

Raising Students' Awareness of National and Global Self-Identities Through Media Analysis of Japanese Social Issues

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Introduction

In a digital age with instant access to media sources from around the globe, university students in Japan can now form a wide range of differing opinions about how their nation and culture is changing. Globalisation is one of the main driving factors behind such changes. We can see evidence of this around Japan in all forms of media such as TV, fashion, news and advertising. "Globalisation has become a buzzword both abroad and in Japan" (Richard 2014:103) and we need to address how it is affecting our students on a daily basis.

One example where we can see the effects of globalisation is English loanwords. Changes to the Japanese language and the increase of *wasei eigo* (mixed forms of Japanese and English) are one issue I have used in class. This topic provides a possible route for students to discuss and explore their Japanese identity and its relation to global change. Intercultural awareness is important for students entering jobs and travelling abroad. Increased awareness in this area can enable them to identify cultural differences and interrelate in different cultural contexts more competently.

Studying English Loanwords

Any article which refers to a social issue in Japan can be chosen as a cause for debate and discussion amongst students. As one example, the following article on English loanwords was assigned as the basis for a teaching unit designed for 4 classes of a 2nd-year *Media English* class:

- Title: "Japan's public broadcaster sued over use of English words"
- Date: 27th June, 2013
- Writer: Justin McCurry (in Tokyo)
- Newspaper: The Guardian.com (world news)
- Overview: Japan's public broadcaster, NHK, was sued by an elderly Japanese viewer for "mental distress" caused by its excessive use of English loan words such as *kea* (care), *toraburu* (trouble) and *shisutemu* (system). The plaintiff, who sued NHK for 1.4 billion yen, urged the broadcaster to use language that is understandable for older viewers.

Although this article is a little dated, it's a useful resource because the spread of *wasei eigo* in Japanese continues to rise, its use on TV and in advertising is rife, students seem to be using it more and it's still controversial. Here's how I designed my teaching activities around this article.

Unit stages

1. Pre-reading introductory discussion

The unit starts with a brief introduction to the topic. Five questions are sufficient. This should take around 15-20 minutes. Open class feedback and comments can be made by students and the teacher. An example discussion question is:

- *What common Japanese words do you know that come from English?* Write 3-4 examples in both Japanese and English, then practice saying them to your partner to test their knowledge of the meaning of these words.

2. Vocabulary focus and presentation

In this stage, students choose 4 *wasei eigo* words and explain them in 3 steps. First, they contrast the form and meaning in Japanese and English, and explain any etymology. Second, they perform a short dialogue in Japanese, then English to contrast the meanings in context. Third, the students and teacher ask questions to clarify any confusion about the meaning. Because this is group-based, students can be assigned roles as researchers, teachers or actors. This allows shyer students to choose roles they feel more comfortable with in a group setting. This stage highlights linguistic differences and serves to show how English manifests itself differently in Japanese form, meaning and/or pronunciation.

3. Reading comprehension

This stage is relatively easy to implement. For students to process the article, 10 questions may suffice. Students scan and find the answers, then the teacher checks via open class feedback.

4. Key vocabulary test (optional)

Based on the article assigned, you may wish to choose 12-15 words from the text which could be revisited to check for detailed understanding. A simple matchup test, dictionary definition writing and/or sample sentence writing may suffice.

5. Article-based discussion questions

In this stage, students discuss two main issues which will relate to their end-of-unit reflection essay. First, they should discuss if they feel empathy towards the older gentlemen in the article who complained about *wasei eigo* and why or why not. Then, they can tackle the issue more directly by considering if there are too many *wasei eigo* words in Japanese and why or why not? Finally,

they can discuss how their feelings have changed after reading the article.

6. (Main reflection) End-of-unit graded essay

Students write an end-of-unit essay featuring their responses to the following two questions:

1) *What kind of influence does the English language have on the Japanese language?*

2) *Has your opinion about the use of wasei eigo words and phrases in Japanese changed since you read this article? Why or why not?*

This task gives students the opportunity to reflect on changes in the Japanese language, the difficulties these pose for different members of Japanese society and their feelings about the spread of Global English. From exposure to ideas from the text and their peers, they can choose to welcome or reject such opinions by explaining their thoughts in written form.

Conclusion

Because “learning another language is fundamentally an intercultural process that takes the learner beyond their familiar settings and communicative practices” (Baker 2015, pp. 174), we should endeavour to increase our students’ intercultural understanding more regularly on a global level. We can help students to do this by increasing their understanding of their identity on a national *and* global level through the discussion of topics which question traditional viewpoints in their culture. With this in mind, it is no longer suitable for teachers to identify with students at the national level *only*. Students’ identities are far more complex in a digital age and require careful analysis and management.

Baker (2015) argues that there is a multitude of contexts in which English as a lingua franca is used. He claims the link between language, culture and identity is often applied too simplistically when viewed only within national boundaries. The broad range of opinions in Japanese society allow us to create debate based on issues from the increasing internationalisation of Japan. Reflection upon Japan’s rich history and traditional culture in this modern age is essential so that students feel more comfortable with change and can more easily shape their multiple identities.

Practical implications

There are several skills that students can practice in this unit. They have an opportunity to share their concerns about cultural change through speaking fluency activities and reflective writing. They also practice extensive reading of authentic material. This contains a large amount of vocab-

ulary which may be challenging for second year university students. It also provides an opportunity to listen to opinions of other students from different backgrounds about issues they may never have had a chance to previously, particularly at high school. Other topics you may wish to consider, with sample questions, may include:

- * *Ms Japan* beauty queen – Should she be ethnically Japanese only?
- * Tokyo Olympic scandals – Are corruption and *amakudari* embedded in the Japanese government?
- * Dolphin hunting – Should this be banned?
- * Self-defence forces – Should Japanese forces be allowed to partake in military action overseas?
- * Maid cafes – Do these exploit young women?
- * Nuclear power - Should this be used for energy?
- * American military bases – Should the U.S. military still have bases in Japan?
- * Immigration and a declining birth rate – Should Japan increase immigration in order to counteract the steady decline in the Japanese population?

You may find articles connected to these issues in the *Japan Times*, *Japan Today* and other online English newspapers and websites. These touch on sensitive issues for Japan which can cause engaging discussions and debates. In a national and global sense, there are differing ways that students can give their opinions on such topics.

In summary, this unit provides reading, writing, speaking and listening practice in a meaningful cultural context. This allows students to question their cultural beliefs on a national and global level and thus shape their self-identity or multiple identities more clearly. In turn, this can contribute to a better understanding of global issues and may promote harmony in the classroom.

References

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