

**Plurilingualism in Language Education:
Possibilities of Institutional Discourse for English Education in Japan
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1. Introduction

English education in Japan has become more chaotic as an appropriate teaching method has yet to be found despite the growing demand for communicating in English. The Ministry of Education, inspired by general opinion, claims the importance of proactive, interactive, and deep learning in the education curriculum. However, no specific approaches have been established to achieve these goals. The present course of study maintains that increasing students' opportunities to listen to and speak English is an effective method of English education. However, teaching in English does not necessarily contribute to students' communication skills in English. Indeed, this approach sometimes produces negative effects, such as increasing the number of people who do not like English and expanding the gap of comprehension between those who can understand and those who cannot (Hosaka, 2017, 2018a, 2018b).

New course guidelines suggested by the government provide hope of established methods for English education in Japan. Under these guidelines, English is associated with Japanese, as the native language, and students objectively focus on the differences and similarities of both languages. This approach, which has been influenced by the ideology of plurilingualism proposed by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, can lead to the creative use of English and can enhance communication skills (Otsu, 2020). However, the concept and advantages of plurilingualism are not yet fully understood; currently, the parties concerned in the Ministry of Education or schools focus solely on speaking and listening skills and tend to avoid using their native language for English education.

This paper provides an overview of the history of English education ranging from conventional confusion to the introduction of plurilingualism based on statements from the new course guidelines. Furthermore, this paper argues for the usefulness of institutional discourse as a tool for students to contemplate the cultural similarities or differences between English and Japanese. Finally, it demonstrates that plurilingualism can help students use English creatively and appropriately.

2. Chaos from Speaking-Centered Teaching

2.1 The focus of the courses of study on required skills

The Ministry of Education, Cultures, Sports, Science, and Technologies defines the courses of study as "broad standards for all schools, from kindergarten through upper secondary schools, to organize their programs in order to ensure a fixed standard of

education.” These guidelines are adopted in public schools, which are free to decide the contents of their curricula based on their own mottos. The guidelines influence the standards of entrance examinations, however, so private schools also cannot digress from them.

The goals of foreign language education according to the course of study are familiarity with the sound of the foreign language, acquisition of four skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing), and appreciation of diverse cultures. The main focus has been increasing students’ ability to use foreign languages; according to Ayabe (2005), the Ministry of Education requires schools to have students acquire practical English by reducing quotas of what they have to learn and focusing on speaking and listening skills to meet the growing demand for the ability to speak English. The course of study announced in 1989 employed the term “communication” for the first time, further indicating the demand for the ability to use English (Shibata, 2019). Additionally, since their enforcement in 2009, the courses of study have stated that lessons should be conducted in English to ensure the class is similar to real-life scenarios and to provide students opportunities to use English.

In the educational guideline announced in 2017, “proactive, interactive and deep learning” was a desirable outcome for education, regardless of the subject. This concept arose from the “active learning” approach, which is popular in education (Emura & Shinmyouzu, 2017). In active learning, teaching takes the form of mediating discussions and debates, rather than giving lectures.

2.2 Confusion in schools caused by an emphasis on listening and speaking skills

Inspired by the demand for speaking and listening skills, some schools have required teachers to conduct English classes in English. According to Hosaka (2019), however, the educational field has remained unchanged; many schools still provide classes in Japanese, and a lively discussion was held between English teachers when the statement that “classes, in principle, should be conducted in English (p. 7)” appeared in the course of Study announced in 2009. Often, classes are conducted in English only when the Board of Education enforces the guidelines through inspection (Hosaka, 2019).

Uenishi (2011) investigated eleventh-grade students’ attitudes toward English classes conducted in English and found that both teachers and students had negative attitudes toward classes conducted in English, especially concerning subjects highly related to entrance examinations. Furthermore, teaching classes in English does not necessarily increase opportunities for the students to use English, and the shortcomings of this method, such as limiting the strategy of learning and impeding the contents and organization of teaching, can surpass its benefits (Watari, 2011). Of course, students who have positive attitudes toward English are likely to desire English-centered classes, but

for those who do not like English, such a class can create English-phobia and cause a decline in the students' academic ability (Hosaka, 2017, 2018a, 2018b, 2019).

Some researchers have stated that conducting class in English is not realistic in Japan, where students learn English as a foreign language, not a second language. If the students wish to use English appropriately, they have to make considerable efforts to realize their hope (Torikai, 2018). Otsu (2020) argued for the need for intentional and conscious teaching and stated that foreign languages should be taught through association with the students' native languages. This argument reflected the idea that learners can understand the system of a foreign language easily if they notice the universal features of language by observing both the foreign language and their native language. Otsu (2020) did not object to conducting classes in English but indicated the need for students to learn its basic structure, such as grammar, in Japanese first. After this basic knowledge is acquired, classes can be taught in English (Otsu, 2020).

The concept of learning foreign languages relatively by associating them with students' native languages arose from plurilingualism. The next section introduces plurilingualism and shows how the new courses of study attempted to apply the concept to foreign language education.

3. New Perspectives from Plurilingualism

3.1 Plurilingualism

Plurilingualism is based on the idea that communication skills emerge from several languages interacting with each other and coexisting within the individual. In contrast, multilingualism refers to several languages that exist independently in the individual's mind (Otsu, 2020; Torikai, 2018). In multilingualism, students should use each foreign language as naturally as native speakers do. Additionally, this approach embraces an education system that provides many foreign language options.

Plurilingualism, however, does not necessarily require people to use foreign languages like native speakers. Rather, it stresses the fact that even if people encounter unfamiliar languages, they can imagine what the unfamiliar languages imply by employing preexisting knowledge of the language and their individual linguistic experiences. Furthermore, this approach, based on plurilingualism or pluriculturalism, helps students accept different languages and cultures because it releases them from their ethnocentric point of view. Using the idea of plurilingualism, Otsu (2020) argued that Japanese education and English education should cooperate since individuals should know several languages that are each significantly and mutually relevant.

Both societal multilingualism and individual plurilingualism are embedded in the language policies of the European Union and the Council of Europe (Coleman, 2006). *The Common European Framework of Reference of Languages: Learning Assessment* announced by the Council of Europe highlighted plurilingualism, stating that

the ultimate goal of foreign language education is not creating an ideal speaker of the foreign language but instead is creating mutual understanding and peace through the lifelong learning of languages and cultures (Torikai, 2018).

Learning a foreign language by associating it with the native language produces an awareness of language that extends beyond the specific languages. In other words, this approach not only attempts to understand, for example, Japanese as Japanese and English as English but also to obtain language awareness by appreciating several languages and meaningfully correlating them with one another. Otsu (2017) argued that understanding the target language based on language awareness can lead to the practical use of both the native language and the object language (Figure 1).

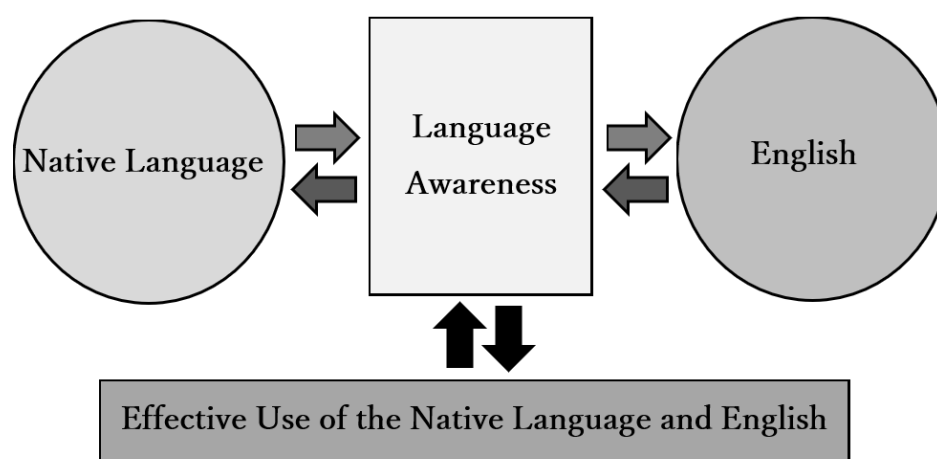


Figure 1. The Need for Cooperation between English Education and Japanese Education
(Figure recreated based on Otsu, 2017, p. 102)

3.2 Adoption of plurilingualism by the new courses of study

The latest courses of study announced in 2017 and 2018 partially reflected the notion of plurilingualism in that the curriculums emphasized the relationship between the native language and target language, especially between Japanese and English. Otsu (2017) called this change a step toward the bright future of English education. In the educational curriculum for elementary schools published in 2017, the following statement employed plurilingualism:

Be aware of the differences between Japanese and foreign languages in terms of speech, letters, vocabulary, expressions, sentence structure, language functions, etc., of foreign languages. Understand this knowledge, familiarize yourself with reading and writing, and acquire basic skills that can be used in actual communication by listening, reading, speaking, and writing. (p. 156) (translation by the author)

Elementary schools will officially start English education in April 2020. The statement above indicates the importance of understanding *the differences between Japanese and foreign languages* at various level, such as different letters, words, and syntactic structures.

The junior high school guideline also focuses on learning a language by associating it with other languages. The course of study about foreign languages state that “teachers have to try to make students notice the differences, such as word order, between English and Japanese. (p. 137)” Moreover, the Japanese curriculum includes the following statement based on plurilingualism:

By comparing foreign languages and Japanese and understanding each other relatively, it may be possible to encourage awareness of the characteristic composition of Japanese sentences. (p. 78) (translation by the author)

Thus, the guidelines for Japanese education state that an approach based on plurilingualism is useful for building understanding of the target language, regardless of which language students are learning.

Compared to the courses of study for elementary and junior high schools, the course of study for high schools require students to understand the differences of both languages at a more abstract level, such as their discourse structure. For example, the following extract from the Explanation of the course of study promotes student understanding of an unknown discourse structure in the foreign language by using knowledge the students obtained before entering high school:

Additionally, teachers need to make students understand the differences and similarities in English and Japanese paragraph structure using what they have already learned in Japanese education in elementary school and junior high school, such as the composition and development of sentences. This is, for example, related to the knowledge of making consistent paragraphs or paying attention to the relationship between paragraphs. Specifically, although the unity of content is commonly important to both, the desirable structure of English paragraphs aggregates a single argument that the writer wants to convey and supporting parts. (p. 52) (translation by the author)

The same Explanation also appeals to the importance of cooperation between Japanese education and English education for improving linguistic ability. Furthermore, understanding the differences and similarities of the languages enables students to understand each language’s history, culture, and customs:

From the perspective of improving linguistic abilities, teachers cooperate with ones of Japanese education, attempt to enhance the effectiveness of their teaching, and make students notice the differences and similarities between Japanese and English

vocabulary, expressions, and logic structure. And finally, they make efforts to deepen the understanding of the background history, culture, and customs. (p. 128) (translation by the author)

The courses of study and their Explanations have indicated that this teaching approach, grounded in plurilingualism, helps students understand general features of the language, and using English based on this knowledge is useful.

4. Understanding Pattern and Linguistic Preference through Language Comparison

Otsu (2017, 2020) stated that nourishing the knowledge of foreign language that is linked with the native language—which is highly likely to make people notice the nature of language—is key to using foreign languages creatively. Here, creativity refers to the learner’s ability to apply the basic pattern of the target language gained from comparing languages to other complicated situations (Otsu, 2020). In the courses of study, higher grade levels require students to learn an increasing number of patterns, ranging from patterns of sound, rhythm, vocabulary, and expression to those of word order and logical structure.

This paper focuses on specific components each language speaker prefers to slot into the prototypical framework thereby exceeding the lexical-grammar and structural pattern of the target language attained from comparison with the native language. For example, even if several languages have the same or similar patterns of grammar or discourse structure, what content students tend to embed in the framework differs according to the students’ culture. This knowledge of framework not only enables students to use the target language creatively but also allows them to notice how to use the language appropriately when interacting with others. Therefore, this paper uses institutional discourse to understand the differences and similarities between English and Japanese; using this discourse allows for easier analysis of the cultural differences between the languages since such discourse has the same structure regardless of country. The following section defines institutional discourse and attempts to investigate corporate discourse, a type of institutional discourse.

4.1 Institutional discourse

In the discipline of conversation analysis, “institutional discourse” refers to the discourse practiced within a specialized and restricted context wherein its “participants have institution-specific goals to accomplish, and the kinds of contribution that can be made

are constrained” (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006, p.90). This discourse frequently contrasts with ordinary discourse, which is “forms of interaction that are not confined to specialized settings or the execution of particular tasks” (ibid., p.89), such as interactions on telephones and speaking with friends at home. Although some research has argued for a continuum of institutionality and stated that ordinary and institutional discourse cannot be wholly divided, a consensus has been reached that institutional discourse has specific goals, identity, framework, and procedure (Heritage, 2005).

4.1.1 Advice-giving Discourse

Abe (2010) identified advice-giving discourse as an institutional discourse due to its characteristics; advice-giving discourse obeys some rules constructed by the social system. In both the West and the East, advice-giving discourse constitutes interaction between clients and counselors, and it has a logical structure in which clients ask for guidance and counselors provide solutions (Abe, 2004). Therefore, the advice discourse in both cultures has a prototypical framework in common, while the contents of the advice tend to be influenced by the differences between languages and cultures. Abe (2001, 2004, 2010) stated that, although English advice-giving discourse and Japanese advice-giving discourse have a common general structure, such specific patterns cannot also necessarily be perceived in the counseling contents. In other words, the common structure illuminates the cultural peculiarity of the counselor’s persuasive strategies. Abe (2004) concluded that the constituents of the advice and the position of counselors toward clients are different between the U.S. and Japan; the Japanese regard trust and empathy as important components of advice while Americans prioritize the solution of the problem. Abe (2010), introduced in *The English Teacher’s Magazine*, indicated that these differences arise from differences in social backgrounds and norms rather than from linguistic discrepancies.

Abe (2010) does not explicitly show a possibility that these differences can be applied to English education, but her discovery that there are differences in the contents between the U.S. and Japanese advice-giving discourse despite their similar framework can have an affinity with plurilingualism or pluriculturalism. This paper, inspired by Abe (2010), will focus on institutional discourse as materials of English education based on plurilingualism.

5. Applying Institutional Discourse to Education

This paper focuses on corporate discourse as one type of institutional discourse, particularly focusing on mission statements, which are easy to procure from corporate websites and can identify the roles of the related people (e.g. employees, customers, and stakeholders). Mission statements clarify the position of employees and orient them around common objectives. The term “mission statement” has been employed relatively recently, beginning in the 1970s, and it was incorporated into Japanese businesses recently.

In Japan, most companies utilized unique guiding philosophies, such as a *shakun* (“company precept”), *shaze* (“company motto”), and *keieirinen* (“management philosophy”), before incorporating mission statements. Therefore, these conventional philosophies may have been inserted into the model of mission statements. This implies that although U.S. and Japanese mission statements are similar in superficial structure, they differ in internal components because of their unique cultural backgrounds. The author’s previous research identified the general argument structure of both U.S. and Japanese mission statements as well as the differences in approaches taken to direct employees’ actions (Kitazawa, 2018). Japanese mission statements tend to emphasize the commonality of the objectives and actions between corporations and employees while U.S. mission statements focus on the corporations’ distinctiveness and superiority over competitors (Kitazawa, 2019).

Mission statements are relatively short and abstract, and their vocabulary is limited to that of the corporation’s specialization in the business world. These features reduce the variations between cultures, thus enabling the genuine characteristics of the language and culture in both countries to be analyzed. This paper first extracts crucial components from mission statements, such as “goal,” “actions,” and “methods.” Second, it investigates the constituents within each component and compares them between the two countries. This analysis allows students to understand the procedure used to find similar structures and compare language and culture easily.

5.1 Common constituent elements in U.S. and Japanese mission statements

To complete this analysis, 40 mission statements (U.S., 20; Japan, 20) were collected from the corporations’ websites. The target companies were limited to financial and insurance corporations to reduce the differences that can arise from a variety of corporations. Each sentence or phrase was investigated in terms of how it functioned in

the mission statements, which showed employees or stakeholders the corporate identity and allowed them to identify with the corporation. Table 1 shows the type frequency of the constituents of each mission statement. Table 2 demonstrates the core elements of the U.S. and Japanese mission statements. It also offers the definition, examples, and linguistic markers effective for judging to which elements each sentence and phrase belonged.

The U.S. and Japanese mission statements included common constituent elements. The constituents employed most in both countries were as follows: (f) goal, (g) action, and (h) method (see Table 1). Japanese corporations also tended to include (e) foundation and (c) positive attitude toward the goals without specific reference to what the corporation would do. The following examples (1) and (2) incorporated three basic elements: (f) goal, (g) action, and (h) method.

Table 1. Type Frequency of Core Elements in Mission Statements

Core Elements	U.S. (20)	Japan (20)
(a) Conditional	5	0
(b) Reason	2	1
(c) Positive attitude	13	19
(d) Self-reference	9	8
(e) Foundation	4	10
(f) Goal	17	20
(g) Action	18	18
(h) Method	14	16

(1) [グローバルな保険・金融サービス事業を通じて method]、[安心と安全を提供し action]、[(活力ある社会の発展と地球の健やかな未来 goal) を支えます positive attitude]。
(MS & AD Insurance)

“We [provide relief and security action] [through our global insurance and financial services business method] and [support (the development of a vibrant society and a healthy future for the planet goal) positive attitude].”¹

¹ This and all subsequent translations of the Japanese statements are by the author.

Table 2. Definitions, Discourse Markers, and Examples of the Core Elements

Core Elements	Definitions	Markers	Examples
(a) Conditional	Time and conditions required to elicit some action	when, if, and whether	When the communities, businesses, and individuals that we serve need stability, our company’s strengths shine brightest. (American Financial Group)
(b) Incentive	Reasons for the action or positive attitudes toward the goals	because	We must reinvent because the world is changing around us at an accelerated pace. (Allstate) We have revised our management philosophy because of the milestone of the stock listing and the 100th anniversary of the birth of simplified life insurance. (Japan Post Insurance)
(c) Positive attitude	Positive attitudes toward the goals of the corporation without stating the implication of the specific action	be committed to, commitment, dedicate, modal verb (e.g., must, can), <i>koukenshi-masu</i> (“contribute”)	We will respond to the trust of our customers, shareholders, and employees and contribute to the realization of a prosperous society. (Mitsubishi UFJ Lease & Finance) Dedicate ourselves to making a meaningful impact with our clients and in our communities. (CBRE Group)
(d) Self-reference	Self-definition indicating what the corporation is	as, we are, <i>toshite</i> (“as”)	As a “lifelong partner” for customers and their important people. (Dai-ichi Life Group) A pioneer in specialized financial services. (INTL FCStone)
(e) Foundation	Foundation for suggesting the corporation’s actions or goals	be guided by, <i>ni-oujite</i> (“respond to”)	Respond to the trust of customers, shareholders, and employees. (Mitsubishi UFJ Lease & Finance) We’re guided by our culture and a set of principles. (Blackrock)
(f) Goal	Aim of the corporation	to, <i>ni koken-suru</i> (“contribute to”)	Goldman Sachs brings people, capital, and ideas together to help our clients and the communities we serve. (Goldman Sachs) Support corporate activities through the leasing business and contribute to the development of society. (Fuyo Lease Group)
(g) Action	What the corporation does	provide, deliver, <i>teikyo-suru</i> (“provide”)	Meet the expectations of shareholders. (Sumitomo Mitsui Trust Holdings) Deliver market-leading financial returns to our investment partners. (CBRE Group)
(h) Method	Plan for achieving the goals	by, through, <i>tsujite</i> (“through”)	Contribute to the development of local communities and society through corporate activities that comply with laws and consider the environment. (Mitsubishi UFJ Lease & Finance) We will win through differentiation. (Allstate)

In (1), MS & AD Insurance includes four constituents in a sentence. The corporation attempts to provide stakeholders relief and security through its global projects. This method and action are grounded on the goals of social development and contribution to the bright future of the Earth. The verb *sasae-masu* shows that the corporation places high value on the goal, although it does not indicate the specific action for achieving it.

The U.S. mission statement below also includes the core elements seen in the Japanese example. Discover Financial Service's goals are helping stakeholders achieve a brighter financial future; to achieve this goal, the corporation states what they should do.

(2) Our mission is [to help people spend smarter, manage debt better and save more action/method] [so they achieve a brighter financial future goal]. (Discover Financial Service)

As these examples show, the U.S. and Japanese mission statements employed similar patterns of constituents and tended to associate (c) positive attitude with the (f) goal and combine (g) action with (h) method.

5.2 Differences between the U.S. and Japanese mission statements

This section indicates what components are emphasized in each core element and investigates whether differences exist between the U.S. and Japanese mission statements. This section focuses on the following contents: the (f) goal, (g) action, and (h) method. These three components can be observed most in both countries in detail.

First, for (f) goal, the U.S. corporations tended to maintain that they would like to respond to the desires of their stakeholders, and they described what they wanted the stakeholders to become and what the corporations could do. Some examples of these tendencies include the following statements: “help clients better manage risk” (AIG), “help individuals protect their financial futures” (American Financial Group), “help people take ownership of their financial futures” (Charles Schwab), and “deliver an exceptional experience for clients” (Cushman & Wakefield). Although Japanese corporations were concerned about meeting stakeholders' expectations, they did not explicitly describe what they could do to accomplish the stakeholders' desires, unlike the American corporations. As seen in the following sentences, the Japanese corporations seemed to believe that being highly assessed or trusted by stakeholders (e.g., customers,

community, and society) was necessary: “services that meet customer expectations” (Japan Post Bank), “products and services that customers enjoy” (Sony Financial Holdings), “companies evaluated by shareholders and markets” (Fuyo Lease Group), “meet shareholders’ expectations” (Sumitomo Mitsui Trust Holdings), “contribute to society: (Sony Financial Holdings and SOMPO Holdings), and “realization of a prosperous society” (Mitsubishi UFJ Lease & Finance).

Second, the same differences seen between the corporations’ (f) goal statements were seen in the statements of (g) action. The corporations of both countries explained what products they could provide based on their characteristics. The U.S. corporations tended to maintain how their products specifically functioned for clients, such as “providing insurance solutions that allow our customers to better manage their risks and grow profitably” (CNA) and “providing differentiated products and services to help them achieve their aspirations” (American Express). In contrast, Japanese corporations seemed to avoid stating particular actions (e.g., “provide total solutions quickly for customers” [Sumitomo Mitsui Trust Holdings], “provide even more valuable services to customers” [Sumitomo Mitsui Financial Group], “appreciate employees’ sincere attitudes” [e.g., take the voice of each customer sincerely; Sony Financial Holdings], and “sincerely face customers” [Mitsubishi UFJ]). This tendency in the Japanese mission statements could be observed especially in sentences or phrases associating (f) goal or (g) action with (e) foundation, such as “meet customer’s trust” (Risona Group) and “respond to shareholder’s mandate” (Tokyo Marine Holdings).

Finally, how the corporations enacted their actions or achieved their goals was also crucial to the statements. When the corporations explained their (h) methods, they showed how attractive their products or activities were. However, what aspects were emphasized varied depending on country. The U.S. corporations tended to stress their distinctiveness or differences from competitors, such as “through differentiation” (Allstate), “through our best in class retirement services” (Principal Financial Services), and “with a comprehensive range of customized financial services and tools” (INTL FCStone). In contrast, Japanese corporations emphasized environmental consciousness and desirable attitudes in their business, such as “through environmentally friendly corporate activities” (Mitsubishi UFJ Lease & Finance) and “through sound business development” (Daiwa Securities Group).

These differences in mission statements seen between the two countries indicated what elements were preferred changes within the business or the cultural background of both countries when the corporations attempted to orient readers, including employees and stakeholders, toward a common direction. Despite the components of the statements not being very different, the U.S. corporations stressed what they could help clients do in the goals or actions and in method (the distinctiveness or supremacy of their products), while the Japanese corporations focused on evaluations from stakeholders of their actions or goals and their attitudes toward their performance in method.

6. Conclusion

The recent amendment of the courses of study of foreign languages encouraged students to learn the target language by relating it with Japanese as the native language. Otsu (2020) maintained that employing the native language in English education allows students to notice the general features of language, thereby helping them use English creatively in any situation. The educational guidelines adopting the approach based on plurilingualism indicated that comprehending the differences or similarities between English and Japanese is crucial at various levels, ranging from sound, rhythm, and vocabulary to argument structure. Using mission statements, this paper argued that even if the same constituent elements exist (e.g., goal, action, and method), what aspects they highlight in each element differs by culture. Furthermore, it demonstrated that the approach of learning a foreign language with the native language can be applied to understanding not only architectural differences or similarities but also preferences of the contents in such frameworks.

However, these results may not be the same in the real world, as this paper used the very specialized genre of corporate discourse, particularly mission statements. Thus, the data were not enough to prove cultural tendency. The paper's abstractness and availability as public discourse, however, will help students notice the differences and similarities between the two languages, allowing them to compare the languages more easily. Hopefully, this paper will contribute to the methodologies of English education grounded in plurilingualism, which enable people to use several languages creatively through meticulous observation of foreign languages with the native language.

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