



## Research Study

# Forming a Personal Multicultural Ideology: The Case of a Japanese College Student

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**ABSTRACT.** Despite increasing multiculturalism in Japan, little has been done on the part of the majority culture (i.e., the Japanese) to encourage ideological changes. An overarching case study investigated the effects of a year-long course that was designed to promote intercultural awareness among Japanese college students at a university in Tokyo. Of the 44 case-study participants, the current study focuses on one particular female student, Akari (pseudonym), because she was one of the students who continued with the course for two consecutive semesters; she was active in class, readily sharing her opinions; and changes in her attitude were quite dramatic throughout the year. Eighteen reaction papers—written by Akari in Japanese immediately after each class—were collected over the course of the year. A follow-up interview corroborated how the course had impacted Akari. The study revealed that Akari had limited contact with non-Japanese people prior to entering university, but her curiosity towards non-native English varieties and non-native English speakers was cultivated before taking the course. The results show how the course allowed her to advance her understanding of multicultural issues and display shifts in attitude and understanding, leading to emergent, multicultural ideologies.

**RÉSUMÉ.** Cette étude examine les effets d'un cours d'un an dont le but était de promouvoir la sensibilisation interculturelle parmi les étudiants japonais d'une université à Tokyo. De tous les étudiants inscrits dans 44 cohortes différentes, cette étude se concentre sur une étudiante en particulier, Akari (pseudonyme), et cela, parce qu'Akari était parmi les seuls étudiants à poursuivre le cours pendant deux semestres consécutifs ; elle était active en classe, et elle était prête à partager volontairement ses pensées ; et la façon dont son attitude a changé pendant l'année était frappante. Après chaque cours, les chercheurs recueillaient des devoirs afin de connaître les réactions écrites en japonais tout le long de l'année (18 en nombre). De plus, ils ont interviewé Akari à la fin du cours afin d'examiner l'effet du cours d'une autre perspective. Akari avait peu de contact avec des non-Japonais avant d'entrer à l'université. Tout de même, les variétés de l'anglais non-natifs et les anglophones non-natifs ont suscité la curiosité d'Akari avant qu'elle ne suive le cours. Les résultats montrent comment le cours lui a permis d'augmenter sa compréhension des problèmes multiculturels et d'adopter des changements d'attitude et de compréhension, menant à une idéologie multiculturelle émergente.

**Keywords:** *Japanese, ideology, case study, college student, language policy.*



## **INTRODUCTION**

There are currently close to three million non-Japanese citizens residing in Japan (E-Stat, 2020). While Japan has long been described as a homogeneous nation, multiculturalism is becoming the norm (Sakamoto, 2012). In such a social climate, it is pressing for Japanese society to address this quickly emergent multiculturalism, embracing the cultural, racial, ethnic, and linguistic diversity it has to offer. This calls not only for an adaptive, flexible attitude on the part of minorities, but also for an open, affable, respectful, and collaborative stance on the part of the majority (Meiji Gakuin University, 2016). This exploratory case study documents the ideological transformation of a Japanese college student who comes to personally realize, 1) the importance and desirability of actualizing multiculturalism, and 2) the inherent difficulties and challenges of doing so in Japan.

This case study is part of a larger collaborative action research project (Burns, 1999) that investigated the effects of a year-long course that was designed to promote intercultural awareness at a private university in Tokyo. Of the 44-student cohort, this study focuses on one particular female senior student, Akari (pseudonym). She was chosen for three reasons: She was among those students who took the course for two consecutive semesters; she was active in class, readily sharing her opinions; and her reaction papers and interviews showed dramatic change in attitude towards multiculturalism throughout the school year.

This study is particularly relevant as Japan is very much behind North American and European countries' national efforts to promote multiculturalism and plurilingualism (Marshall & Moore, 2018; Piccardo, 2018). *Plurilingualism* focuses on one's linguistic repertoires and purposeful language use as an individual phenomenon, whereas *multilingualism* describes a social phenomenon of language contact and coexistence (Marshall & Moore, 2013, 2018). In this paper, we follow and document one particular Japanese student's journey in realizing multiculturalism and re-imagining and re-defining her own multicultural ideology.

Japan has recently introduced an amendment to its immigration laws that encourages newcomers to reside and work in Japan (Immigration Services Agency of Japan, 2020a). Prior to this change, the concept of foreign language was automatically equated with English, and English teaching in Japan was modeled after



Inner Circle varieties (Kachru, 1985). As a result, Japanese people understand English to be *the* foreign language, despite the fact that there are far more non-Japanese Asians living in Japan than there are native speakers of English.

While numerous studies have been conducted on accommodating newcomers, depicting them as needing assistance (e.g., McDonnell & Hill, 1993), little has been done to actualize ideological changes on the part of the majority (i.e., the Japanese) in living and working with those with different cultural/linguistic backgrounds. Members of minority groups are expected to adapt to the host community, but we question this monolithic topos. Unveiling the actualization process by describing the transformation of a Japanese student towards a self that embraces multicultural and plurilingual ideologies provides insight into how to best actualize a multicultural society in Japan.

Specifically, our research questions are as follows:

- 1) What factors triggered the student's interest in signing up for a course on multiculturalism?
- 2) What ideological assumptions did the student bring to the course?
- 3) To what extent and in what ways is a year-long college course on multiculturalism effective for a Japanese college student to reconceptualize notions pertaining to multiculturalism?
- 4) What pedagogical implications can be deduced from (3) above?

The core of the current study is an assessment of the impact of a Japanese college course on multiculturalism, in response to the third question.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

In this paper, *ideology* is defined as a discursive, emergent, dynamic phenomenon which arises from social interactions. What is widely disseminated and accepted becomes a societal norm, in turn shaping and dictating socially acceptable conduct, or what we often refer to as *common sense*. According to van Dijk (1998):

Ideologies may be very succinctly defined as the *basis of the social representations shared by members of a group*. This means that ideologies



allow people, as group members, to organise the multitude of social beliefs about what is the case, good or bad, right or wrong, *for them*, and to act accordingly. (p. 8, emphasis in the original)

Social norms fabricated by widely accepted ideologies, promulgated by the dominant discourse, determine the rights and wrongs of society. Needless to say, this decision does not benefit all equally. Holborow (2012) warns that the mainstream world view might be a one-sided representation constructed by a particular social group (p. 29); representations that are widely accepted by the dominant group exert control over emergent ideologies, thereby determining and reinforcing social norms and “common sense.” Clearly, the influence of ideologies is immense, and thus creation of a harmonious, just, and equitable society largely rests on them.

Gramsci (1971) conceptualized the relations of ideology and society in terms of *hegemony*, describing how dominant ideologies control the minds of citizens by creating a consensus regarding an imposed social order, even among the oppressed. This, in turn, contributes to a status quo that can be oblivious to, and discriminatory toward, minorities, and reflecting neoliberal ideals the world currently embraces. According to Harvey, neoliberalism suggests that “human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills” through the promotion of individual rights, free market, and free trade (2005, p. 2). In the field of Applied Linguistics, the teaching of both skills and language have come to be appreciated as a new commodity within a knowledge economy that can be exchanged with other resources (Holborow, 2012, p. 20). In Japan, given the enmeshment of English imperialism (e.g., Phillipson, 1992; 2010) within the Japanese social fabric, knowledge of English has become one such knowledge commodity (Seargeant, 2009)—a form of socio-economic capital (Flores, 2013). English is deemed to be a necessity in the face of globalization.

Extending this argument, Appadurai (1996) proposed five human phenomena, categorized into *scapes*, that characterize modern globalization: *ethnoscape* (human mobility); *mediascape* (dissemination of information and images); *technoscape* (new technological configurations); *financescape* (global capital dispositions); and *ideoscape* (proliferation of images and ideas) (p. 33; see also Pennycook, 2007, p. 24 for a similar discussion). In keeping with this ideology, our discursive practices are propagated and conflated with various scapes that can account for what



Fairclough (2006) calls *neoliberal globalism*, which includes new forms of communication (p. 163).

Sadly, it is commonplace to see how the current neoliberal world promotes what Cummins (2001) describes as *coercive relations of power*, in which individuals are eager to monopolize resources and power. In such a world, implacable greed and self-interest are pervasive, propagating vitriolic competition and neoliberal ideals, prolific market deregulations, rampant capitalism, and increased privatization of public sectors resulting in the haves exploiting the have-nots. Instead, Cummins calls for *collaborative relations of power* in which resources are continuously co-created for everyone's well-being. Only when this is actualized will a true multicultural society in which diversity is deemed desirable and important be realized. Yet, despite Cummins' (2001) admonitions, the world today remains subject to coercive relations of power. In order to challenge these and bring about a more desirable world, Cummins (2001) emphasizes how change can be instigated in classrooms, where the teacher can adopt, demonstrate and encourage collaborative, inclusive practices. Instead of designing and implementing materials that are remote from student experiences, Cummins suggests building on the skills and knowledge students bring to the classroom to address authentic and relevant topics that impact not only students but society at large.

Cummins' (2001) suggestions are meant for educators working with minority children; we have adapted them to the majority through a year-long course for Japanese students that addresses linguistic issues that pertain to minorities in Japan.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The course developed for this and other related studies was called *Modern World and Individuals*. It was offered once a week for 90 minutes and conducted in Japanese. The first semester lasted from April to July 2018, and the second semester from September 2018 to January 2019, with 28 classes total. The course began with a cohort of 44 male and female students. The course consisted of Japanese students, with the exception of one exchange student from China. Each semester, the course was taught by four instructors: the course coordinator (Meiji Gakuin University 2); a scholar specializing in bilingualism and bilingual education (Sakamoto); and two scholars whose expertise is in Japanese education and teacher training.



One senior university student, Akari (pseudonym), was selected for the current case study for three reasons: First, she was one of the students who continued with the course for the two consecutive semesters; second, she was active in class, readily sharing her opinions; and finally, she demonstrated dramatic changes in attitude through the year-long course. Akari is currently a graduate student at the same university where the course was offered; she was a senior when she took the course.

## **ANALYSIS AND RESULTS**

The data, in the form of reaction papers, were collected immediately after each class, amounting to 18 pages written by Akari in Japanese. No word limit was set, and she was encouraged to write freely whatever was deemed to be important for her. Her writings, because they were all hand-written, were entered into a word processor by the researchers for analysis. The authors coded and categorized the writings individually to identify recurring themes. They then shared their analyses and determined the categories that were commonly found relevant for this study. As for the interview, the first author compiled a ten-item interview guide, which was then revised by the second author, then checked again by the first author. A follow-up online interview lasting an hour and a half was conducted a year later in Japanese. The authors coded and categorized the interview data separately, then the analyses were exchanged, identifying commonalities and differences. A discussion between the authors followed to finalize the results. Their categories largely overlapped, but the first author had explored the multicultural ideologies Akari had shared in a holistic way, while the second author had focused more on the ideological *shifts* Akari had displayed. The analyses were then discussed and combined to formulate the final results, and the draft was shared with Akari for member checking (Heigham & Croker, 2009, p. 269), to make sure that our interpretations truthfully reflected her perceptions and beliefs.

The study revealed that Akari knew non-Japanese speakers who also were non-native English speakers. Furthermore, she was interested in non-native varieties of English prior to the course, and so was triggered to explore this interest in greater depth. Throughout the course, she managed to advance her interests and displayed important shifts in ideological attitudes and understanding, leading to an emergent multicultural and plurilingual identity.



Akari's initial interest in non-native speakers stemmed from her school visit to Singapore. Given that English is Singapore's second official language, she had assumed that exchanges in English would be problem-free. However, when she arrived, she quickly discovered that she was unable to understand what Singaporeans were saying.

**Excerpt 1** (bold = emphasized by Akari; English translation provided by the researchers)

高校の3年生、2年生の時に行った修学旅行の行き先がシンガポールで。で、「シンガポールは英語が通じる国です。中国の方もいっぱいいて、中国語とタミール語もやっています」というのを事前学習でやっています。で、ああ、英語が通じるなら、まあ英語圏行ったことがあるし、問題ないな、と思ってたんですけど。実際に行ってみて、現地の人と話そうとすると、多分こっちが言っていることは通じるんですけど、もう、何を言っているかが分からない、と思って（笑）それがすっごく衝撃で。なんで英語なのに通じないし分からないんだろうっていうのがすっごく引っかかかっていて、そこから興味を持っていった感じになります。

[We went to Singapore on a school trip when we were in grade 12, I mean, 11. Prior to our trip, we were told how “English is spoken in Singapore. There are many Chinese, and Chinese and Tamil are also used”. So I thought there won't be much of a problem if they speak English as I had been to an English-speaking country. However, when I actually got there, it seemed that they understood what I said but I could not understand them at all (laugh). This was **so** shocking. It **really** bothered me why English could not be understood, and I became interested from there on.]

Prior to her visit, Akari knew that English had many varieties—Singaporean English being one of them—but had assumed that these were only slight variations from American English, not such huge deviations. Her realization led her to explore the notion of World Englishes, and she chose to study at a university which had an expert on World Englishes. Here, she notes how her perception of English has changed greatly:



## **Excerpt 2**

今は、えーっと、結構変わったとっていて。その、アメリカ英語（2秒）が軸という訳ではないな、というのもまずありますし、その、それぞれの言語によって、なんか、発音しやすいしにくいとか、聞き取りやすい聞き取りにくい音っていうのもあると思うので。そこについてはちょっと。どの言語に、寄らせていくっていうことをしちゃうと、そこからやっぱあぶれちゃう人たちがいるから。うーん。アメリカ英語が軸っていう考えは今は全然ないですね。

[Now, um, I think I've changed quite a bit. Um, American English (2 sec. pause) first of all, is not the most important, um, ease to pronounce or understand is also a factor. That, I think about it a bit. If you were to choose a language as the standard, inadvertently those who don't speak the language will be categorized otherwise. Um. I totally do not see American English as the standard.]

Prior to taking the course, Akari had felt knowledge of English was a tool necessary for academic and social mobility:

## **Excerpt 3**

授業を受けた時から、その、受ける前までは、その、試験でやる言語。で、その、学校によっては英語以外のものを必修の外国語としてやってるところもあるんで、そういう言語を、やる、って。大学に入る時とか、仕事で使いたい時にそれぞれの言語をやるっていう様な認識がすごく強かったんですけど。

[Since I began taking the course, um, till I took the course, um, language for tests. And, um, depending on the school, some required a foreign language other than English, so I would study those. I strongly felt that you do those languages when entering university or wanting to use it for work.]

However, now, Akari appreciates English to a greater extent, not merely as one of many languages:

## **Excerpt 4**





必ずしも英語じゃなくてもいいとは思いますが、何かもう一個、人によってはもう一言語使えた方が、いい、人もいるかな、ぐらいいい感じで思っています。

[I don't think it needs to be English, but depending on the individual, there are some who might be better off knowing how to use another language.]

Akari further emphasizes how English- or Japanese-centeredness can give rise to social divisiveness. In fact, Akari often used the metaphor of a line to depict the separation between majority and minority:

#### **Excerpt 5**

英語とか他の言語、日本にいるからいらない、っていう認識を持ってると、やっぱり、その、最初の方に言った線引きみたいなのがくっきりしてきてしまう。

[If you have this understanding that English and other languages are not necessary because you are in Japan, it draws a line in dividing people, as I've mentioned earlier.]

Another factor that has affected Akari's multilingual/multicultural conceptualization is her older brother, who is a professional Japanese language instructor. He has adamantly explained to her how it is difficult to categorize people based on such criteria as nationality or ethnicity. According to him, aggregating non-Japanese speakers into one "non-Japanese" category does not realistically describe who they are.

#### **Excerpt 6**

あかり：兄が日本語教師を始めた頃から、その、外国人という括りにすごい敏感になったような気がして、

R2：お兄さんが？

あかり：はい、で、なんかその、私の家族が兄に対して、その、なんか、仕事はどう、みたいな感じで話を聞く時に、外国人みたいな話が出ると、その、外国人というのは、なんか、その、国籍がそうなのか、日本で生まれ育ってる人がどうなのか、みたいな、



そういう、その、括りがざっくりし過ぎているから、もうちょっと細かく、なんでしょう、細かい認識をもった上で、話したいみたいな感じが、あって、で、その、授業を受けていたので、なんとなくそういうのがちょっと、なんだろう、兄の言っていることがわかるようになったかなっていうのは思います。

[Akari: I think I've become very sensitive when people define foreigners as one lump ever since my brother began working as a Japanese instructor.

Researcher 2: Your brother?

Akari: Yes. And, um, my family would ask my brother, like, how's work, like that and the topic of foreigners came up, um, he seemed, foreigners were described based on nationality or whether the person was born and raised in Japan, so such a label was too simplistic, so he wished a more refined, how should I say, he wanted to discuss this with a more refined understanding, and because I had begun to take the course, I think I managed to appreciate what he was saying.]

In addition to her experience in the course, Akari came to appreciate her brother's sensitivity to labels, something she had only vaguely thought about before her conversations with him.

When asked what she remembers most about the course, she noted her increased understanding of bi- and multilinguals. She said it had never occurred to her that bilinguals could lose their first language (L1) upon learning the second (L2). Her assumption was that people just added languages as they learned them:

### **Excerpt 7**

新しく知った知識で印象に残っているものとしては、その、バイリンガルについてのもところで、バイリンガルの方が、あの、人によって、例えば、話すのは得意だけど、英語の、日本の学校で英語のテストでは点数が取れないっていうことがあること自体は知っていたんですけど、それが、すごい、細かく分類分けされていて、で、中でも、例えば、バイリンガルなんだけど、第2言語とされるものをどんどんやっていくうちに第1言語が失われていくみたいなのがあるっていうのを全然その時知らなかったのも、それが結構、印象に残っています。



[As for something new that I remember, um, it's about bilinguals, that, I knew that, depending on the individual, a bilingual might be good at speaking, but cannot do well on English tests in Japanese schools, but that there are many types of bilinguals, that there are bilinguals who eventually lose their L1 as they continue to learn L2, was something I did not know at all, so that has left an impression.]

Refining her understanding of bilingualism was important for Akari, and left a lasting impression of the complexities and subtleties involved in being bilingual. Indeed, her struggles in defining bilingualism is also evident in her reaction paper:

### **Excerpt 8**

5月10日

マイノリティのレベルが多様である際の一斉教授として行う&評価するというのはやはり難しい。"Bilingual"と一口に言っても、発音のうまさまで入れたものなのか、読み書きさえ完璧であればバイリンガルなのか...?と言った線引きは難しい

[May 10

Given the variation among minorities<sup>i</sup> levels, it would be difficult to teach and assess them altogether. When one uses the term "bilingual," it is difficult to categorize an individual... do we take into consideration the pronunciation, or rather is one a bilingual if they have perfect literacy skills?]

In line with her sensitivity towards a minority's idiosyncratic needs, individualizing instruction has emerged as something Akari now strongly believes in:

### **Excerpt 9**

10月11日

日本政府の提示するカリキュラム自体を変更することはすぐにできる解決法（改革法）ではないが、（新カリキュラムが）教員による生徒一人一人への意識変化を生む...現カリキュラムに沿った範囲の中で興味、関心の持てる様な教育を提供

[October 11



I don't think it is a feasible solution (or reform plan) to change the curriculum proposed by the Japanese government right away, ([the government] expecting the new curriculum) to help teachers heighten each student's awareness... providing interesting and relevant education within the current curriculum]

She echoed this sentiment that emphasizes individualized instruction not just in her reaction papers but in the interview as well, but this time emphasizing a focus on languages beyond just English:

### **Excerpt 10**

英語をやっぱり教えることがメインになっていて、その後ろ側。文化だとか。文化も一応扱ってはいるんですけど、その、世界中では、英語以外の言語もあるし、英語以外の言語を使っている人もたくさんいるし、っていう。なんか、その、言葉としても、もっと目を、目？視野を広げる？様な機会が与えられるカリキュラムはあった方が良  
いかな、と  
思  
っ  
て。

[Teaching English has been the main focus but behind those things... like culture. Culture is being taken up but, um, there are other languages besides English and many people are using languages other than English. Um, I think there should be a curriculum that provides many opportunities that focuses? Widens our perspective? about languages.]

For Akari, the current English-focused curriculum and instruction in Japan are limiting opportunities to learn about other languages and cultures.

Lastly, Akari concentrates on her views towards the mass media in proliferating certain cultural/linguistic ideologies:

### **Excerpt 11**

10月18日

NHK で外国人の増加を取り上げられていた際、「無関心ではいられても無関係では  
い  
ら  
れ  
な  
い」という言葉があったが、その現状を広める効果的な媒体がメディアや教育...



テレビで「外国人問題」というニュースやプログラムがあっても視聴する人は非常に限られてしまうので、バラエティ番組で面白おかしく発信する番組が増えているのもここからきているのかもしれない。これについても偏った意見を持たせてしまう危険があるので、やはり非常に難しい問題である。

[October 18

When NHK<sup>ii</sup> took issue with the increase of foreigners, they used the expression “one might be indifferent, but one cannot remain unrelated,” but the medium that propagates the current situation is the mass media and education.... Only a handful actually watch the news and TV programs that take up “foreigner issues,” so maybe that is why variety shows portray them in silly ways. There is a danger of inciting biased opinions in people, so it is a very grave issue.]

In fact, during the interview, Akari noted:

### **Excerpt 12**

ニュースで見ているだけだと、なんか、どこかよその問題、みたいなものがあるのかもしれないんですけど、なんか、もっと身近な場所からそういうことを、知る?...機会があれば、もっと認識が変わるのかな、と、うーん、そういう機会が足りてない。

[When watching the news, it comes across as issues unrelated to us but learning about it from our surroundings...? If we have a chance, I feel that our awareness might change, but, um, such chances are rare.]

Indifference towards minorities is a serious concern for Akari. However, it remains a non-issue for many Japanese, as the mass media continues to depict non-Japanese as an egregious, wayward, audacious group of individuals. One example that shows Japan's attitude is its recent promulgation of a Hate Speech Act in 2016 in response to the UN's call to eliminate discrimination. While the act was meant to reduce hate, the law still does not ban hate speech outright and there is no penalty for committing it.



Personally, Akari has always tried to accommodate non-Japanese speakers. Now, however—perhaps because of having taken the course—her approach is much more informed:

### **Excerpt 13**

「やさしい日本語」はすごい印象に残っていて、それについては、その一、授業で話を聞いていくうちに、意外と自分でも実践していたことだったかなってというのは思ったんですけど、「やさしい日本語」っていう名前で、のがあるっていうのは知らなくて、で、その、なんだろう、そういう考え方があって、で、具体的にどういう、日本語の使い方をすれば良いのかっていうのを授業で聞き、たことをきっかけにして、その、アルバイト先とかで、外国の方で、なんだろう、日本語が得意ではなさそうなんだけど日本語で訊いてきてくれるお客様とかに対しては日本語で答えたいなっていうのを思っていたので、そういう時に、どういう伝え方をすれば一番わかりやすいかなっていうのを、その、授業でやったことを元にして実践は、していて、そこは結構変わったかなと思います。

[Using “Easy Japanese”<sup>iiii</sup> has left an impression and as to that, as I listened to the lecture in class, I thought that I was already practicing it unconsciously but did not know that it had a term, “Easy Japanese,” so having learned its concept and exactly how to use it, at my workplace, those who might not have been fluent but asked questions in Japanese, I always wanted to reply in Japanese, so I now keep in mind how to effectively communicate with them based on what I learned in class, and this is the point; I think I’ve changed quite a bit.]

Akari noted that previously she would resort to hand gestures to communicate. Currently, however, she is more conscious of modifying her language by keeping sentences simple, avoiding complicated expressions, and emphasizing her intonation when asking questions. Furthermore, she noted how her workplace colleagues have expressed curiosity about her dealings with foreigners, and have indicated that they too wish to adopt her approach. Overall, establishing connections and learning about each other by attending to language use are important for Akari.



## DISCUSSION

According to Akari, the mediascape promulgated by the mass media and ideoscape (Appadurai, 1996) via education is perpetuating negative, simplistic, monolithic ideologies in conceptualizing minorities in Japan. Akari questions these stereotypes, and has managed to cultivate a more nuanced and complex outlook on foreigners in Japan. The two main factors she mentioned triggered her change were the course called *The Modern World and the Individual* taken in 2018–2019 and her brother, who has continuously shared with her his insights about non-Japanese people. Her ideological formation process is shown in Figure 1 below.

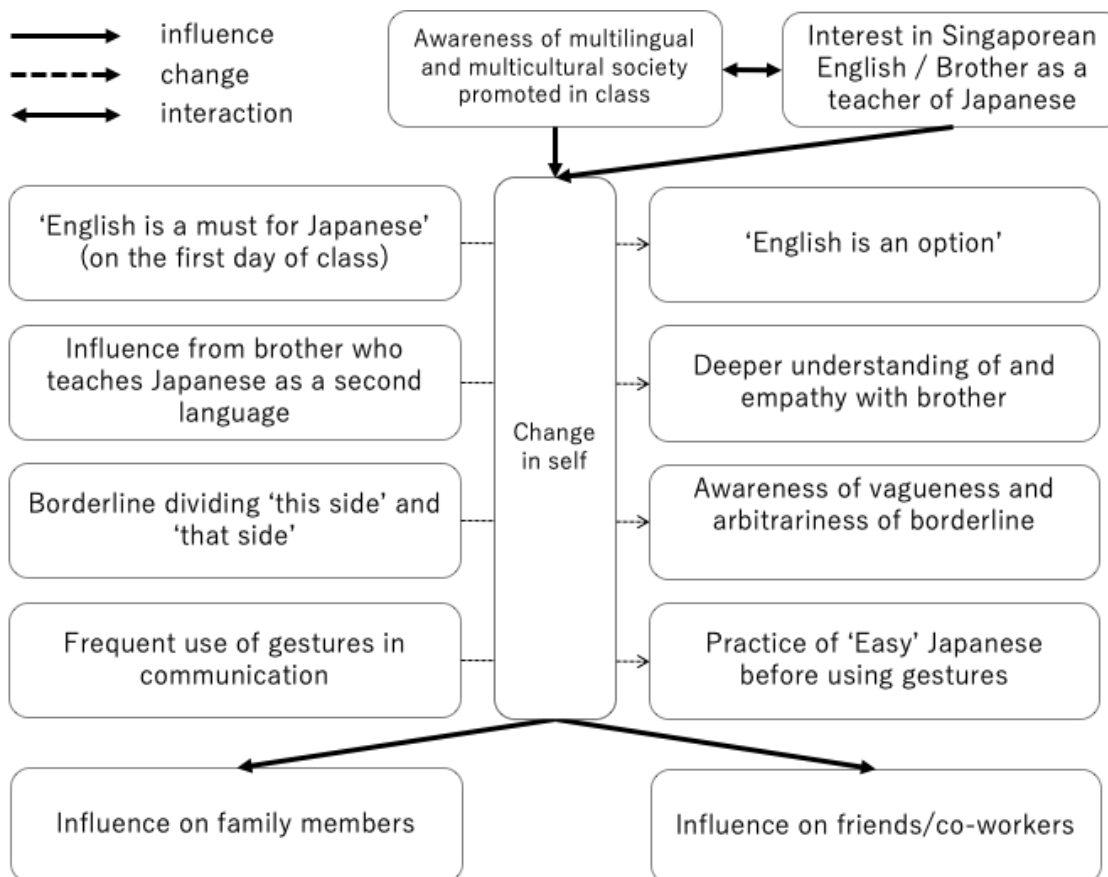


Figure 1. Akari's ideological formation process



According to Akari, one of the ways to challenge negative stereotypes is via education. She feels that instigating curriculum change may not be easy, but that an instructor's attitude can be influential in raising students' cultural and linguistic awareness (e.g., Cummins, 2001).

It is widely thought that a neoliberal agenda has led to a concentrated effort to cultivate English proficiency, especially in the American English variety, among the Japanese (Kubota, 2019; Seargeant, 2009), but Akari questions this, as she has come to realize the prevalence of non-native English speakers around the world. The most prominent ethnic groups in Japan are non-Japanese Asians, the most numerous being Chinese (E-Stat, 2020). Akari's encounter with Singaporean English in Singapore had triggered her interest in exploring World Englishes, and the course provided a forum to further her interests. Realizing how the Outer and Expanding Circles (Kachru, 1985) enjoy their own English varieties, she has come to criticize adherence to linguistic conventions imposed by the Inner Circle. Her realization is in line with Japan's evolving language policy that now embraces plurilingualism instead of native speaker norms (MEXT, 2018).

Finally, Akari's feedback provides several important insights in addressing difficulties in establishing communication and in turn comprehending minority language speakers. Our understanding tends to be based on our past experiences only with those with similar linguistic and cultural backgrounds, and this could easily lead to misleading assumptions, what Holborow (2012) refers to as "one-sided representation" (p. 29). In Akari's case, American English was the only form of the English language with which she was familiar. This changed with her introduction to Singaporean English. Akari was initially taken aback by Singaporean English; however, she came to know that there exist many viable forms of World Englishes. Likewise, Akari came to appreciate non-English speakers and to use creative means (e.g., using "Easy Japanese") to communicate with them. By modelling how we can associate with others, Akari is affecting the ideoscape (Appadurai, 1996) prevalent among her colleagues, introducing a new perspective, and helping to disseminate a new ideology (van Dijk, 1998) in interacting with those from other ethnolinguistic backgrounds. News and social media (i.e., mediascape) are also deemed to be an important source of information, yet the number of those interested in learning more about the issue is limited, and a racially biased and flawed portrayal of non-Japanese is propagated by the media.





## **CONCLUSION**

Japan has now close to three million non-Japanese citizens residing in Japan (E-Stat, 2020). Although they amount to just over 2% of the total population, the number has been steadily increasing over the years (Immigration Services Agency of Japan, 2020b). Given that Japan is amongst the nations with the most rapidly aging populations, a greater influx of migrants is expected in the future. Therefore, the ratio of non-Japanese to Japanese is expected to increase.

We consider this demographic trend to be an opportunity towards the goal of increasing awareness of multiculturalism in Japan. As Akari pointed out pertinently in her interview, to promote a multicultural society in which the majority and the minority live together harmoniously, the former has to make ardent efforts to connect with the latter, not the other way round. It seems crucial that the majority adopt a positive attitude towards collaborative power relations (Cummins, 2001) as a response to the power imbalance that exists between the majority and minority groups in Japan.

Indeed, Akari herself is a pro-active agent of the majority who contributes to the actualization of multiculturalism in Japan by making positive overtures towards members of minority groups. Accordingly, what she acquired in the class further promoted her intercultural awareness. This heightened awareness has transformed her into someone who embraces multicultural and plurilingual ideologies. It should be also noted that this transformation has led to people in her entourage becoming aware of the importance of actualizing multiculturalism in Japan (Figure 1), thereby affecting the ideoscape (Appadurai, 1996). There might be a possibility that these individuals in turn play the role of agent as Akari has done. In this way multicultural and plurilingual ideologies could be disseminated among the majority.

Certainly, Akari had a unique background before taking the course: She had a great interest in Singaporean English and so knew, though unconsciously, about World Englishes; she also had a brother who worked as a Japanese as a second language instructor. Therefore, we cannot assert that taking the course resulted in Akari's ideological transformation. However, our analysis found evidence of ongoing transformation in her reaction papers and interview, indicating that at a very minimum the course influenced her multicultural ideologies in a desirable way and



contributed to her transformation. This result reassures us that, although education alone may not be able to change the mediascape directly, it can exert an influence on the ideoscape by promoting intercultural awareness, insofar as ideological transformation may be actualized on the part of the majority. Further research in Japan, as well as other parts of the world where various people from different ethnolinguistic backgrounds are represented, would allow us to deepen and extend our understanding of the findings from this exploratory single-case study on addressing and heightening multicultural awareness, in turn bringing that awareness to bear on language policy in a way that is conducive to realizing a plurilingual nation.

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<sup>i</sup> Non-Japanese people

<sup>ii</sup> Nippon Hoso Kai, or The Broadcasting Corporation of Japan, which is a government-funded public broadcaster in Japan.

<sup>iii</sup> A simplified Japanese vernacular devoid of difficult words and syntax.