Developing a Training Program for
International Language Management Specialists:
Japanese Business in Context

Junko Saruhashi, Aoyama Gakuin University

Many coping strategies for dealing with sociolinguistic environment change in Japanese business settings are undocumented and are embedded in the individuals' experiences and memories. Scholars and researchers would be able to contribute to this field by documenting both successful and unsuccessful cases, integrating these cases with existent theories from intercultural communication studies, sociolinguistics and management studies, and by creating new frameworks which help to explain and to anticipate the reality of interaction between corporations and their surrounding environments. One of the most important tasks is compiling desirable competencies required for international language management specialists as the foundation of a training course design for undergraduate and postgraduate level. The author discusses these competencies as well as considering relevant teaching approaches with an example of international language management practice.

There is a growing awareness of the multilingual and the multicultural environment in Japan. There has been a myth-like belief that Japan is a monolingual country, even though sociolinguists have claimed repeatedly that this idea was far from the linguistic reality. Therefore, this current tendency of rising awareness can be regarded as a shift of perception of Japanese people as global citizens toward language and society. How to deal with linguistic diversity has become a common issue of governments, corporations, and institutions around the world.

Due to a century-long reluctance of Japanese society to appreciate the multilingual reality, people tend to think there is no past experience of linguistic diversity management to refer to, in order to cope with the current complex demand of language management today. There are many studies aimed at introducing Japanese readers to the management strategies from multilingual countries such as Canada, Australia, Singapore, and the European Union. However, a series of focused interviews with coordinators of corporate in-house training and business people who had dealt with global business management issues apparently shows that there have been endeavors to manage linguistic and cultural diversities in Japan as well (Honna, Saruhashi, Miyake, & Takeshita, 2006). Much of the various endeavors were pursued as ad-hoc trials, therefore knowledge and insights from these interactions were accumulated into memories and narratives of individuals (Saruhashi, 2008b). Hence, there seemed much room to provide frameworks, categories, and criteria to reconstruct pieces of experiences into compartmentalized knowledge to review, share, and discuss for proactive and reactive strategies in the future.

People within the dynamism of the sociolinguistic reality are encountering contradictions, ambiguity, and conflicting perspectives. One of the tasks of sociolinguists is to

provide learning materials and learning opportunities through which learners can acquire new knowledge in relation to their previous knowledge and lived experiences. Therefore, in content and process, philosophies and ideas can be referred to and applied from a learning-centered perspective, lifelong learning, and transformative learning (Garson, 2009; Grunert O'Brien, Millis, & Cohen, 2008; Mezirow, 1991).

The Dawn of International Language Management (ILM) Education in Japan

Discussing whether linguistic diversity would be problematic or a resource is no longer meaningful. Our major concern has to be to consider how to make linguistic diversity effective, appreciated, and worthwhile. The curriculum of International Language Management (ILM) is designed to foster strategic perspectives and skills, instead of immediately requiring ad-hoc and unplanned reactions that were common in the past.

The core idea of ILM is analyzing sociolinguistic environments or global-linguistic environments holistically, and skillfully responding to overt and latent linguistic needs. The term *environment* has been referred to and quoted metaphorically in sociolinguistic studies in many ways. For example, Einar Haugen is one of the first scholars who used the term environment in his sociolinguistic studies (Haugen, 1968). He referred to environment as the society that utilizes a language. That means environment includes all non-linguistic social factors. Here, in our ILM project, sociolinguistic environment is defined as an open-ended sphere, in which interaction constantly emerges between languages, linguistic varieties, speakers, language communities, values and attitudes toward languages, communication mediums, and language responses. That is to say, the definition here emphasizes the relations between languages and speech communities. Saruhashi and Takeshita (2008) point out 10 current linguistic issues in Japan, which are the components of sociolinguistic environment as follows: (1) maintenance and revitalization of the Ainu language, (2) empowerment policies for the Japanese Sign Language, (3) elaboration of the Japanese language system, (4) promotion of Japanese language learning, (5) reorientation of English as an international language, (6) reinforcement of multilingual services, (7) support for inherited ethnic languages of immigrants, (8) establishment of mutual language learning alliances, (9) innovation and integration of linguistic technologies, and (10) review of holistic language policies. Conceptually, the global-linguistic environment is a part of sociolinguistic environment from the scope of a corporation or an organization, which is increasingly changing due to globalization (Figure 1). Honna (2008) suggests that there are four major linguistic areas that Japanese companies are expected to take into account due to globalization: (1) English as an international language; (2) plain Japanese; (3) languages of consumers, investors, and business partners other than English; and (4) Japanese as a working language.
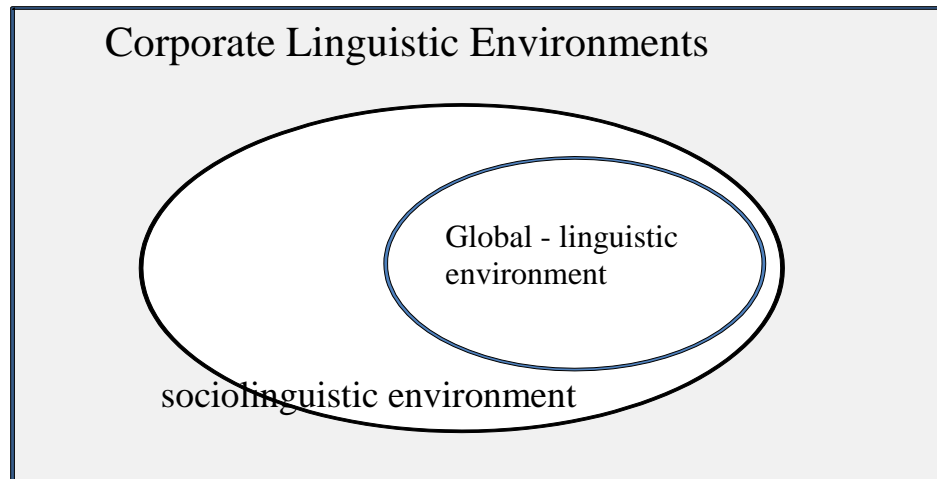
Figure 1. Corporate linguistic environments

From the current view point of postmodernism, the diversified sociolinguistic environment is not only the matter of phenomena, but the people who enjoy and pursue different linguistic goals and values toward linguistic varieties. One of the main components of global-linguistic environment, for example, the idea of *World Englishes*, represents the appreciation and respect of differences. At the same time, there will be also growing possibilities of conflicts and misunderstandings concerning those differences (Saruhashi, 2008a). Some find a different way of speaking English as human creativity but others might see the same expression as impolite, rude, or a deviation. Therefore, various kinds of organizations are now feeling a need for diversity management more strongly and widely than ever before. The diversity management for linguistic and cultural differences is the foundation of it.

The modified version of ILM strategic procedure from precedent studies, such as Reeves and Wright (1996), Koster (2004), Honna (2008), and Saruhashi (2008b), can be described in seven steps as follows:

1. Setting up a language management team
2. Analyzing global linguistic environment
3. Analyzing linguistic needs
4. Assessing linguistic resources
5. Proposing new/modified linguistic response projects
6. Monitoring linguistic response projects
7. Evaluating international language management benefits and problems

As one can see from this step-by-step procedure, the people in charge of ILM need to analyze, assess, propose, monitor, and evaluate language- and communication-related

agendas. The sociolinguistic and global-linguistic environment is so dynamic that successful ILM hinges on trained specialists and their effective teamwork. Thus, developing a well-designed curriculum with appropriate case studies, practical methods, and guidelines are needed.

Traits of Societal Language Problems

In addition to the above discussion, because of the traits of societal language problems both in interpersonal communication and in organizational communication, there are solid demands for ILM endeavors and trained specialists for them.

There are four aspects from interpersonal communication studies, which support the significance of ILM and the specialist (Honna & Saruhashi, in press). First, no one can avoid having language problems. As Herbert Blumer (1969) suggested in his idea of *symbolic interactionism*, "Human interaction is mediated by the use of symbols, by interpretation, or by ascertaining the meaning of one another's actions" (p. 79). In addition to human actions, any verbal and nonverbal signs and objectives would be a symbol. That means even silence or ignoring can be interpreted as a powerful message. An un-updated website can be interpreted as, "The person is not interested in online business anymore," "The person is very busy," or even, "I cannot trust this person." Therefore, we cannot totally escape language problems.

Second, people tend to overlook language problems by being flexible and adapting to unfamiliar communication styles. The origin of communication accommodation theory (CAT) can trace back to the works of Giles and his associates (e.g., Giles & Wiemann, 1987; Soliz & Giles, 2009). CAT explains that people switch codes creatively and appropriately to adjust themselves according to the situation. Sometimes people would not even be aware that the switching is occurring. Stylistic accommodation among inner members is encouraged, especially when a person desires to "articulate a positive self-image" (Soliz & Giles, 2009, p. 77). This communication behavior suggests human flexibility and creativity; however, it might also make outsiders feel, or actually become, excluded. This kind of miscommunication increases in multilingual settings. When people are emotionally involved with each other, people tend to forget the existence of others who do not understand the language, and might lose important potential customers unwillingly.

Third, even when language and its contents are fully shared, language-related aspects, such as attitude, behavior, or value toward languages and communication might cause conflicts. Especially when there was a clear distinction of social advantage or disadvantage among linguistic communities, people would be more sensitive to how their languages were treated (Fishman, 1989). Some may think sharing a lingua franca is enough and others might think mutual language learning represents mutual respect. Language is a tool of communication in a manner, but it also deeply relates to personal and social identity. Therefore, searching for an agreement on how to treat languages is becoming a more important issue not only in a country or a state but also in an organization or a community group. "How to deal with a linguistic environment that is diverse and complex" has become one of the major management issues for all kinds of organizations (Tietze, 2008, p. 53).

Fourth, language problems arise in the process of interaction. As it was mentioned in the first point, messages which people generate intentionally or unintentionally cannot avoid being interpreted; there is no definite ending point in communication. Therefore, even if a certain aspect was regarded as a problem or an opportunity, it can never cease being in the middle of fluid interaction. It can get worse or better. These factors are why ILM needs professionals to ensure the objectivity in analysis and evaluation.
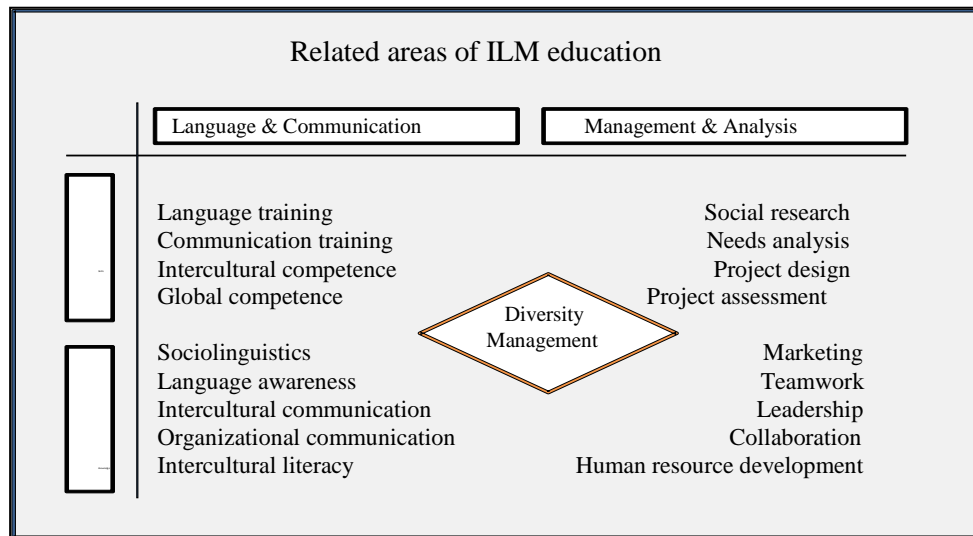
Since the studies in interpersonal communication provide basic understanding of, and insight into, other areas of communication studies, and because linguistic and communication problems in interpersonal communication are complex enough, there are limited studies regarding language and communication problems at the corporate level. All these four traits we discussed in interpersonal communication are applicable to organizational communication. In particular, the fourth trait, the process in which linguistic problems and opportunities emerge, has to be examined carefully in order to grasp multiple impacts.

Moreover, corporations need to promote linguistic diversity within the organization. Japanese companies used to tend to pursue homogeneous and general second language ability; for example, several companies put up the same mission statement sayings: "All employees have to have TOEIC score of 600 or more." However, to cope with the dynamism of a sociolinguistic environment, a corporation needs to create a workplace culture in which people with different language abilities can work together effectively. To pursue this, collaborative teamwork has to be cultivated, which will be one of the major tasks for an ILM project.

To realize steady data collection and analysis of a complex and dynamic sociolinguistic environment, an ILM team needs to choose one survey tool, or a set of them, from the variety of research methods and assessment tools. Therefore, ILM team members are expected to be knowledgeable about, and skillful with, (a) a variety of research methods, (b) the validity of research methods according to the type of research questions and hypothesis, (c) designing a research plan, and (d) implementing a research plan. In addition, the reflection on epistemological inquiry has been broadening the choices of research methods. People who deal with ILM also need to keep access to these discussions.

Findings from sociology and intercultural communication suggest that there is a wide range of possible strategies to manage cultural differences such as assimilation, acculturation, integration, and affirmative action. Which path to take heavily depends on the power relationship between the two contacting individuals or communities. Moreover, from focused interviews, it was reported that even when people are aware of linguistic problems, they hesitate to make remarks about them when they have relatively weak power. Therefore, mediation by a trained third person will be of great use for a successful ILM project.

In short, organizational language management has become increasingly important in globalizing society. Therefore, organizations need to develop a concrete division which deals with meditative functions regarding language, communication, and relationship related issues.

Related areas of ILM education

| Language & Communication | Management & Analysis |

Language training
Communication training
Intercultural competence
Global competence

Social research
Needs analysis
Project design
Project assessment

Diversity Management

Sociolinguistics
Language awareness
Intercultural communication
Organizational communication
Intercultural literacy

Marketing
Teamwork
Leadership
Collaboration
Human resource development

Figure 2. Related areas of ILM education

Approaches to Gain International Language Management **S**kills

To accomplish the strategic procedure of ILM, practitioners need to be specialists in two different areas. One is about language, culture, and communication, and the other is about research methods, policy evaluation tools, project design, and monitoring tactics. In both areas, intellectual knowledge and practical skills have to be developed. The descriptors of ILM competencies cover various fields as Figure 2 shows. It might keep expanding, but the core idea which connects disciplines is diversity management. The common concern to cope with global-linguistic environment is how to foster a mind to manage various aspects of diversity.

People can gain knowledge and learn about rules and theories by attending lectures and reading books. The biggest concern is how to actually respond to sociolinguistic needs. Knowledge is somehow fixed relatively, but actual global linguistic environments are fluid with continual interaction. So there is a very important question of how we can practically convert static knowledge and theories into actual actions. The true challenge is how to integrate pedagogical tools such as worksheets, simulations, and internships, and develop actual learning courses.

According to Peter Backhaus's enormous research on signs and billboards with more than two languages in urban Tokyo areas, 71% out of 2,444 items were for commercial purposes. More than 90% of them included English words or phrases, however two-thirds of them were assumed to be written for image-building or concept-evoking and sometimes totally meaningless as information (Backhaus, 2007). These findings suggest that there will be huge possibilities to utilize not only billboards but any kind of advertisements or product

Exercise 1: Choose one product or a service your company produces or distributes, and fill in the sheet to discover what the package or the brochure tells or does not tell to the non-Japanese speaking customers. Then design a proposal of package(s) in order to access to the potential customers.

<u>Work Sheet</u>   Name:

Name of Product: Date:

MFR:

Place of Production:
                                    Photo
Price:

Distribution (Place):

Information for Japanese speakers	Information for non-Japanese speakers	Potential consumers	Necessary/ Preferable information for the potential customers
• Verbal messages	• Verbal messages	• Attributes (foreign residents / tourists)	• Verbal message
• Nonverbal messages	• Images	• Age, Sex	• Nonverbal message
• Cultural assumptions	• Icons	• Language	
		• Knowledge about Japanese culture	

Figure 3. A sample of ILM exercise worksheets (template)

packages that are more English-speaker-friendly. To consider this possibility concretely, an exercise was created as Figure 3 shows.

ILM Exercise: An Example

As the author mentioned in the second section of this paper, the first step of ILM is setting up a language management team in which each team member can bring different perspectives and ideas. However, we can start as an individual practice rather than waiting for others to join you.

Prior to the second step, which is analyzing a global linguistic environment, ILM trainees need to decide in which area and to what extent and depth their ILM practice will involve. If the trainees were business people who already had a concrete issue to implement ILM, then the answers to these questions might be obvious. If the trainees were less experienced students, it might be a good idea to choose an issue from either their school district or the

community they live in or they are from. When the ILM trainees choose one particular location and situation, then they should start analyzing the linguistic environment.

One of the basic data sets which help to analyze a linguistic environment in Japan is demographic data. Needless to say, it is preferable to refer to sociolinguistic data to comprehend the linguistic environment. However, there has been no linguistic census in Japan for decades and all we can do is to predict social linguistic features from knowing the nationality of residents. Learners can easily access and download the statistical data of the nationality of foreign residents from the official website of municipal or prefectural government. It might not be able to lead to an accurate analysis; however, it will provide meaningful learning opportunities for trainees to learn how different language speakers are treated in the society and why we need to raise more awareness of a linguistic minority's need and to start data gathering concerning languages.

The third step is analyzing linguistic needs. This is a good opportunity for postgraduate and undergraduate students to learn the method of empirical quantitative and qualitative studies such as questionnaires, interviews, and observations. In addition to the empirical studies, there are various voices related to linguistic needs of the target community. We can hear and read them in the mass media. If one is aware of linguistic issues, then it may be no exaggeration to say that no day goes by without a newspaper article related to multilingual issues, innovations, and possibilities of improvement these days. The shortage of trained court interpreters is highlighted one day in the news and in the next, a moving story of a foreign student who manages to overcome linguistic barriers in a critical incident.

This stage can provide a learning opportunity for data gathering based on an actual access to the target community. In addition, this stage can contribute to acquiring ILM attitude or ILM mind; that is to say, being sensitive to cues connected to linguistic issues and linguistic possibilities. It is possible to find lots of ILM issues from just having a chat with a nonnative speaker of Japanese who lives in Japan and it might not be so difficult to find informants who wish to share their linguistic awareness as a foreign resident, as my own experience shows. One day, I was chatting with a friend of mine who has lived in Japan for 25 years. I asked him whether there was any product in a glossary store which is still confusing for him to understand all the product information that is clear to Japanese people and he mentioned a variety of products which seemed to overlook people who don't read Japanese. One of the items was milk, which I will talk about further.

In Japan, with the exception of processed milk products, drinking milk has a domestic self-sufficient ratio of almost 100%. There are several major nation-wide dairy companies which have a major share of the market. In addition, middle- or small-sized farms and companies are also supplying wide varieties of differentiated products. Some packages focus on nutrition, and others emphasize freshness, technology of pasteurization, seasonal features, or organic dairy system. Some farms have been succeeding in branding with tied-in travel through which families can enjoy nature and cattle in open pastures. Looking at the milk product packages, most of them are only written in Japanese (Figure 4). But still non-Japanese readers may be able to recognize that some of these are milk packs by the pictures on them.

Figure 4. A sample of ILM exercise products: milk packages.

Then there are some products which say milk in English on them. However, most of the products do not tell how they are qualitatively different to non-Japanese readers. ILM training is not suggesting word-by-word translation; however, if the producers start to think about non-Japanese speaking/reading consumers and if they are willing to use foreign languages such as English for image-creation, then alternative product designs will be able to be proposed. Especially quality focused products and tourism tied-in products might have much opportunity to appeal to the non-Japanese speaking market since there is a growing number of tourists from abroad.

			Name: YAMADA Hanako

Work Sheet 001
Date: 08/12/2009

Name of product: Oishii Gyunyu (Tasty Milk)

MFR: Meiji Dairies Corporation

Place of Production: Tochigi, Japan

Price: 285yen (1000ml)

Distribution: supermarkets, CVS

Information for Japanese readers	Information for non-Japanese readers	Potential consumers	Necessary information for potential consumers
Concept of product	None	Mothers of small babies	Necessary
Expiry date	Unclear		Highly necessary
Component	None		Preferable
Nutrients	None		Necessary
Preservation method	None		Necessary
Process of production	None		Not very necessary
Seasonal changes of fat	None		Not very necessary
Customer service center	Unclear		Preferable

Figure 5. A sample of ILM exercise worksheets (milk package)

Figure 5 shows a consideration of an alternative package of milk when we focus on mothers of small babies as potential consumers. Mothers of infants might care about nutrients and the safety of the product. Inserting information other than Japanese means the producer has to give up some space. Therefore, the order of priority has to be carefully examined. At the same time, we can also recognize that there is room to appeal to both traditional and potential consumers with a little ingenuity.

For example, this milk package surely shows the expiration date, but it might be unclear to non-Japanese readers as it says "賞味期限（開封前）10.04.11." No matter. Regardless of whether there is a blank space or not, the English translation, "Use before 10.04.11," should be added. And if there is a possibility to add an English word or a phrase or an icon to show the major concept of the product, that would help to appeal to the potential consumers. Then it is natural to come up with several alternatives. There is not only one right answer, but it will vary depending on target consumer, product features, and corporate identity. The main purpose of ILM training is to make a habit of considering several linguistic possibilities according to the dynamic interaction of linguistic environment and attitude toward it.

Conclusion

International language management is in its infancy and we have a lot of ground to cover. In the longer term, it would be preferable to develop well-trained ILM specialists. In addition, it is also important to encourage a wide spectrum of people who are aware of the importance of a diversified linguistic environment and its management. Educators and program designers of ILM specialization have to keep in mind that the combination of knowledge and skill development is to be maintained in a fine balance. To realize effective educational contents and training tools, co-creative classrooms with repeated feedforward and feedback is needed.

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