

Immersion Education in Early Meiji Japan: The Kumamoto Yogakko as a Total English Immersion School

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1. Introduction

Since 1992, Katoh Gakuen in Shizuoka, Japan, has offered a standard primary and secondary school curriculum taught mainly in English to Japanese students. As such, it claims to be “the first English Immersion Program in Japan” (Katoh Gakuen, online). And indeed, it is undoubtedly the first accredited Japanese school to offer a documented immersion program labeled as such. This is because the term *immersion* has only come into existence in the past 50 years starting with Canadian programs in the 1960s (Johnson, 2007).

However, there were several schools in the early Meiji era, between 1868 and 1880, that could rightfully be considered immersion-like schools. Two examples are the Daigaku Nanko in 1870, forerunner of Tokyo University (Saito, 2000, p.102) and the Sapporo Agricultural College, founded in 1875 and headed by William S. Clark (Akaishi, 2006; 2007). At the middle school level, Hosaka (2008) proposes that the Iwakuni English School headed by Herbert Stevens may have provided immersion-like education.

Yoneoka (2009) suggests that the education at the Kumamoto Yogakko, or Western School, a school established by the prefectural government in Kumamoto Prefecture from 1871-1876, was also a form of immersion. The present work goes on to explore the validity of this suggestion and to answer the following research questions:

- (1) Was the Kumamoto Yogakko curriculum actually a form of immersion education?
- (2) If so, what kind of immersion does it most closely resemble?
- (3) Is the Yogakko curriculum more appropriately considered immersion or submersion?

First, a review of current literature on immersion is provided, including different types of immersion (partial, total, early, middle, late, two-way, bilingual) and contrasting it with submersion (Fazio and Lyster, 1998). Then, the Kumamoto Yogakko curriculum is compared with the present day immersion literature

2. What is Immersion?

The first point that must be established is whether the Kumamoto Yogakko can indeed be considered an immersion school, and if so, what kind. To answer this question we need a working definition of immersion. Based on Genesee (1994), the father of modern immersion, Bostwick (2001) defines immersion “as a programme in which 50% or more of the school curriculum is done in the students’ foreign language” (p. 272). Immersion schools, by definition, teach a majority of the content curriculum through the target language, and thus differ from intensive language schools, where only the language itself is taught.

There are several different subtypes of immersion. *Total immersion* is complete use of the target language for the teaching of all subjects, and is generally accepted to be the quickest way to mastery of the language. In contrast, *partial immersion* programs teach some subjects (generally about 50%) in the host language, and the remainder in the target language. In addition to total and partial immersion, *bilingual immersion* programs, found in environments where two languages are approximately equal in status and usage, aim at developing proficiency in both languages simultaneously. *Two-way immersion* is a form of bilingual immersion in which there are enough students from both language groups to teach each other.

Immersion programs are also classified with respect to the age of the students in the program. *Early immersion* is a standard term for students who begin at age 5 or 6, in contrast to *middle immersion* when students begin at 9 or 10, and *late immersion* beginning at age 11 or older. Students who go on to study advanced subjects in the target language in early adulthood are called *continuing immersion* students.

The immersion track at Katoh Gakuen, mentioned at the outset of this paper, has been categorized as “a hybrid between partial and total immersion” (Bostwick 2001, p. 274) as about 70% of its curriculum is taught in English. Because students begin the program in the first year of elementary school (that is, at age 6), the program is characterized more specifically as *early partial immersion*.

3. *Seisoku* vs. Immersion

In Japan of the early Meiji era, the scramble to obtain and utilize voluminous amounts of information from the West in as short a time as possible led to two distinctly different methods of studying and teaching English and other Western languages (Smith and Imura, 2004; Takayanagi, 1971; Jones, 1975). *Seisoku* (regular course) vs. *hensoku* (irregular course) methods are defined in Brinkley's *Unabridged Japanese-English Dictionary* (Tokyo: Sanseido, 1896) as follows:

Seisoku, n. A method of learning a language by studying the correct pronunciation as well as the meaning (opposite of *hensoku*).

Hensoku, n. A method of learning a foreign language which consists in translating the meaning without regard to the correct pronunciation of the words, and without paying much attention to the rules of syntax. (cited in Omura, 1978, p.94).

The *seisoku* method stressed correct pronunciation and oral ability in addition to reading and writing. According to Smith and Imura (2004, p.30), *seisoku* teaching “was associated with English-medium instruction or ‘teaching by conversation (a form of direct method)’ by native speakers. This method was best suited for production of interpreters and preparation of students to study abroad. On the other hand, the *hensoku* method of English education was modeled on methods used to teach the Chinese classics, and sought to provide fast-track access to written Western knowledge. The pronunciation was of little or no importance; learning to read, translate and write was paramount. Both methods developed more or less in tandem as students, eager for Western knowledge but frustrated with the time and energy needed to learn a Western language, turned to the *hensoku* method as a solution to their immediate goal of importing information.

Both of these traditions crop up again and again in the history of English education in Japan. The *hensoku* tradition neatly matched the grammar-translation method in use in Europe at the time (and therefore adopted the terminology as its English translation), and has been the default method until recently. On the other hand, *seisoku* movements have appeared regularly, coming down through the ages as Harold E. Palmer's Oral Method in the 1920s, ELEC (English Language Exploratory Committee) attempts to reintroduce an oral approach to post-war Japan in the latter 1950s, audio-lingual methods in the 1960s, *eikaiwa* English conversation in the 1970-1990s and communicative English of the present day.

Within the context of early Meiji education, however, the goal of *seisoku* education was not merely to produce fluency in a foreign language, but also to provide a route to the riches of Western knowledge through direct communication with Western *yatoi* teachers and study abroad. Students in language schools all over Japan were not after linguistic ability *per se*, but rather the scientific, technical, political, ethical, and historical knowledge locked in the Western-language books and in the minds of their Western teachers. There were only two ways to access the new flood of information: through books or through the teachers themselves. The first method of access required extensive reading skills, the second extensive listening and speaking skills, and in both cases, the content of study was more important than the language itself. Within this context, *seisoku* was not about language education, but about the medium of content education. In other words, it was essentially what we call immersion today.

4. The Kumamoto Yogakko as an Immersion School

The Kumamoto Western School was established by the local government as a domain school in 1871, 3 years after the Meiji Restoration in 1868. It was meant to play the role of modernizing Higo—as Kumamoto was then called—in the fashion of nearby Hizen (Saga) and Satsuma (Kagoshima), both of which played leading roles in the national government at that time. The local authorities wanted a Western teacher who would not only import Western knowledge but also train the young samurai elite in western martial arts. They therefore stipulated that the Western instructor be a military man. Moreover, he should not be a missionary, as he would be expressly forbidden to teach Christianity, and he should be married (the reasoning behind this was unclear—it could be the authorities were worried about “protecting” the Higo womenfolk, or they may have wanted to secure a teacher for their Western girls at the same time). At any rate, it took the better part of a year to find an appropriate man, but Leroy Lansing Janes eventually came to take on the position. By this time, the Higo domain had become Kumamoto Prefecture, and the school already had selected and begun the training of the first class of 54 students.

Did the Kumamoto Yogakko offer an immersion curriculum? We must approach this question from two angles: the first is the language, which must be English at least for 50% of the curriculum, and the second deals with the content of the curriculum, which must be comparable with that taught at contemporary schools.

It is easy to answer the language question. Upon arriving in Kumamoto, Janes was extremely eager to begin teaching, but worried greatly about the question of language. He was not impressed with the interpreters provided him, and soon found that the students knew next to no English. Moreover, his own Japanese was minimal, and it seems he never really came to speak more than random words in the language. After deliberating for several days on how best to overcome this dilemma, he finally decided to teach the students English, and then use English as a medium to teach them all the other subjects that the authorities required. To this end, he reorganized the fledgling school, revised the curriculum so that subjects taught in Japanese were cut out (such as Confucian classics and Japanese ethics), fired his interpreters and began his first class with the ABCs.

Therefore, Janes, the only teacher at the school for most of its lifetime, taught 100% in English, a conscious decision documented at length by Janes himself and corroborated by his students (see Yoneoka, 2009 for further discussion). Hired to teach “civilization and enlightenment” (Notehelfer, 1975), he was greeted by a group of some 45 students, most of whom were “unable to tell the top from the bottom of an English book” (Iwamatsu, 2003, p.70) and “didn’t even know what yes and no meant” (Iwamatsu, 2003, p.118). He decided almost immediately that “a thorough knowledge of English as a means of study, an open door to western attainments and the sciences, would alone be worth four years of effort to any young man in the land” (Janes, letter to Anna, Oct. 7, 1874).

There were three possible solutions to Janes’ dilemma of how to teach his new charges: (1) to use interpreters provided for that purpose by the government (this was the solution that Japanese authorities had assumed and prepared for); (2) to learn Japanese himself (a solution often practiced by contemporary missionaries such as Verbeck, Brown and Hepburn); and (3) to first teach the students English, and then teach them content in English. He rejected the first solution as impossible, as his two interpreters were evidently not very skilled in English themselves. The second solution he rejected as a task likely to take up more time than either he or the authorities would desire, considering the difficulty of the Japanese language (the “devil’s tongue” as he called it). Thus, he was left with the third solution: to teach students to understand him in English (Janes, 1970).

Janes writes about what happened next in a letter to his distant cousin and mentor Anna Warner:

The interpreter carefully provided me, had nothing to do from the first and

soon left. I have had no assistant of any kind from without the school, since I regarded my boys for the time as children. They soon got in the way of asking for the milk as they wanted it. And each new class has the same experience; but the classes successively now furnish the nurses for the babes. (Janes, letter to Anna, Oct. 7, 1874)

The first part of this passage underscores Janes' attempts to provide a "natural" learning method similar to L1 acquisition, and the last sentence indicates the use of the ablest upperclassmen to help teach members of lower classes, thereby ensuring the continuance of the original immersion-like methods.

The question of the Yogakko curriculum requires more explanation. Clearly the approach to language teaching is *seisoku*, but is it immersion? For the first year coursework, the answer must be no, as the education consisted of intensive language training and included only minimal content such as basic math and science (Yoneoka, 2009). However, we begin to see evidence of content courses equivalent to other schools being taught from the second year. In his 1874 letter to his cousin Anna Warner, Janes writes a detailed explanation of the structure of his school.

I have now nearly a hundred boys in four classes. A class has entered each year, the last three each on the 1st of September. For the present I must leave reasons, and just say that the instruction is entirely in English; and almost from the first unlike all the other schools in Japan I have had and allowed no interpreting whatever. A class learned English (in my experience here) in a year so as to be up to the elementary textbooks Gu got's Geography and Whites Arithmetic (a jewel of a textbook I have just got); which with a beginning in History and higher mathematics occupy the second year. Algebra, Geometry, Trigonometry and Surveying fill the mornings and History the afternoons of the third year. Philosophy (Physics), Astronomy, and Geology in the morning; with Chemistry, physiology and a higher course in English (a touch of some of the literature of the language which is to be their study vehicle) is the course in the fourth year. After the first year, there runs through the term a course of exercises to which the Saturdays are devoted, varied to suit the class: composition, dialogue, declamation, +c that are becoming interesting. (Janes, Letter to Anna, Oct. 7, 1874).

The curriculum explained above coincides with that in Notehelfer (1985, p. 134):

Janes moved on to geography, history, and basic mathematics in the second (year). Algebra, geometry, trigonometry, and surveying took up the mornings of the third year; history the afternoons. In the fourth year mornings were given over to philosophy (physics), astronomy, and geology, while afternoons concentrated on chemistry, physiology, and English literature. (Notehelfer, 1985, p. 134)

The completion certificate of one Yogakko student, Sakanoue Takematsu, indicates the study of geography, composition, arithmetic, English, algebra, and history in the second year, and chemistry, algebra, geometry, physiology, science, astronomy, geology, speech, and composition in the third year. Sakanoue was not able to complete his fourth year due to the closure of the school. Although this certificate coincides for the most part with the curriculum described above by Notehelfer and by Janes himself, there are several notable exceptions. First, Sakanoue seems to have studied algebra in the second instead of third year, indicating that perhaps he was put in an excelled class. Second, the certificate mentions geometry and physiology classes in the third year, which may again denote excelled academics provided for this particular student. Finally, composition (English composition, assumedly) in second and third years and speech in third year are included. These are included in Janes' description of Saturday academic content, and demonstrate that instruction in English per se was continued throughout the curriculum, even when content classes were introduced.

In either case, it is clear that a content curriculum was taught completely in English from the second year, thus qualifying it as a total immersion program. Moreover, the curriculum seems to be comparable to those of contemporary schools in the country. For example, Hosaka (2008, p.107) notes that the 1871 contract of Herbert Augustus Stevens, a contemporary of Janes teaching in Iwakuni, included instruction in language, composition, arithmetic, astronomy, geography, history, physics, etc. Similarly, Shigehisa (1976, p. 85) cites the English curriculum at the Kyoto Ougakusha in Kyoto, which began to teach English, French and German in 1871, as including the following:

Introductory and 4th level: English (Conversation, Penmanship, Spelling)

3rd level: Geography, English (Readers, Spelling, Conversation,
Penmanship)

2nd level: Astronomy, Geography, Mathematics, English (Readers,
Spelling, Conversation, Translation, Penmanship)

1st level: History, Astronomy, Mathematics, Geography, English
(Readers, Spelling, Conversation, Translation, Penmanship)

The similarities between the three curricula are striking—all contain history, astronomy, geography, and mathematics in addition to language arts, and the addition of content courses increases with the year of study. However, for the latter two it is unclear whether the content courses were actually taught completely in English. There were other Japanese teachers at the Kyoto school, and Stevens is known to have spoken some Japanese as well (Hosaka, 2010, personal communication). At the Kumamoto Yogakko, however, we may be certain that Janes taught the content courses alone and in English, based on accounts and documents left both by Janes himself and by his students.

5. Immersion or submersion?

Finally, we consider whether the Yogakko curriculum might actually have not been more “submersion” than immersion. The former is a somewhat derogatory term used to describe a situation in which a child is “thrown” into a novel language situation with no help or lifeline (such as in minority immigrant situations) to “sink or swim” in the new linguistic environment. It is generally considered to be detrimental to a child’s education. A landmark supreme court decision in favor of Chinese-American students in San Francisco (*Lau vs. Nichols*, 1974) resulted in US schools being required to offer bilingual aid to children who did not have the language ability to follow the mainstream education provided, in order to avoid submersion.

Fazio and Lyster (1998) make three generalizations as to the differences between the two concepts of immersion and submersion (see Table 1). First, immersion is additive bilingualism—that is, it supports rather than tries to replace the L1. Most immersion schools nowadays practice additive bilingualism, and offer

Immersion	Submersion	Katoh Gakuen	Kumamoto
additive bilingualism (supports L1)	subtractive or replacive bilingualism (rejects L1)	Additive	Additive/ Replacive?
bilingual teachers	monolingual teachers	bilinguals	monolingual
same level students	different level students	Same level	Same level

Table 1. Comparison of Katoh Gakuen and Kumamoto Yogakko with respect to Immersion/Submersion (Fazio and Lyster 1988)

instruction in both L1 and L2. On the other hand, submersion is subtractive or replacive bilingualism—that is, it rejects the L1 and focuses only on the L2. Partial immersion is by definition additive bilingualism. Total immersion, however, may be considered submersion if it downgrades the L1 to the extent that the student is afraid or ashamed to use it. Second, immersion education should be offered by bilingual teachers, whereas submersion generally involves monolingual L2 teachers, who do not have the ability to coach the students in their L1. Third, the immersion situation involves students who have approximately the same ability in the L2 learning together, which is only possible if there is a multiple number of students who are not native speakers of the target language.

Although these are generalizations of trends rather than hard and fast criteria, the Katoh Gakuen program clearly classifies as immersion rather than submersion on all three counts. As 30%-50% of the courses are offered in the students' L1 (that is, Japanese), the program is clearly additive. Teachers are for the most part more or less bilingual, and classwork is done in groups of students who have roughly the same linguistic ability with respect to the L2.

On the other hand, the Kumamoto Yogakko seems at first glance to be closer to submersion. The education seems to be replacive rather than additive, as students were required to use English only during class hours. No Japanese studies were provided by Janes. Indeed, the local government at first required Yogakko students to study Confucian classics, but “even this modicum was soon cut out of the curriculum” (Janes, 1991, p.69) and taken up as an extracurricular activity instead. One parent even wrote a letter to Janes, suggesting that students should be required to read more scholarly Chinese books—the literary language for Japanese at the time—as they seemed to be falling behind their peers in this part of their education (Yamada, 1876). Second, as already explained, Janes himself was in no way bilingual, nor did he make any attempt to study Japanese, which he referred to as “the devil’s tongue” (Janes, 1970) and “degraded” (Janes, 1874). English may also have been used in the dormitory after school, making the environment there more bilingual than monolingual. Finally, it can be argued that students did find themselves in a submersion-like “sink or swim” situation, being forced to improve their English or face expulsion.

However, there are several reasons to consider the Yogakko education closer to immersion than to submersion. First, the final criterion—that is, the students proceed at more or less the same level—was clearly the case at the Yogakko.

Students were streamed into classes by English level, and were taught as a single cohort. If they could not keep up, they would be moved down to a lower level—or in some cases, out of the school itself.

Second, although not part of the formal curriculum, students were encouraged to use Japanese on many occasions. Some of these, which can be corroborated by existing records, are as follows:

- (1) many students were known to study the Confucian classics in extracurricular lessons (perhaps taking place on Sundays and/or evenings) and Janes did not discourage them from doing so;
- (2) Janes oversaw the production of a booklet called *Seisan Shoho* “Introduction to Agricultural Production” (Yamada, 1972), a collection of his second year lectures on agriculture which was compiled by his students (Yamasaki Tamenori, Matsumura Genji and Ichihara Takemasa) and translated into Japanese¹⁾;
- (3) Janes directed a group of his best students (Yamasaki Tamenori, Ise Tokio and Okada Gentaro) to translate his speech at the ceremony of continuation of the Yogakko in 1874 into Japanese, and copies of both the original and translation are in existence today;
- (4) students often accompanied Janes to local shops and other facilities as translators;
- (5) Janes’ pedagogy included upper class students teaching their juniors, which (although we cannot be sure) probably involved at least some Japanese.

Finally, it should be pointed out that the term submersion is generally reserved for ESL situations, in which the native language of the student is not used in the environment outside of the classroom, except perhaps within the family. In EFL situations, as is the case with the Yogakko, the need for ability in their native language is obvious to students the minute they set foot off campus.

6. Conclusions

This paper has argued that the Kumamoto Yogakko, a little school circa 1871-

1) It may be noted here that one of Janes’ students, Yokoi Tokiyoshi, went on to become the first president of the Tokyo University of Agriculture.

1876 in Kumamoto, Japan, is one of the first instances of English immersion education in Japan. The first year curriculum was made up entirely of English language study, and can therefore be considered an intensive language program (Yoneoka, 2009). On the other hand, the curriculum from the second to fourth years, although ahead of its time in terms of terminology, qualifies as total immersion, based on the following two facts:

- (1) Janes was the only teacher at the school as the original staff of Japanese teachers and translators had all been dismissed at the beginning of the first year and he controlled the entire curriculum;
- (2) Janes did not speak Japanese both in fact and on principle, nor did he allow the use of Japanese in the classroom, believing it to be the best way for his students to learn English quickly.

Moreover, the Yogakko program can be classified as *late total immersion*, as the great majority of the students entering the school were between the ages of 11 and 15, making them at least 12 years old in their second year. This differs from most present-day immersion education programs, which usually begin much earlier and are more balanced between the L1 and L2. For example, the immersion program at Katoh Gakuen is a *partial additive early bilingual immersion* program beginning from the first grade in elementary school, offering a balanced education geared to producing true Japanese-English bilinguals.

In addition to being one of the first immersion schools, the Yogakko may have also been the **last** state-funded total immersion school in Japan. The early Meiji movement towards English as a vehicle for importation of knowledge from the West, epitomized by Minister of Education Arinori Mori's attempts to make English an official language in Japan in the late 1880s, soon gave way to an antithetic movement promoting education in Japanese language and values:

Japanese became the teaching language in Tokyo University [and].... academic books written in European languages were translated into Japanese...so it was no longer necessary to teach the subjects in English ...this then led to a sense among Japanese that English was no longer the required means to gain access to western culture and knowledge. (Fujimoto-Adamson 2006, p.266)

The Kumamoto Yogakko is sometimes characterized as a somewhat chauvinistic one-man effort at recreating a US military-style grammar school to modernize and Westernize a backward nation in the shortest time possible, using English as a

medium. Even so, the success of the its total immersion program can be measured by the fact that many its students went on to become important and successful ministers, teachers, and businessmen—truly a generation of international leaders of young Japan. With the current government control of education, the circumstances that lead to the Yogakko would be extremely difficult to imitate today. On the other hand, with the introduction of English in elementary school beginning in April 2011, the proposed introduction of all-English classes in high school by 2016, and the spread of immersion education in other private schools (there are at least 10 around the country), the time may be ripe to explore the possibilities of introducing a Yogakko-like immersion school today.

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明治初期のイメージョン教育 英語の晩期完全イメージョンを実地した熊本洋学校の考察

米岡 ジュリ

静岡県にある加藤学園 (1991 年設立) は日本初のイメージョン学校と自己 PR をしていますが、明治初期は英語のイメージョン教育と呼んでいいものが横浜、北海道など、各地の学校で行われました。中には熊本洋学校は、一足早く All English (トータルイメージョン) のカリキュラムを導入しました。1871 年 10 月から、唯一の教師である L.L.ジェーンズ氏が一切日本語を使わずに、英語を全くわからない生徒たちに数学、地理、歴史、物理、化学、天文、地質、生物などを 4 年間で教え込み始めました。

本論では、この熊本洋学校の教育をイメージョン論の立場から分析します。加藤学園の教育は「初記部分的イメージョン」(early partial immersion) とみなすが、熊本洋学校の教育は「晩期完全イメージョン」(late total immersion) と位置づけます。また、学生が全員英語を初記段階から同時に進んだためと、母国語である日本語への翻訳も重視されたため、外国語環境に行き成り投げ込まれる“submersion” (水浸) よりも、計画的に外国語環境に浸水させる immersion 法に近いことが議論されています。結論として、熊本洋学校が All English (トータルイメージョン) 教育であったことを論議します。