

Impacts and Implications of Adoption of English as a Corporate Official Language in Japan

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Major Japanese companies are adopting English as their official language; which received media and academic attention when a well-known E-commerce company in Japan announced their policy to implement English-only corporate language policy in 2010. But the language policy could pose challenges for Japanese business people. Although the English language is widely used in businesses in Japan, the country is in Kachru's expanding circle, where English has no official status, and the culture and tradition are very different from those of Western societies. The E-commerce company has eventually abandoned the English-only policy, which turned out to be impossible to implement and considerably impeded their day-to-day business practices, so they now use both Japanese and English internally, and accidentally practice) bi-(multi-)lingualism. (After the implementation of the language policy, the number of non-Japanese employees increased: they were mostly Chinese and Indian IT specialists.) The present study examines the problems and difficulties experienced by the employees of this e-commerce company, implementing English as their official language policy in the environment where the language is not their intra-national communication medium. Based on the interviews of the company employees who experienced the changes caused by the new policy, the informants' narratives reveal discomfort and difficulties encountered during and after the somewhat chaotic transition, despite the fact that they are well aware of the importance of the language policy for the company's future growth. The study is hoped to provide insights into better corporate language management.