Overview

The first decade of the Meiji Era reflected one of sudden and wide spread change. The introduction of English was no exception to this. In a relatively short period of time, English displaced its more established foreign language counterparts, Chinese and Dutch, becoming the de facto language of instruction in many education institutions for over two decades (Duke, 2014; Erikawa, 2011; Imura, 2003) (Duke, 2014; Erikawa, 2011; Imura, 2003). Sasaki (2008) succinctly wrote, "English was not the target of learning, but the means of acquiring new skills and knowledge (p. 65). That is, English and other foreign languages were utilized as a means to an end; specifically, the creation of Japan as a modern nation-state. The Meiji government cleverly undertook this challenge by employing the rhetoric of the 'West' to establish Japan as an equal power (Heinrich, 2012; Imura, 2003). Ultimately, this would be realized through two primary channels, education and language modernization.

The Education System and the Gakusei

Okamoto Takato, director of the Ministry of Education, drafted the First National Plan for Education (*Gakusei*)

in 1872. He envisioned a system where a highly qualified group of foreigner professors would initially educate the future core of Japanese leaders and professionals, from government employees to teacher trainers. It was planned that some members of this Western-educated group would teach modern ‘Western’ education to other Japanese students in their native language, eventually replacing the invited foreign professors. As government members and other elites tasked with creating this new “imagined community were not well established in numbers or in reputation, they faced the challenge of populating the community while also promoting its benefits to the masses. A centralized education system and national language were sought to educate the masses and transmit a sense of national identity, but both had yet to be established. Although all levels of education were established simultaneously under the *Gakusei*, great concentration was placed on the elementary schools (Amano, 1983; Duke, 2014).

While the higher schools of learning such as the Kaisei Gakko (the precursor to Tokyo University) initially served as institutions of training for the elite, the government faced the problem instability among many people in society, particularly the peasants who comprised nearly 80 percent of the population (Duke, 2014; Marshall, 1994). A more detailed look into the *Gakusei* as well as the Conscription Act and Land Tax (enacted the same year) offer some insights into this issue. From its inception, the *Gakusei* deviated from the feudalistic Confucian-inspired education model, reflected by its heavy influence from multiple Western models, particularly American and French. The First National Plan for Education mandated the closure of the venerable temple schools (*terakoya*), required attendance of school-aged children, and placed the burden of financing the new schools on the communities it benefited. In contrast, the *terakoya* represented a familiar feudal institution and catered to local villages offering basic literacy and numeracy skills for interested families.

Needless to say, the disruption of established feudal practices and customs by a distant centralized government entity were not welcomed warmly (Duke, 2014). The financial burden of funding the schools and required attendance took away both monetary and labor resources from already struggling farmers. Further exacerbating peasant opposition towards the government was a detested land tax of 3 percent as well as the Conscription Act which took able bodied men away from farms. With a majority of the population uninterested and unconvinced in the merits of the new system, coupled with a lack of unity in the Japanese language and education system, the prognosis of a modern nation-state seemed guarded at best.

Second Decade of Meiji — Towards Nationhood

Despite a slow start towards nationhood, offset by the still developing and chaotic education system, the 1880s began to carry a growing sense of national identity facilitated primarily by educational reforms and language modernization. Under the collaboration of Prime Minister Ito and Education Minister Mori, the education system was finally realized and utilized as an instrument of nation building. The German Gymnasium, chosen as the model for the modernization of the Japanese school system, was

thought to best serve the interests of the nation through its two-track education system. Under this structure, primary and lower secondary education would provide general skills and practical knowledge for the masses to sustain a general workforce. On the other hand, advancement to upper middle school and beyond was reserved for an academic elite being groomed for placement into the upper echelons of society as administrators and future leaders. Mori's implementation of the track system was greatly successful in bringing order to the disparate situation within the education system by outlining a clear path of advancement from elementary school to middle school to higher middle school to the university.

Shortly after in the late-1880s, a link between education and employment began to develop a more intertwined relationship. That is, for the first time formal education became a means of upward social mobility, sometimes referred to in contemporary terms as the *gakureki shakai* (Amano, 1982, 1983; Duke, 2014; Mehl, 2003), which I will discuss further in the next section. Not coincidentally, the elementary schools saw an increase in stability and middle school attendance rose exponentially from the late-1880s forward. The Imperial Rescript on Education of 1890, the milestone of educational reforms in the Meiji Era, tied up the loose ends concerning moral education. This reform completed the image of a national identity based on traditional (nativist) values imbued with modernist (progressive) Western knowledge, to be disseminated through the educational system to a new imagined community. The advocacy by both Ito and Mori of an education for the state as well as advancements in the military and government infrastructures secured a sound foundation to address the final issue of language modernization regarding the creation of Japan as a modern nation-state.

The Last Piece of the Puzzle

The Japanese language recognized today is the product resulting from the unification of the spoken and written languages, which were terribly disparate entities not being completely resolved until after World War II (for a more in depth discussion see Heinrich, 2012; Lee, 1996; Tomasi, 1999). The government and other elites appeared to have an awareness of these disparities and its implications far before the Meiji Restoration. Under the hierarchy of the feudal system, education was reserved for samurai and other elites. Advanced literacy skills functioned as a means of communication among the upper classes and represented a way to express respective social class among other elites and commoners (Heinrich, 2012; Tomasi, 1999). It was thus beyond the right and practicality for a peasant to pursue such skills. The Meiji Restoration, however, dissolved this former social hierarchy, bringing into relevance the lack of a common comprehensible language. This was particularly true for peasant farmers who could not decipher the Sino-Japanese character set used in government announcements and newspapers (Lee, 1996, 2010). Moreover, the government saw a national language as a medium and a tool to support the creation of a national identity as well as the education system (see e.g., Anderson, 2006; Lee, 1996, 2010).

Major developments towards a national language prior to the mid-1880s seemed to take a secondary seat

to the primary goals of industrialization and modernization. The first decade of Meiji, also known as the “translated textbooks period (Duke, 2014, p. 141; Galan, 2013), reflected the urgency to modernize and industrialize under the theme of enlightenment and civilization. During this period, Japanese and particularly Chinese studies were dismissed as feudalistic and their potential contributions overlooked despite advice from David Murray, then Superintendent of Education (Duke, 2014; Imura, 2003). The displacement of the Shohei Gakko, the most prestigious Confucius temple during the Tokugawa Period (1603-1868), for Marion Scott’s new “San Francisco method teacher training classroom represented an extreme instance of this (Duke, 2014). Interestingly, however, the largely former samurai workforce behind the successful translation of foreign books (primarily American) into Japanese was predicated on literacy skills acquired from their Confucian-inspired schooling. While the pursuit of creating an industrialized and modern nation was biased towards the acquisition of Western knowledge, the opening years of the Meiji Era did not foster a favorable social or political situation for the promotion of a national language. The government was painfully aware of their failure in persuading the peasants to attend the new elementary schools. Moreover, the chaotic and the patchwork quilt nature of the education system was not developed enough to serve as a hub to transmit a common language, culture, and identity, as these too did not yet exist.

Running in parallel to the stabilization of elementary schools and the massive influx of middle school students, was the *Genbun Itchi* movement. This movement, considered as the culmination of debates regarding the unification of speech and writing occurred over different mediums, such as *Bun*, an academic journal of the period (for a detailed history see Heinrich, 2012; Lee, 1996, 2010). Linguistically the movement aimed at closing the gap between written and spoken Japanese by adopting the spoken model for writing. It was envisioned that the Tokyo vernacular would serve as the national standard to consolidate the masses into an imagined community. Despite the temporary implementation of an old mixed Chinese style from late-1880s through the early-1890s, the *Genbun Itchi* movement would prevail from the mid-1890s until the close of the Meiji Era in 1912 (Heinrich, 2012; Lee, 1996, 2010). Final tweaks would again be applied following the Second World War, but by the end of Russo-Japanese War in 1895, the major underpinnings of the modern Japanese language would be laid. The successful implementation of the German Gymnasium model and increased attendance across all levels of school made the education system both a viable and ideal vehicle to spread the newly established national identity, a more unified common language, and a shared culture.

From the inception of the Meiji period to its end in 1912, the government developed its barebones legal framework into a functioning modern nation-state. The sections above have attempted to show how English (and other foreign languages) were situated the Meiji period as a means to a nationalistic end. Moreover, I have tried to highlight the importance of both the education system and the creation of a unified national language as tools to achieve this. It is hoped this background knowledge will help provide a basis for understanding the evolution of both examinations and examination English (*juken*

eigo) in the subsequent part. The following section will revisit the *Gakusei* looking at how it shaped the initial structure of the education system as well as the stipulations regarding examinations. Specifically, I argue that the *juken eigo* emerged as the product of a flawed structure in the education system, accelerated by both the middle school boom and the establishment of academic credentialism.

Juken Eigo

Juken eigo, or examination English, seems rather neutrally defined by many Japanese scholars as the English that appears on tests (e.g., Erikawa, 2011; Imura, 2003). However, as a child born out of a chaotic modern education system and reared under the environment of a developing nation-state, the history of *juken eigo* towards its modern connotation cannot be casually overlooked. This section will begin by tracing its conception in the *Gakusei* and birth on entrance exams. The catalytic influence of the middle school boom and academic credentialism will then be explored.

The Gakusei Revisited

Although the short lived *Gakusei* met its demise upon the enactment of the Imperial Will on Education in 1879, the examination system survived into present day Japan. It is thus important to take a brief look at the implications of the exams and how they were established. While tests and examinations in Japan can be traced as far back to the 7th century, the ones introduced during the Meiji Era differed greatly from their Chinese-origin counterparts (Amano, 1983; Duke, 2014; Erikawa, 2011; Imura, 2003). First, these tests were Western-based primarily drawing influence from France, Germany and the UK. Moreover, the examination provisions of the *Gakusei* stipulated that exams would be utilized as means of assessing learning and progression in the education system.

The examinations for this purpose were broadly comprised of formative and summative exams. The former were given periodically to monitor learning and determine whether pupils were ready to advance to the next grade. The latter were used to evaluate learning at major levels, i.e., primary, secondary, and tertiary, and diplomas issued to successful candidates qualifying them to advance to the next level. Examinations were also implemented for the selection of scholarships and when applicants exceeded available spots for some institutions or classes. Oki Takato's emphasis on academic ability seemed to be reflected in the exams under the *Gakusei*, and the subsequent meritocracy initially born from it. However, given the historical context outlined in the previous section, until the elementary school system stabilized in the mid-1880s, students from former samurai families were not surprisingly the biggest demographic. An unbalanced student population during the early stages of the education system coupled with a wide variation in academic standards would have implications in the overall infrastructure of the education system as well as on the course of *juken eigo*. These problems would be addressed in two major ways, entrance exams and education credentials.

Until the implementation of the German Gymnasium model in the mid-1880s, the education system

was fragmented, especially the connection between elementary school and university (see Amano, 1983, p.289, 2004; Izawa, 1958). While the *Gakusei* stipulated rules to govern graduation examinations, academic standards varied considerably, usually with diminishing results outside the core of Tokyo. Advanced learning institutions not able to rely on the graduation exams to consistently produce qualified candidate pools created their own entrance exams. During the first half of Meiji, higher education institutions needing to establish their legitimacy did so by maintaining a level of academic rigor on par with their Western counterparts. As such, classes were taught by foreign faculty in their native languages with little exception (see e.g., Amano, 1983, p. 290; Duke, 2014, p. 207). Entrance exams administered at middle school, high school, and higher education schools served as a kind of band-aid approach to bridge the gap between education levels and the various standards among them. Erikawa (2011) corroborates this noting the focus of practical English skills, particularly spoken and oral skills, which appeared on the entrance exams administered by higher learning institutions during this time. According to Erikawa (2011), the well-known and perhaps stigmatized elements (e.g., grammar translation) associated with *juken eigo* would not make a regular appearance until post-1910. However, the entrance exams alone did not provide a substantial enough link between elementary school and higher education. Preparations for the entrance exams as well as supplementary education were used to mitigate the gap in academic ability. This preparatory education was provided outside the provisions of the *Gakusei* by private schools, many the theoretical forerunners of modern *jukus* and *yobikos* (Amano, 1983; Mehl, 2003).

Preparatory Schools and the Middle School Boom

Preparatory schools functioned not only to fill the provisional gap of the education system but also provided supplemental education, particularly in foreign languages. As noted above, passing the difficult entrance exams of middle school and high school did not guarantee the necessary language ability demanded by the English language lectures of the university. The Tokyo University preparatory school, attached to Tokyo University since its inception in 1877 represents an intriguing example. The initiative of Tokyo University to incorporate the preparatory school, which primarily functioned as a large language center, reflected the incomplete nature of the education system at large. Thus, the Tokyo University Preparatory school with its four-year curriculum became a stepping stone to the university (Amano, 1983; Duke, 2014). Operating as it historically did as the Kaisei Gakko, this language school offered intensive English training with foreign teachers. Marion Scott after finishing his tenure at the Tokyo Teacher Training School joined the faculty of the Tokyo Daigaku Yobimon. Interestingly, this language school would become the First Higher Middle School in Tokyo under the reforms of Mori in the mid-1880s. While the preparatory schools were able to support the advancement of students to higher education institutions (e.g., Tokyo University or Sapporo College of Agriculture), the original plan called for middle schools to lead to university entrance.

The educational reforms of Mori and Ito as well as advances in nation building would phase out the

temporary need for these preparatory schools as they were eventually replaced by a developed network of middle schools. However, this transition did not take off as smoothly as envisioned in the Middle School Ordinance which stipulated that each prefecture was responsible for sponsoring a lower and higher middle school. In practice, only five higher regional schools were originally established (in Tokyo, Sendai, Osaka, Kanazawa, and Kumamoto respectively). Moreover, the discrepancies in academic standards between the First Higher Middle School and the others created quality control problems for graduates looking to enter Tokyo University. In fact, 90 percent of the next ten incoming classes at Tokyo University were dominated by graduates of its former preparatory school, the First Higher Middle School (Duke, 2014, p. 325). As other higher middle schools improved, so did their lower-track counterparts. By the end of the late-1880s, a clear order of advancement in education as well as its link to employment was seen by the general public, increasing exponentially after. This was reflected by middle school attendance rates of 1,170 in 1895 to 9,927 in 1905, and finally jumping to 20,852 in 1919 (Amano, 1992, pp. 208-213; Mehl, 2003, p. 197). Under the newly established education for the state model, academic credentials and competitive examinations for selection would become more and more institutionalized as seemingly small quotas were dwarfed by a huge pool of candidates seeking entry into high levels of education. For instance, Marshall (1994) noted that in 1900 Tokyo University and Kyoto University (established in 1897) took a combined 564 students (p.68). Moreover, the emphasis of a practical English on the entrance exams would gradually shift to take on a more bookish flavor during this time.

The Road to Credentialism

This section will discuss the intersection of nation building and the education system in relation to examinations and educational credentials. I will first explain the context of the *gakureki* and its inseparable relationship with examinations. Following the path of examinations, I will further explore the effect of nationalism on the reforms of *juken eigo* and the institutionalization of exams. The first tangible form of an educational credential (*gakureki*) took roots in the provisions of the *Gakusei* whereby successful examinees were issued certificates denoting the institution, level of education, and area of study (Amano, 1983, pp. 181-2). Modern university diplomas offer a nice example of this with the name of the school, degree level, and major clearly displayed on the certificate. Amano (1983) also notes that these credentials by themselves have no intrinsic value unless implemented as a measure of social evaluation and or selection. In theory, the certificates were supposed to verify that *Gakusei* standards were met for a particular level. However, as evidenced by the creation of entrance exams and the establishment of preparatory schools, the education system was not developed enough nationally to support the stipulations outlined by the *Gakusei*. Instead examinations, especially entrance exams, served as a more reliable means to measure ability than their diploma counterparts. In turn, a diploma from Tokyo University served as the proverbial golden ticket to a prestigious government job. Alternatively put, competitive entrance examinations as a selection tool, and the subsequent educational credential as means of social evaluation established a link between formal education and employment. The middle

school boom beginning in the late-1890s played a pivotal role in shaping not only this relationship but of *juken eigo* as well.

Although the implementation and stabilization of the German Gymnasium model logically suggests that the reliance on entrance exams would no longer be necessary, in practice it was never realized. To better conceptualize this, let us look to Amano's (1983, p. 121; 1990, p. 91) metaphor:

The Japanese education system during the Meiji period can be compared to a two-story house in which the first floor—the elementary and middle schools—was a completely different world from the second floor—the university. The university became “the West in Japan, and preparatory education with foreign language training as its main objective, served as the stairs to go up from the first floor to the second. The preparatory course “stairs were soon systematized as the Higher Middle School and the Higher School. As would be seen later, the Japanese “examination hell was to form at the bottom of this staircase.

The “examination hell of entrance exams stemmed from a logistical flaw in the lack of the higher secondary and tertiary institutions to handle the sudden influx of so many prospective students. For instance, over the 10 year span between 1895 and 1905, middle school attendance increased by 8,757 students (from 1,170 to 9,927), but only seven higher middle schools and two national universities existed (Tokyo and Kyoto University respectively). Although entrance examinations continued their former function as an indispensable selection tool, the content and construction of the test would take a new form. Keeping in mind this time span represented Japan's first decade as a modern nation-state, the next part will start at the second floor using Tokyo University as an example.

In the years leading up the establishment of Japan as a nation-state, Tokyo University underwent a process of “Japanization beginning in the early-1880s (Amano, 1977, 1983, 1992; Erikawa, 2011; Imura, 2003). The curriculum and faculty changes of 1881 resulted in Japanese faculty outnumbering their foreign counterparts 21 to 16, a phenomenon never witnessed before (Erikawa, 2011, p. 27). In fact, several specialized courses were taught by qualified Japanese trained overseas and domestically. Coinciding with this change of faculty was a new job ranking system consisting of professors and lecturers, the former unique to Japanese and the latter designated to foreigners. The following year, students in the law department had the choice to submit their theses in either Japanese or *kanbun* (Amano, 1983; Erikawa, 2011). Moreover, by 1883 English as the language of instruction was abolished and replaced by Japanese (Amano, 1977). As Tokyo University was still “the West in Japan, these trends primarily reflected changes in the medium of instruction; Japan needed to maintain its competitive academic base for which it continued to look westward. For instance, although Japanese was used as the language of instruction, English medium textbooks were still imported and used. Just as the nation was progressing towards sovereignty, so was the first university. When viewed from this perspective, the “domestication (Tobin, 1992) of English, or the Japanization of foreign things to conform with its domestic needs, seemed inevitable (see also Keenley & Thomas, 1937, p. 3). A closer examination of the

content on the entrance exams is one medium that offers an interesting reflection of this.

As it has probably become evident, changes to the content and style of the entrance exams adapted and moved accordingly with the development of both the education system and the establishment of Japan as a nation-state. For the first 20 years of the Meiji era, the high foreign language proficiency standard (especially in English) was crucial not only for the acquisition of knowledge and the establishment of bona fide higher education institutions, but also for the development of the nation-state. This was translated into the entrance exams of many higher schools from the Kaisei Gakko (the forerunner to Tokyo University) to the First Higher Middle School, where students were lined up and called in one by one to verbally answer various questions from the analysis of texts to conversation questions in English (Erikawa, 2011). When recruiting students for the Sapporo College of Agriculture, Clark and his associates used a one-to-one oral examination they had previously employed at their Massachusetts school (Duke, 2014, p. 206). Before continuing, let us recap the situation at these 5 higher education institutions at the end of the first decade: Tokyo University, Tokyo Teacher Training School, Imperial University of Engineering, Keio Gijuku, and Sapporo College of Agriculture. All but Keio Gijuku were government sponsored and primarily taught by foreign professors through the medium of English. Although classes at Keio Gijuku were taught in Japanese by Japanese professors with English texts, the English proficiency demanded of its government counterparts was required. Duke (2014) offered a nice summary writing, “It was truly a remarkable ‘era of English’ never to be equaled in the history of the nation (p. 236). Erikawa (2011) notes this interview method was possible because of the relatively low number of applicants and because of the demanding academic rigors of universities on foreign language ability, especially aural and speaking skills.

As the idea that academic credentials as an instrument of upward mobility registered with the general public and rooted itself in society, the entrance examinations became the sword in the stone. Both exam English and English at large would move from a “vehicle of study (Amano, 1983, p. 119) to a subject of study (Erikawa, 2011, p. 19). No longer would an interview system be viable for selecting a small group of candidates from a large pool of prospective students. While this method was generally accompanied by a written test, the limits of the interview process were impressive. For instance, the 1889 entrance exam for the First Higher Middle School (formerly Tokyo University’s preparatory school), entailed candidates to read a text aloud, summarize it, and explain certain grammar points verbally (Erikawa, 2011, p. 19). Of the 800 applicants 155 successfully passed. This type of entrance exam, with a focus on strong practical English ability began declining during the late-1880s and was phased out of practice by the early-1900s. In its place was a new written-based exam focused primarily on English to Japanese and Japanese to English translations, English grammar, and dictation. The last decade of Meiji would also see the creation of a new skill, *kaishaku* (interpretation), which would replace the English to Japanese translation (see Amano, 1982; Erikawa, 2011 for further details). Improvements in the education system and the creation of a nation-state with a common language, culture, and identity made it possible to teach

modern Western knowledge through a Japanese medium. The proliferation of entrance examination reference books beginning in late-Meiji and early-Showa (1912-1988) eras also played a profound role on shaping the entrance exams towards a more “intellectual than “practical direction (see Erikawa, 2011; Imura, 2003; pp. 265-286). By the close of the Meiji era the theoretical underpinnings as well as the seemingly esoteric English content of the entrance exams were set and embarked on a journey towards contemporary Japan.

Conclusion

In exploring the various socio-political, academic, and cultural changes of the latter part of the Meiji Period (1880-1912), I have shown that *juken eigo* was birthed from the intersection of many movements; the focus of the government to establish a modern nation-state, the unification of spoken and written Japanese, as well as the sharp increase of students wishing to pursue advanced education from the birth of the *gakureki*. Moreover, the notion and history of examination English is far from a monolith. As I have outlined above, historically the education system in regards to English education, and specifically *juken eigo*, are capable of sustaining a wide range of goals and outcomes. It is the author’s hope that this brief historical overview of some previous questions, debates, and solutions to English education and *juken eigo* can serve as a source and offer insights towards solutions for the problems of today.

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