

Re: What's MEXT in English?

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From: Jed Rothwell (jedrothwell_at_earthlink.net)

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Kevin Wayne Williams writes:

> > *certainly India people speak English perfectly well without native speaker*

> > *instruction.*

>

> *I think that many Indians would bristle at you not thinking of them as native speakers of English.*

Yes, I acknowledge that in my last sentence. I listed India as an extreme example. Places like India and Sweden show that after a nation reaches a certain level of fluency, it is bilingual and there is no need to hire "native speaker" instructors. Paul Blay and many others have suggested that Japan needs more native speaker instructors. Of course I agree that would be a good idea, but there is a limit to how many you can bring in, and after a while there should be a limit to how many you need. If Japan were to fire a bunch of its present incompetent English teachers, it would probably make more progress than it could by hiring an equal number of foreign native speakers.

This MEXT white paper suggests a bold initiative: send 10,000 Japanese high school students overseas. That would probably be cheaper than importing 10,000 native speaker instructors, and it would be much more effective. You would end up with a smaller number of people learning English, but they would learn it thoroughly. The trouble is, 9,000 of those students would not come home.

I know little about conditions in Europe, but my daughter lived in Germany for a year. She says she knew little kids there who spoke English fluently mainly because they like to watch "The Simpsons" on TV. That is their main source of instruction. I imagine the same approach would work in Japan. If children at home were given televisions that showed only English programs, they would soon learn English. Especially if, as I proposed earlier, starting in sixth grade all instruction in all subjects was exclusively in English. That would do the job in a single generation. I doubt the Japanese public or government would go along with this modest proposal, since it would lead to the demise of the Japanese language over the next few hundred years. I think several minority languages in Europe, such as Icelandic, are

headed for oblivion because they cannot compete with English.

Being bilingual is a large burden on the student. I know very few Americans who have preserved immigrant languages for more than three generations. I cannot think of a single third-generation Japanese-American I know who speaks Japanese, except people who learned it in school, the way I did (along with me, in one case). In my opinion, a bilingual culture is in an unsteady, temporary state, and sooner or later it will shift to the exclusive use of one language or the other. Perhaps countries like India prove I am wrong, but my prediction is that within a hundred years nearly everyone on earth will speak English as a second language, and within a thousand years all other languages will be extinct. That is a terrible thing, but it seems unavoidable.

– Jed