The importance of English in Japan

07 Yuki Kanaya

My presentation was about whether English is too important in Japan. My presentation was to raise the question, “Is English too important in Japan? In Japan, there are several exams that students must pass during their school years. These are entrance exams and employment exams. In many universities, English test scores account for a large percentage of the entrance examinations. In job hunting, too, English test scores are a key point in any industry or company. This means that no matter what stage of an organization you are in, it is likely to have a high opinion of your English skills.

Certainly, the ability to read, write, and interact in English is a wonderful thing, and it is a good thing to have. The value of English should be valued as much as any other ability, since speaking English can directly enable you to conduct business negotiations and expand your business opportunities in foreign companies. However, I believe that other abilities should be valued as much or more than English.

There are two reasons. One is that language is only a means to an end. English is something we should learn because it allows us to communicate our ideas to other people who do not speak Japanese, but that is only possible with content. If the content is poor, it is meaningless no matter how enthusiastically they appeal their charms in fluent English. It is these contents, in other words, the abilities in science, mathematics, imagination, etc., that create substantial value, that should be emphasized the most.

Second, is the effect of language on thought. We use language to think every day. It is no exaggeration to say that language forms a person's values and framework for thinking. However, a halfway advanced level of a foreign language cannot influence them. Because even when speaking English, most students convert it into Japanese once and then speak English, don't they? It is not possible for an ordinary person to surpass his/her native language overnight. If that is the case, shouldn't we place more importance on our native language, Japanese? It would be more beneficial to increase the vocabulary of Japanese to concretize more essential parts of our thoughts and to be able to construct them logically.

These are just a few of the questions we have raised about the Japanese system of educating and assessing English proficiency. We also believe that there is no need to spend more time and money on English education, even if there is a possibility that this ability will become more necessary in a global society in the future. If AI continues to advance at the current pace of research, it will be able to interpret everything in real time before the world becomes solely an English-speaking country due to globalization. Based on the above, we believe that English is overvalued in Japan, and based on this, we have made some suggestions for Japan's educational system.