

# **The development of the Australian Curriculum and implications for Japanese language education**

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## **Abstract**

In this paper I set the context and provide a rationale for a shift in languages education in Australia. I discuss the major features of the Australian curriculum for languages and draw implications for the learning and teaching of Japanese in Australian schools, K-12; and for understanding and describing learner achievements. The discussion will draw examples from recent research studies conducted in Australia.

## **Key words**

Globalisation; intercultural language learning; Australian Curriculum; teaching and learning Japanese in Australia; interpretation in communication and in learning

## 全国統一カリキュラムの開発が日本語教育にもたらす影響について

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### 要旨

本稿では、オーストラリアにおける言語教育の変化についてその背景と理由を述べる。その上で、全国統一カリキュラムの言語教育部分の主な特徴を紹介し、統一カリキュラムがオーストラリアの学校(K-12年生)の日本語教育に今後どのような影響を与えるか、また生徒の学習成果を理解し説明するのにどう役立つのかを論じる。議論を進めるにあたっては、最近オーストラリアで行われた調査研究を実例として挙げる。

### キーワード

グローバル化、異文化間言語学習、全国統一カリキュラム、オーストラリアの日本語教育、コミュニケーションと学習の解釈

## **Introduction**

The Australian education community is currently engaged in the development and implementation of a national Australian curriculum, under the auspices of the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA). The Australian Curriculum is being developed through three dimensions: a set of learning areas (the Arts, English, Geography, Health and Physical Education, History, Languages, Mathematics, Science, Technologies, Humanities and Social Sciences, Economics and Business, Civics and Citizenship); a set of cross-curricular capabilities (literacy, numeracy, information and communication technology competence, critical and creative thinking, ethical behaviour, personal and social competence and intercultural understanding) and three cross-curriculum priorities (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures; Australia's engagement with Asia; and sustainability). The development of the curriculum for each learning area has begun with the preparation of a so-called Shape Paper, written by an academic, to provide a conceptualisation of the learning area that could be used as a blueprint for curriculum development according to the key constructs developed by ACARA. I write this paper as the academic, invited by ACARA, and working through its extensive consultative processes, to write the Shape Paper for Languages (see ACARA 2011). As such, I write as an actor in the development process, although it must be highlighted that although I have had the opportunity to propose a design, I have had no role in the decision-making. Writing from this position, in this paper I discuss the context of the development that provides a rationale for the nature of the development. I then discuss six key considerations and features of the curriculum for Languages. Throughout the discussion I draw implications specifically for curriculum design, and for the teaching, learning and assessment of K–12 Japanese language learning in contemporary Australia. For the first time in the past three decades of national curriculum development in Australia, the curriculum for Languages is not being developed generically in a way that is intended to apply to all languages but, rather, the development is language-specific and it is for this reason that it becomes particularly valuable to highlight implications for specific languages—Japanese, in the present instance.

### **Context: setting the scene for the development of the Australian Curriculum: Languages**

In setting the scene for the development of the Australian Curriculum: Languages, I consider first the reality of globalisation and its impact, and second, the national Australian Education reform agenda.

Language learning is taking place in the context of globalisation, which in its contemporary guise is creating a new social order; it is producing the movement of people and their ideas and knowledge, goods and services at a scale and speed that are unprecedented. The fact of such global circulation is not new but, combined with the reality of advanced technologies, the intensity is much more marked than in previous times. The process of globalisation has altered the nature and extent of social, cultural and linguistic diversity in societies. The new term “super-diversity” (Vertovec 2010) is intended to capture the kind of sociocultural complexity surpassing anything that many migrant-receiving communities have previously experienced. The impact on education in general and on languages education in particular has been well documented. The very nature of multilingualism and multiculturalism is changing (see Blommaert 2010; Kramsch 2014; Kramsch and Whiteside 2008; Lo Bianco 2010). In this context of mobility and global information networks, language use and capabilities are increasingly important, and communicating successfully—that is, being able to exchange meaning across languages and cultures—becomes critical. Language issues are more salient than ever before and mobility, mixing and social, cultural and political dynamics become central concerns in the learning and teaching of languages. In his preface to an international review of “non-native language learning” in a global world, Kurt Fischer sees language learning as “central to politics, economics, history and most obviously education ... language learning is not isolated, but totally enmeshed with all the important issues of the future” (2012, 23). He views language learning as central to improving communication, which is at a premium in this context, but also as a means to promoting global understanding, highlighting: “To understand the importance of language and culture, people need to be familiar with several languages and cultures” (23).

The new global reality of our times requires a renewed conceptualisation of language learning itself. In languages education many diverse manifestations of the impact of globalisation have emerged in recent times. These are best characterised as a shift from monolingual to multilingual views of language learning, or what Ortega (2010) has termed “the bilingual turn”. This means that the process of learning additional languages is itself understood as a multilingual act—where all the languages in the learners’ repertoires come into play—rather than one which involves learning additional languages separately from the language of learners’ primary socialisation. Cenoz and Gorter (2011) refer to this as a ‘holistic approach’. Cook (2005) coined the term ‘multicompetence’ to refer to the co-existence of more than one language in the same mind. Li Wei (2011), working with Chinese background learners, notes the code- and mode-switching in the language use of these students and that this hybridity is a natural part of their multilinguality and language use. García (2009) uses the term “translanguaging” to describe the kind of language use that is integral to bilingual

language learning. Another dimension of change in language learning is in the recognition of language learning being not only a cognitive and linguistic activity, but also a social and affective one.

Language learning is not simply a matter of learning a subject at school but, rather, learning about oneself and others and the way languages and cultures shape identity (Norton 2012). It requires individual learner biographies and trajectories of experiences be taken seriously. Specifically, what are needed are curricula and pedagogies that engage with and build on “the diversity in semiotic modes that learners, with diverse social, cultural, linguistic and learning biographies bring into the classroom” (Stroud and Heugh 2011, 413-429). It is these understandings about the changing nature of language learning that were brought to bear in the development of the Shape Paper for Languages in the Australian Curriculum.

A second aspect of the context that has shaped the development of languages in the Australian Curriculum is the National Educational Reform agenda.<sup>1</sup> The Australian Curriculum was foreshadowed in the *Melbourne declaration on educational goals for young Australians* (MCEETYA 2008). These national goals include languages as a key learning area, prioritising Asian Languages. The Australian Government’s white paper, *Australia in the Asian century* (2012) was released by the previous federal government, marking in education a renewed emphasis on the learning of Asian languages and the need for students to have direct experiences of Asia. As mentioned, ACARA has designated Asia, and Australia’s engagement with Asia, as one of the cross-curriculum priorities that needs to be enmeshed in learning in all learning areas. A recent review of Japanese language learning (de Kretser and Spence-Brown 2010) provides a thorough analysis of the learning of Japanese language and culture in Australia at the present time. Despite Australia being one of the largest centres in the world for the learning of Japanese as a foreign language, and the positive uptake of Japanese in Australian schools K–12, there are some signs of fragility in the provision and nature of learning Japanese.

These two aspects indicate the need for a curriculum for Languages, including Japanese, which represents a significant change from the status quo. How these contextual realities and their implications for language learning and teaching were conceptualised and “translated” into a curriculum design are discussed in the section that follows.

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<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that with the change of government at the end of 2013 some aspects of the Australian Education Reform agenda are likely to change. Notably, the new government has initiated a review of the Australian Curriculum and a review of teacher education that are likely to impact on the national educational landscape.

## Key considerations and features of the Australian Curriculum: Languages

In this section I address six features that are central to the design of the Australian Curriculum: Languages. These include (1) profiling learners and learning; (2) reconceptualising the key features of Language, Culture and Learning; (3) reconceptualising teaching and learning practices; (4) the specificity of Japanese; (5) reframing of aims, curriculum content and its scope and sequencing; and finally, (6) achievement standards.

### *Profiling learners and learning*

The design of the Australian Curriculum: Languages began with a consideration of learners and their learning. The profile of learners in the Australian language learning classroom is rich and increasingly diverse. In designing a curriculum for language learning, it is necessary to appreciate who the learners are linguistically and culturally. Learners come to language learning with diverse knowledge, experiences of life and learning, affiliations, desires and memories that come from their life-worlds (see Scarino and Liddicoat 2009; Liddicoat and Scarino 2013, Chapter 3 for a detailed discussion). Traditionally, these characteristics have been seen as part of a learner's "background" or traits and teachers were invited to "be aware" of the learner's profile. The notion of "background" has meant that the life-worlds of students have indeed been backgrounded. Yet, learners' biographies or life-worlds, mediated through the languages and cultures of their primary socialisation at home and at school, are constitutive of learning. Learning is understood to emerge through linguistically and culturally mediated, historically developing practical activity (Gutiérrez 2003). In learning an additional language, learners learn to operate within (at least) two linguistic and cultural worlds, and they learn by constantly comparing, interacting and reflecting on the experience. It is in this sense that their language learning is *intercultural*. Their learning is not an abstracted activity; it is embodied. Learners participate (1) as language learners, using language and cultural tools to create new knowledge and understanding; (2) as intercultural language users, using the target language to develop a personal voice in the target language, recognising the linguistic and cultural demands of communication across languages and cultures; and (3) as persons, whose identities are developed through the process of learning.

The Australian Curriculum: Languages—Japanese<sup>2</sup> will be based on this view of learners and learning and an intercultural orientation to language learning, as described in the

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<sup>2</sup> At the time of writing this paper, the Australian Curriculum: Languages—Japanese has been written to a first draft stage only and, based on the data that emerged from a national consultation on the initial draft, it is currently being re-written.

Shape Paper for Languages and as further elaborated in the Australian Curriculum: Languages Design Paper.<sup>3</sup> The implications for teachers of Japanese are that they need to recognise students of Japanese as diverse (as learners who may or may not have a home “background” in Japanese or may or may not have a prior learning experience of Japanese at school or in the community). They also need to recognise the role of their students as language learners, as intercultural language users and as young persons. They need to *personalise* the learning of Japanese, to consider what learning Japanese might mean for different learners with different affiliations, goals and expectations in relation to learning Japanese. They need to consider the different kinds of “bridging” towards understanding that will be needed by different learners, the different kinds of challenges that Japanese language learning poses for different learners, and they need to maintain high expectations. Teachers of Japanese also need to recognise that, for all learners, learning Japanese in Australia is different from learning Japanese in Japan or indeed in any other context—for example, the USA or Singapore. They need to understand the changing, contemporary world and Japan in this context, and reflect upon the kinds of experiences of Japan and Japanese-ness that they are creating with students in their classrooms. Finally, in relation to learners and learning, teachers need to recognise that, like their learners, they too bring their distinctive life-worlds to their teaching, and that they too see the world and learning through their linguistic and cultural lenses.

### *Reconceptualising Language, Culture and Learning*

As already mentioned, the impact of globalisation on people’s lives, work and learning is substantial. Language learning, including Japanese language learning, needs to be responsive to changing global realities. For the languages education profession, this means moving beyond communicative language learning to accomplish a kind of language learning that reflects the multilingual reality of the diverse spaces in which languages are now used. Kramersch (2006; 2009; 2011) highlights a major difference from communicative language teaching when she states that “today it is not sufficient for learners to know how to communicate meanings, they have to understand the practice of meaning making itself” (Kramersch 2006, 251). This implies, firstly, that learners do not just exchange words but, rather, that they exchange personal meanings, mediated through the lens of the languages and cultures of their primary socialisation. It also implies that they need to understand what is entailed in the reciprocal exchange of meanings, especially when the exchange is across diverse linguistic and cultural worlds. This also entails questioning assumptions, trying to understand the world from another’s point of view or stance, and being able to “move between” languages and cultures. Thus, the key concepts of language learning (Language, Culture and Learning) need

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<sup>3</sup> In addition to the Australian Curriculum: Languages Shape Paper (ACARA 2011), the work on developing curricula in specific languages is based on the Australian Curriculum Design: Languages, which ACARA has not yet released.

to be reconceptualised. The view of *language* in the Australian Curriculum: Languages (ACARA 2011) not only acknowledges language as a grammatical system and as social practice, but also as a practice that involves people and their participation in a reciprocal process of interpreting the language and culture, the person and the self. The view of *culture* not only captures culture as facts, artefacts and information and as social practice (i.e. ways of doing things in diverse cultures), but also as a lens through which people mutually interpret, create and exchange meaning. The view of *learning* not only includes acquisition of new knowledge and participation in the use of knowledge, but also as involving processes to make sense of knowledge, self and others (see Halliday 1993). It is a kind of language learning that calls for a greater emphasis on interpretation, reflectivity, reflexivity and imagination (see Scarino 2014 for a detailed discussion).

Byrnes (2006) highlights another dimension of language learning that becomes crucial. This is the understanding that learning a language involves a process of engaging all language users in continued language development toward highly functional multilingualism. In other words, it is necessary to take a long-term developmental perspective.

These ideas are also reflected in shifts in Japanese second language education, for example, in the work of Hosokawa, who advocates a shift in language learning from “what” and “how” to “why”; that is, from Japanese language learning and Japanology to Japanese language education; and from Japanese society and culture to “a pedagogy of language-culture and the development of problem-finding and problem-solving learning by using Japanese” (Hosokawa 2005, 218). In this view, language learning shifts from being teacher-guided to being learner-centred and, more recently, to highlighting learner subjectivity. Developing literacy across languages is understood as holding in play both the learners’ first language(s) and the additional language being learnt (Koda and Zehler 2008).

In summary, for all students learning languages (with or without a home background), language learning involves necessarily moving between “bridging”, “negotiating”, “crossing”) at least two linguistic and cultural worlds. As Aoki, a Japanese–Canadian educator, explains:

Bilingualism ... is indeed a mode of being-and-becoming in the world. For me personally, learning a second language has been an entering into the strange world of unfamiliarity. Gradually, the new language sheds its unfamiliarity as I see more deeply into another perspective of the world and see with my new eyes an already familiar world. Two perspectives dance before me and press forward upon me, and when I find difficulty with one perspective, the other lends a willing hand.

Being bilingual ... is to meet the unfamiliar second language at the margin of the horizon of the mother language. It is to belong to two worlds at once and yet not belong to either completely. It offers an opportunity to fall back on the only person I must depend on, myself. Being bilingual asks of me that I live while probing life and life experiences. Because I live in tension at the margin, questioning becomes central to my way of life. (Aoki 1987/1991, 243)

In learning to use the target language, learners learn to: (1) exchange meanings reciprocally through interaction with people and/or texts; (2) “move between” and come to understand the linguistic and cultural systems of the language they are learning, and at the same time referencing these to their own linguistic and cultural systems; and (3) develop metacognitive and metalinguistic awareness of what it means to interpret and to act in the world, and to be interpreted reciprocally by others (ACARA 2011).

The implications for teachers of Japanese of this reconceptualisation of the key concepts in languages education is that they will need to go beyond traditional views of language, culture and learning to consider using the Japanese language as a social practice, in Australia and in Japan and other Japanese-speaking communities, in actual or virtual spaces. They need to consider learning language as an intercultural endeavour, focused on the exchange of meaning. They need to ensure that students are invited to reflect on Australian English and Japanese, Englishness and Japanese-ness and on themselves and others. Such reflection should become an integral and natural part of language learning. Teachers also need to consider their own conceptions of these key concepts and the way their own conceptions impact on the Japanese learning experiences that they create for their learners.

### *The specificity of Japanese*

Approaching the development of the Australian Curriculum: Languages as language-specific after many years of developing generic frameworks for learning languages in Australia raises an important question. What is it that is specific in teaching and learning specific languages? Some aspects of the distinctiveness of particular languages that need to be considered include the following:

- Language communities: Languages are practised by communities of speakers whose identity is defined by their language—which communities and which identities, for Japanese?
- Learners: The profile of learners learning the specific language (i.e. Japanese) in Australia here and now.

- Learning: Linguistic and cultural “distance” of the specific language for Australian learners: the concept of what it is that is “difficult” or “different” to learn from an Australian learner’s perspective.
- History: The history of the specific language in Australian education: how has it been framed and what is the impact of this framing?
- Language: Distinctiveness of concepts, grammar, etc.

Thus, in relation to Japanese language learning some examples of the specificity of Japanese might include explicit features of the linguistic system; principles of the *kana* and *kanji* writing systems; knowledge of aspects of Japanese language use (e.g. levels of formality and their significance in interpersonal relationships, awareness and use of honorifics, understanding politeness conventions); and aspects of Japanese cultural practices and values (e.g. the interrelationship of traditional and modern perspectives in society, an awareness of the role of respect for age and hierarchy, an awareness of the integral role of Shinto and Buddhism).

The implications for teachers of Japanese are that they need to shift away from the generalising tendency that has resulted from generic frameworks and reconsider the specificity of Japanese. It also means considering the learning of Japanese from the (Australian) learners’ points of view and imagining diverse ways of “bridging” the individual, Japanese and Japanese-ness in the world. It also means seeking to avoid reinforcing stereotypes through teaching and learning.

### *Reframing aims, curriculum content and its scope and sequencing*

The expanded, interrelated aims of language learning in the Australian Curriculum: Languages are as follows. Learners learn to:

- communicate in the target language
- understand language, culture, and learning and their relationship, and thereby develop an intercultural capability in communication
- understand themselves as communicators (ACARA 2011)

These aims are intended to capture the interpretive, reflective, reflexive and imaginative work involved in learning languages. The third aim acknowledges that language learning is not a static subject in the school curriculum, but rather that it involves

people communicating with each other and coming to understand the nature of communication and the self as a communicator when communicating both within a language and culture and across languages and cultures.

These aspects are further elaborated in the curriculum design through two strands: (1) communicating in the context of diversity and (2) understanding (not just language but also the process of exchanging meanings). These are further elaborated through a set of sub-strands as follows:

- Communication
  - Socialising and taking action
  - Obtaining and using information
  - Responding and expressing imaginative experience
  - Translating (mediating; moving-between/languages and cultures)
  - Reflecting on intercultural language use
  
- Understanding
  - Systems of language
  - Variability in language use
  - Understanding of the role of language and culture

It is through these strands and sub-strands that the nature, scope and sequence of language learning is depicted. The progression in learning is captured in content descriptions and elaborations (see ACARA 2011). These sub-strands are further developed as “threads” for specific languages. (see Scarino 2013 for a depiction).

The implication for teachers of Japanese is to ensure that they capture the distinctiveness of learning Japanese. It also means considering the nature of language learning and expanding the domains or scope of work encompassed in the communication and understanding strands. For example, the translating sub-strand is one that has been much debated in the development process. This arises from teachers understanding translation as the process of word-for-word rendering that it might have been in the past, rather than its contemporary sense of mediating cultural meanings. It is not by chance, for example, that the concept of “lost in translation” has gained so much currency in literature and cinema, or that the concept of translation and Japan should feature so strongly in the theatre works of the Canadian director, Robert Lepage—particularly

in his work, *The seven streams of the River Ota* (Lepage 1996). It also means creating opportunities for intercultural experiences and reflection for students. Teachers need to take a developmental view of learning, ensuring that they build connections across the span of learning. Importantly, it means resourcing ourselves as teachers so that we are able to critically discuss our own experiences of an ever-expanding repertoire of intercultural engagement with the target language.

### *Achievement standards*

A number of issues arise in relation to seeking to describe student achievements in languages education, including Japanese. A major problem is the absence of an adequate description of student achievements. A sustained study of students' experience of learning Japanese (Lo Bianco and Aliani 2013) shows how students are, in fact, seeking more rigorous and extensive learning. There is no clear understanding of the nature, range and level of achievements that might be expected of language learning in Australia. This is due at least in part to the fact that descriptions of student achievements in languages education have been generic rather than language-specific. Further, there is evidence that there is a great deal of variation in student achievements and that this relates to two major variables: time on task and learner background.

The Student Achievement in Asian Languages Education (SAALE) project (Scarino et al. 2011) investigated student achievement in four languages—Chinese, Japanese, Indonesian and Korean—through testing at three points along the K–12 continuum: at the end of the primary cycle, at the end of Year 10, and at the end of Year 12. The study explicitly examined the variables of time on task and learner background. Based on statistical analysis of the test data and qualitative analysis of student responses, descriptions were created for specific student groupings. In other words, descriptions of achievement were developed at “average” and “high” levels in a way that took into account time on task and learner background. Furthermore, the descriptions are supplemented by exemplars of students' work with commentaries that outline the features of language use and language learning evidenced in each exemplar. This work represents an initial step in the direction of establishing empirically based descriptions of achievements that are sensitive to the context of learning. Much more research is needed to develop descriptions that do justice to the nature, range and scope of Japanese language learning.

Teachers of Japanese need to consider actual student achievements, tailored to different groups of learners (who have been learning Japanese for different periods of time and who are learning Japanese as a second language or as a background user of Japanese).

Teachers also need to reconsider their own expectations about the nature and extent of student achievements, for these expectations can be highly influential.

## Conclusion

The development of the Australian Curriculum: Languages—Japanese provides an opportunity for teachers (and other interested parties) to re-examine and re-conceptualise the learning and teaching of Japanese in Australian schools. In curriculum terms, the shift needs to be towards a focus on *meaning*, recognising its centrality in both the process of communication and the process of learning. It is also necessary to consider the nature, range and scope of Japanese language learning. In pedagogy, it is necessary to honour the learners, to recognise that language and culture need to be integrated in learning experiences as students learn to move between at least two different linguistic and cultural worlds. Further, it is necessary to reconsider the central role of reflection, to build meta-awareness of the role of language and culture in communication and in learning. Finally, it is important to develop students' capability for reflection, in a way that is reciprocal and recognises the knowledge, assumptions and values of others. Through the assessment process, it is necessary to expand the learning that is valued, to develop accounts of language-using-and-learning that capture communication as well as reflection, and to develop alternative ways of assessing that do justice to learners of Japanese.

For many, the Australian Curriculum: Languages, and specifically the curriculum for Japanese, will not be seen as “new”. This may well be the case in some instances, but it is certainly more. It seeks to put in place a necessary expansion of learning to focus on meaning and the ways in which it is interpreted, created and exchanged, and with this careful attention to reflection, both on the role of language and culture in communication and on self in relation to other. In this way a utilitarian curriculum, which is so often highlighted in relation to the learning of Japanese, will begin to be complemented with a curriculum that is humanistic and educative.

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