

# CONSTRUCTIONS OF HERITAGE IN JAPANESE AS A HERITAGE LANGUAGE SCHOOLS IN ENGLAND

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## Abstract

This paper presents data from interviews conducted with head administrators of 10 Japanese as a Heritage Language (JHL) schools in England and examines their emic perspectives on 'heritage'. 'Heritage' is defined as "elements of past experience that a group deliberately sets out to preserve and pass on to the next generation" (Blackledge & Creese, 2010, p. 164). The interview transcripts are interrogated for their constructions of heritage in relation to the curriculum. A range of perspectives on heritage can be seen and these differences may affect the programme and approach each school chooses. In the era of globalisation, 'heritage' can involve connections to the future as well as connections to the past. *Kokugo* textbooks are selected because of the way they construct a Japanese 'authenticity'. This paper presents phase one of a larger project aiming to shed light on the curriculum of JHL schools in England.

## Introduction

In the era of globalisation, new educational responses are required as a result of the increase in mobility and social diversity and change in community structures. Heritage language schools have existed in England since the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, but the number increased significantly from the 1950s onwards owing to the arrival of communities from the 'New Commonwealth' (Minty, Maylor, Issa, Kuyok, & Ross, 2008). Since the end of the 1990s, as heritage language schools have gained the interest of researchers in the UK, the US, Australia and Canada, many aspects of these schools have been revealed. However, research into the curricula adopted in these schools has barely been carried out. This paper presents phase one of a larger project on the curriculum of Japanese as a heritage language (JHL) schools in England.

## Literature

### 1. Heritage language

According to Kramsch (2008), heritage language is described as a language learnt by members of an ethnic group hoping to reconnect with their ancestors' culture.

'Heritage' concerns "elements of past experience that a group deliberately sets out to preserve and pass on to the next generation" (Blackledge & Creese, 2010, p. 164). Heritage language schools are also called supplementary schools, complementary schools or community language schools in England, but I chose the term 'heritage language schools' since I consider these schools are sites where people would like to pass on what they regard as 'heritage' to the next generation. In the era of globalisation, however, I argue that 'heritage' can be more than connections with the past.

The teaching of language as ‘cultural heritage’ is one of the key rationales of heritage language schools, since the teaching of language is intertwined with the teaching of ‘heritage’ there (Blackledge & Creese, 2010). Since language practices are always shaped by language ideologies and language ideologies are constantly influenced by language practices (Blackledge & Creese, 2010), ‘heritage’ contains language ideologies.

## 2. Heritage language schools in Japanese

Although Japanese people started to immigrate to England in the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there is no trace of heritage language schools in Japanese in England before WWII (Ito, 2001). In 1965, a Japanese class opened in London, which, in 1976, developed into a *hoshuko*, a Japanese supplementary school supported by the Japanese government. *Hoshuko* is a national project which provides at weekends part of the education children would have received at schools in Japan, so that children living temporarily abroad can go back to the Japanese school system smoothly. All the *hoshuko* in the world follow the Japanese national curriculum and use government authorised textbooks. In 2013 there were 203 *hoshuko* in 54 countries with 18,000 students enrolled, and in the UK, there are nine *hoshuko*, seven in England, one in Wales and another one in Scotland (MEXT, 2014).

There are also other types of heritage language schools in Japanese which were opened by Japanese parents or communities for their children having settled in England. These schools use locally-produced curricula without the government’s guidelines. In my project I investigate these non-*hoshuko* schools, calling them Japanese as a heritage language (JHL) schools and their students JHL learners. The summary of the two types of UK’s heritage language school in Japanese is in Table 1.

**Table 1: UK’s Heritage Language Schools in Japanese**

	Number	Curriculum	Target students	Aim	Japanese government support	Information
<b>Hoshuko</b>	England: 7 Wales: 1 Scotland: 1  Total: 9	Japanese national curriculum with the guidance of the Japanese government	Temporary sojourners overseas	Help students make a smooth transition to the Japanese school system on return to Japan	Financial support, dispatched teachers (depending on the number of students)	Available via MEXT homepage
<b>JHL schools</b>	?	Locally created, no guidelines	Those having no clear intention to return to Japan	Varied	None	Not readily available

## 3. *Kokugo* and *Nihongo*

In Japanese there exist two separate words meaning Japanese language. One is *kokugo* (nation + language), which literally means a national language. A national language can be described as “an institution that is used to create and unify a nation

in modern nation-states” (Yasuda, 2003, translated and quoted in Doerr & Lee, 2012, p. 562) based on the model of one nation, one language. In creating modern Japan in the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Japanese government chose a linguistic variety in Tokyo as the standard language for compulsory *kokugo* education and designated it the only legitimate variety for its citizens in an effort to create a homogeneous Japanese nation (Doerr & Lee, 2009; Yasuda, 2003). The government then constructed the term. Another word is *nihon-go* (Japan + language), which directly means Japanese language. This is now considered a general term for Japanese language. Actually, this term was also constructed by the Japanese government during the colonial period in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when *nihongo* education started as Japanese language education in the colonies (Yasuda, 2003). Therefore, *nihongo* education was for people outside the main islands of Japan, while *kokugo* education was for people inside the main islands (Yasuda, 2003).

Even now, *nihongo* education refers to Japanese as a foreign language education and *nihongo* textbooks are for learners studying Japanese as a foreign language. *Kokugo*, however, is a school subject in Japan. *Kokugo* textbooks, which are composed separately for each school year following the national curriculum and authorised by the government, contain ideological messages such as respect for the nation. These textbooks are used at schools in Japan and *hoshuko* the world over.

#### 4. Emblematic features

For my research project I use discourse analysis. Wortham & Reyes (2015) indicate that discourse analysis starts with choosing indexical signs which might be important signals about the social action occurring or might play a central role in contextualization. Among types of indexical signs, an emblem is a particular kind of evaluative indexical, a sign or group of signs that presupposes and characterises a recognizable social type (Agha, 2007; Wortham & Reyes, 2015). Emblems of a social type can be not only linguistic signs like individual words, the use of particular language, register or dialect, but also non-linguistic signs such as gestures or clothing (Wortham & Reyes, 2015). ‘Authenticity’ can be demonstrated in specific arrangements or configurations of ‘emblematic features,’ and people need enough of these features in order to be acknowledged as an authentic member (Blommaert, 2012; Blommaert & Varis, 2011). In the case of Eliza Doolittle in ‘My Fair Lady’, for example, not only accents and speech content, but also clothing, body language and mannerisms, such as how to hold a cup or proffer a hand, are ‘emblematic features’ to be acknowledged as upper class. I look at how people at JHL schools describe what can be considered as ‘emblematic features’ and how they perceive ‘authenticity’ at JHL schools in England.

#### **Research Question**

My main project aims to contribute to research areas on curricula adopted in JHL schools in the UK context. As a part of its phase 1, this paper seeks to address the following research question:

What would people in JHL schools in England like to pass on to their students?

## Methods

Using Japanese networks in the UK for secondary school teachers, university teachers and the Japanese community, I first discovered 10 JHL schools in England. Then, I contacted head administrators of all the schools and got permission to visit them all. Between January and May 2015 I visited the 10 schools, spending one day at each, observing as many classes as possible and conducting an interview with the head administrator. The interviews were semi-structured so that I could obtain their emic perspective. Most interviews took around one hour, and a few took more than one-and-a-half hours as some participants talked more than I expected.

## Data Analysis

From a large volume of interview data I have chosen some extracts from interviews conducted with three administrators to discuss here. Interviews were all conducted in Japanese, but only the English translation is shown in this paper due to limitations of space.

### 1. Flexible approach

Administrator A said:

*I think it is not bad [for my students] to be able to use up to Year 4 kokugo textbooks. [...] Children often find Year 4 textbooks too difficult because of their vocabulary and, of course, their content. [...] In fact, as children's motivation is getting lower [in their teens], I ask them, 'Would you like to take GCSE exams? It is a good opportunity.' Eventually, around that time, I transfer from materials for Japanese as a mother tongue to those for Japanese as a foreign language.*

Her school normally starts with *kokugo* textbooks and very flexibly changes to *nihongo* textbooks when students in each class find the former difficult, and, in order to raise secondary school students' low motivation, introduces GCSE exam preparation. She has learnt this flexible approach through her 18 years' experience at her school.

### 2. 'Thinly but long'

She continued:

*[...] The most important purpose for parents to send their children to my school is that they want them to learn and remember reading and writing in nihongo [Japanese language]. Some want them to get familiar with primary school textbooks or something like that and others just want them to have time to keep contact with nihongo [Japanese language]. I don't think parents have a really clear aim, such as that children should learn up to a certain level by a certain age. Therefore my motto is to study Japanese 'thinly but long.' [...] In short, if they continue to study long enough they can reach somewhere.*

Her motto, 'thinly but long,' is a Japanese expression describing an approach to an activity where one continues for a long time by not putting in too much energy. She

may consider that one aim at JHL school can be to keep contact with literacy practice in Japanese as long as possible so that students may reach a certain point in the future where they find their Japanese useful for them. Another administrator also used this expression as an approach adopted in her school.

### 3. Easygoing or rigorous

Administrator B's school has provided easygoing programmes for 18 years by using *kokugo* textbooks very casually, and has flexibly accepted students with various Japanese backgrounds and abilities. However, recently, a younger generation of mothers, wanting to make the easygoing curriculum more rigorous, decided not to accept one student whose Japanese ability was too low to study *kokugo* textbooks. The next extract is about this student.

*I thought he could just sit in the classroom even if he cannot understand nihongo [Japanese language] now, as long as he wants to. He may start studying after making friends and want to study. It doesn't matter too much now. I told the younger-generation mothers that his mother can come to the classroom and interpret for him if he wants, but they said it is no good as he will just listen to his mother's English.*

For her, coming to JHL school and keeping a connection with Japan is more important than mastering Japanese language skills. In fact, Administrator C also told me about a troublesome case in her school in the past when one mother had sat next to her child in the classroom and had translated the teacher's instructions in English. This situation would be out of the question in a normal language school, but can happen, or be considered, in JHL schools, where people want to pass on something else as well as language skills. In this school, ideas about what kinds of approach to take are contested among generations.

### 4. Strong faith

Although Administrator A's school uses *kokugo* and *nihongo* textbooks very flexibly, I noticed during my observation that she gave students a photocopied article from a *kokugo* textbook in one class in which a *nihongo* textbook was being used. She said to me later that she tries to introduce something from *kokugo* textbooks as much as possible even after changing to *nihongo* textbooks, because she does not want to make her teaching completely Japanese as a foreign language. She seems to have a certain negative feeling about *nihongo* textbooks, but has faith in *kokugo* textbooks, thinking them 'authentic.' Her school, however, also provides special streams where *nihongo* textbooks are mainly used from the beginning for students who do not have much opportunity to use Japanese at home. Even if she has strong faith in *kokugo* textbooks, she provides environments for various students to study Japanese 'thinly but long.'

Strong faith in *kokugo* textbooks can also be recognised in other administrators' interviews. Among all the administrators, Administrator C has the strongest faith. Her school uses *kokugo* textbooks exclusively and does not think of using *nihongo* textbooks at all. She said:

*[Kokugo textbooks] show how to use polite expressions or casual expressions at important points. In higher levels, Year 4 or Year 5 textbooks contain how to write letters and things like that. It's wonderful, isn't it? [...] Honorific expressions, request expressions, and suchlike, appear one after the other. They introduce various expressions much more than A-level [Japanese]. If we can teach up to Year 6, we can cover what is necessary for a social life more or less. I just want to give the students opportunities to be exposed to them.*

She told me very enthusiastically how various language skills *kokugo* textbooks aim to develop are 'authentic' for her students. She continued:

*[...] Although the government's strong intentions are evident at times, we can teach those critically, as we don't teach under the government's control.*

She also acknowledged that *kokugo* textbooks contain strong ideological beliefs and values imposed by the Japanese government, which she resists and treats critically.

Notwithstanding the adoption of *kokugo* textbooks, the three administrators used the term *nihongo* for the Japanese language taught at their schools. In fact no administrators used the term *kokugo*, but always *nihongo*. Regarding textbooks, eight schools out of ten teach literacy and use *kokugo* textbooks.

#### 5. 'Heritage'

Administrators told me what they would like to pass on to their students, that is, what they regard as 'heritage.'

Administrator C's thought is:

*I have no intention to organise [school name] as a Japanese language school. Though we are Japanese mothers, we do not intend to teach them nihongo [Japanese language], but, how shall I put it ... our consciousness? We teach them Japan, including nihongo [Japanese language], don't we?*

She thinks her school is different from a language school and wants to pass on, not only 'authentic' language skills, but also values or beliefs Japanese people possess, some vague feeling of Japaneseness.

Administrator B said,

*Regarding my child... he has two choices, doesn't he? Though others don't. He doesn't need to choose Japan or Japanese culture, which includes working in Japan and all other possibilities. Though he doesn't need to choose Japan, I want him to keep that option open. For example, in deciding which university to go to, he can think of a Japanese university, which is difficult for ordinary British people, and, in finding employment, he can think of a Japanese company. I mean that sort of thing. I want him to keep what he was born with ready for use.*

She wants her son and her students to keep what they were born with, something Japanese, ready for possible use in the future. In the era of globalisation, people can get updated information anywhere by Internet, and travel/move to Japan and

other countries very easily. Therefore, she may think Japanese language abilities and Japaneseness, on top of English language abilities and Englishness, can expand students' future possibilities. 'Heritage' involves not only connections to the past, but also connections to the future.

## Discussion

People at JHL schools do not call the Japanese language they teach *kokugo*. They may not think it appropriate to pass on *kokugo* as it is to their students who have settled in England, since *kokugo* has a high level of sophistication and contains strong ideological values and beliefs to respect the nation imposed by the Japanese government. However, they chose *kokugo* textbooks. Since they themselves were brought up and educated with *kokugo* ideology using *kokugo* textbooks in Japan, they have attachment to and faith in these textbooks, thinking that what these textbooks contain is 'authentic'. By using these books they can pick and choose elements of *kokugo* ideology appropriate for their students who have settled in England and construct 'authenticity' at their JHL schools.

Although the three administrators' schools use *kokugo* textbooks, their understanding of the ideologies contained in these textbooks and faith in these textbooks differ. These differences may affect the programme and approach each school chooses.

Although administrator A does have faith in *kokugo* textbooks, she changes to *nihongo* textbooks according to the circumstances of each class very flexibly so that various students with their heterogeneous Japanese backgrounds and abilities can study Japanese literacy 'thinly but long'. She even makes separate streams where *kokugo* textbooks are not necessarily used. Administrator C, having the strongest faith in *kokugo* textbooks, adopts a programme and approach to encourage students to make progress steadily. Administrator B, on the other hand, considers it important to welcome any JHL learners to her school and to let them all connect to Japan, but the younger generation of mothers at the school, having stronger faith in *kokugo* textbooks, have tried to change the easygoing programme so that students' language skills can be reinforced more rigorously. As a consequence, this school cannot accept various JHL students flexibly as it did before.

Regarding what they would like to pass on to the next generation, that is, what they regard as 'heritage', the interviewees mentioned not only Japanese language skills, but also values or beliefs Japanese people possess, some vague feeling of Japaneseness, and connections to Japan. These can be seen as 'emblematic features' demonstrating authenticity at JHL schools in England. Specific arrangements and configurations of these emblematic features, however, vary among schools, among generations or among parents, and the teaching of Japanese language is intertwined with the teaching of 'heritage' in various ways. 'Heritage' connects to "elements of past experience that a group deliberately sets out to preserve and pass on to the next generation" (Blackledge & Creese, 2010), but also can connect to the future, since the administrators believe that it can expand the future possibilities of the next generation.

## Conclusion

People at JHL schools in England have attachment to and faith in *kokugo* textbooks and choose these textbooks for their students' education as much and as long as possible. However, their understanding of and faith in them differ. These differences may decide the specific arrangements and configurations of 'emblematic features' demonstrating 'authenticity' at respective JHL schools.

Specific arrangements and configurations of 'emblematic features' and ideas about what they regard as 'heritage', differ among schools, among generations and among parents. In the era of globalisation, 'heritage' can involve connections to the future as well as connections to the past.

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## **Biography**

Nahoko has been involved in language education for many years at schools and universities in Japan, Australia and the UK. Her research interest in heritage language schools arose while working for a JHL school in Australia. She is currently doing a PhD in education at the University of Birmingham.