

働く女性と英語

—ビジネス雑誌表紙の分析から—

Women and English in the Japanese Workplace: How English and English Study are Illustrated in Japanese Women's Business Magazine Covers

森住 史 MORIZUMI, Fumi

- 成蹊大学, 国際基督教大学教育研究所
Seikei University / Institute for Educational Research and Service, International Christian University

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ABSTRACT

女性を対象にしたビジネス雑誌2誌の表紙から、英語あるいは英語学習に関する特集の記事について記載があったものを選び、その記事の重要度や英語・英語学習の位置付けや意味付けのディスコースについて分析した。対象の2誌は、ターゲットとする読者層が異なるために、英語学習をどう捉えるかについて異なったプレゼンテーションをしていた一方で、英語学習は教養の一環でありより良い自分になるための手段なのである、というディスコースが共通に展開されていた。これは、TOEIC 攻略法や英語ができないと生き残れないと脅すディスコースが幅を効かせる一般ビジネス誌との大きな違いである。このことは、日本人女性と男性との間の、英語や英語学習に対する態度の違いの現れであるとともに、女性と男性とでは職場での地位や機会がいまだに異なっていることを示唆するものであろうと考えられる。

This paper analyzes the cover pages of two Japanese business magazines targeting women which mention English or English study, paying attention to the importance of the topic itself and to the discourse presented by the magazines regarding the significance of English study for their readers. The two magazines target different audiences: one, younger, rank-and-file office workers in their 20s and early 30s; the other, more mature women on their managerial career track in their 30s and 40s. However, they both present English and

English study as something that will help these workers better themselves, both professionally but also in terms of becoming more ‘cultured’ individuals. Any mention of TOEIC is kept to a minimum, and there is also no discourse of threat that urges them to study English (or else!), which is in contrast to the prevailing discourse in business magazines with a predominantly male readership. It is argued that these differences possibly reflect the differences between women’s and men’s attitudes towards English and the studying of English as well as different positions and different career paths which women and men find available to them in their respective working environments.

1. English language and career in Japan

Since the turn of century, there has been a series of proposals and changes initiated by Japan’s Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) to the Japanese English education system. These reforms have been carried out in response to requests from the business world (Kubota, 2018), which has been under pressure to keep pace with globalization. Some companies, such as Uniqlo, the apparel company, and Rakuten, the online shopping mall which now also offers banking and insurance services, have gone so far as to adopt English as their official in-house language.

Such moves have contributed to creating a popular belief among many Japanese people that they need to speak English in order to get and keep a job. This belief is underscored by specially-featured topics in business magazines such as *Weekly Diamond*, *Weekly Toyo Keizai*, *Nikkei Business* and *President*, which exploit the discourse of threat, essentially telling their readers that unless they have a certain TOEIC scores or are able to speak English in business, they will not be able to survive (Morizumi, 2019). Whether such discourse reflects Japan’s reality or not is another matter. In fact, research conducted by Terasawa (2015) seems to suggest otherwise. However, that is the popular discourse provided by the four best-selling business magazines in Japan, and as such, it is likely one of the common beliefs shared by many Japanese people.

1.1 The aim of the research

The magazines listed above, however, mainly target men, not women. As the number of women in workplace has increased, some publishers are now publishing magazines targeting working women. Two of the magazines mentioned above, *Nikkei Business* and *President*, have alternative versions targeting women, *Nikkei Woman* and *President Woman Premier*, respectively. This paper analyzes the cover pages of these two magazines, paying specific attention to their featured topics where they deal with English and/or English study. The questions addressed are as follows: (1) How is English or English study represented? (2) According to the magazines, what is the significance of acquiring English language skills for Japanese working women? Answers to these questions are expected to help understand the current situation in which women are placed in Japanese workplace.

1.2 Research method

All the cover pages of *Nikkei Woman* from January 2010, as well as those of *President Woman/President Woman Premier* (the magazine changed its name in 2019) from November 2014, are checked, and if there is any mention –however small– of English or English learning is identified, it will be analyzed for its impact and importance (how large the English-related topic is, in comparison to other featured topics) as well as for its message.

January 2010 is when Mikitani, CEO of Rakuten, a Japanese e-commerce company, announced the company’s adoption of English as their official language, or its lingua franca. It caused a sensation,

and it is considered to have had a major impact on publishers' choices of their featured articles from then onwards. *Nikkei Woman* was first published in 1988, so their magazine covers from 1988 to 2009 are not included in this study. As for *President Woman Premier*, it was first published in 2014 as *President Woman*, so all the volumes that have so far been published are checked.

When English or English study is mentioned in a featured article, the whole description – however long and complicated or short and brief – will be presented in the table, both in the original Japanese and in its English translation provided by the author. The translation may often sound awkward because the author tries to remain faithful to the original Japanese.

2. *Nikkei Woman*

Nikkei Woman is one of the oldest magazines serving the needs of working women. It was first published in 1988. It is a monthly magazine published by Nikkei Business Publications, which also publishes *Nikkei Business*, a weekly magazine with a predominantly male readership. About 60% of *Nikken Woman* readers are full-time office workers, the majority being women aged between 25 and 35 (Dainichi, n.d.).

2.1 Featured articles on the cover

A total of nine issues between January 2010 and August 2019 mention English or English study on the cover. The cover pages usually highlight three featured articles, and the importance, or the length of the actual article inside, is visible in terms of the space allocated to the description of each featured article: the description for the main feature, or featured article number one, is the largest, accounting for approximately 30-35% of the whole cover page, while featured article number two usually takes up 5-10% of the cover, and featured article number three occupies a mere 3% or so.

While it may appear as if several covers dedicate a

large space to the topic of English study, there was actually only one issue that featured English study as their largest topic (May 7, 2015, Table 1). The largest letters in the title were 私を変える! 日本一の「英語」の学び方 (*watashi o kaeru! nihon ichi no eigo no manabikata*), or “This will change me! The easiest way in Japan to study English”. Then in much smaller letters, explanations on some of the study methods are presented, including one that mentioned Atsuko Maeda, a former singer/actor member of the hugely popular group, AKB48. How to achieve high TOEIC scores, which is often one of the most popular topics in Japan's English study context, gets a small mention three lines below Maeda's remarks.

The issues published on August 7, 2012, March 7, 2018, and September 7, 2018 (Table 1) all mention English study in the larger context of different kinds of study in general. For example, TOEIC gets a very small mention in the August 7, 2012, issue. The largest feature in this issue discusses studying for qualifications and taking up different lessons that may help women in their careers, such as bookkeeping, but it also includes more popular pastimes such as how to perform a tea ceremony, play musical instruments, and even how to dance flamenco. Preparing for TOEIC is mentioned alongside, which may make it seem like just one of the lessons any cultured and fun-loving women should be taking.

Similar patterns emerge in the other two issues. In the March 7, 2018 issue, number one feature article concerns how to make good use of small pockets of time. Studying English is only a small part of it, receiving no more weight than other subtopics such as how to make use of Instagram to run a side business or to gather information on financial tips to increase income.

The September 7, 2018 issue again mentions TOEIC but in very small letters, and it is placed at the bottom of the cover page, as a sub-part of the main feature article on how to change life through study. The expression used in the original Japanese is キラキラ

Table 1 The Largest Special Feature Mentioning English and/or English Study on Nikkei Woman's Cover

Issue	Japanese title	English translation
August 7, 2012	0円からOK! 楽しく学んで毎日充実 一生役立つ! 資格と習いごと 産んでも働ける, 職場で必要とされる… あなたを助ける一生モノの資格はこれだ! FP, 簿記, 社労士, etc. 働きながら資格を取った女性たちの”すき間”勉強法 集中力&記憶力アップ! 脳に効く生活習慣 / 0円からできる TOEIC 対策 茶道, 楽器, 空手からフラメンコまで! 習い事で毎日が充実の女性たち	You can start with a zero-yen capital! Have fun learning and your every day will be fulfilled These certificates and lessons will help you throughout your life! These are life-long certificates that will help you keep your job after you become a mother! Financial planning, bookkeeping, Labor and Social Security Attorney, etc.: This is how these women obtained those certificates while working How to improve your concentration and memory: Life style choices that are good for your brain/ How to tackle TOEIC with as little money as zero yen Tea ceremony, musical instruments, karate, flamenco – these women are enjoying their life with their lessons!
May 7, 2015	脱・英語コンプレックス 私を変える! 日本一やさしい「英語」の学び方 前田敦子さん「英会話, 勇気とスマホが鍵でした」 オンライン英会話, NHK 講座, アプリ, マンガ…1日5分 あなたにピッタリの学習メニュー 「ハウ・アー・ユー」「ファイト!」いつもの英語 実はちょっと変! 1ヶ月で100点上がる! TOEIC 満点チーム伝授の「スコアアップ勉強法」	No more English complex This will change me! The easiest way in Japan to study English Atsuko Maeda: “Courage and a smartphone played a key to my English conversation study” Online English conversation sites, NHK lessons, smartphone applications, manga – the best study menu for you that takes only 5 minutes “How are you?” “Fight!” These common phrases actually used in the wrong way Study one month and your score will improve by 100 points! These people who have scored the maximum marks in TOEIC will teach you how to improve your score
March 7, 2018	お金, 英語, 教養, 副業 人生が9割うまくいく! すきま時間の新習慣 100 貯蓄1000万円女子のお金の情報収集24時間 話せない…を卒業! すきま時間のゼロ円英語勉強法 インスタで人生が変わった! パラレルキャリアのリアル 大江麻里子さんの聞く力, はあちゅうさんの SNS 活用術	Money, English, culture, side business They will make 90 % of your life successful! How to study during your ‘pockets of time’: 100 new habits How a woman with an annual income of 10 million yen gathers information about financing No more ‘I can’t speak English’...! Study methods that cost you zero yen Instagram changed my life! The reality of having two careers Mariko Oe’s ability to listen, Haachuu’s use of SNS
September 7, 2018	語学力で五輪ボランティア ITスキルで年収アップ FP資格で貯まる家計に 今「大人の学び」でキラキラしている人が増殖中! 新時代の人生を変える勉強法大作戦 池上彰さん&増田ユリヤさんのリアル勉強習慣 勉強にハマってる人の24時間&習慣化できた理由 TOEIC900点以上取った人の意外な必勝テク ワクワクしながら脳が成長する! 大人の正しい勉強法	How to work as a volunteer for the Olympic Games applying your language skills Increase your annual income by obtaining IT skills Become a certified financial planner and increase your household savings People are becoming more attractive because they are studying what mature people should study! Operation ‘Study’: this will change your life in the new era! Study habits of Akira Ikegami & Yuriya Masuda How to successfully make studying your habit: This is how they’ve done it and their 24 hours Unexpected study techniques by those who scored more than 900 points in TOEIC Your brain will be excited and developed! This is how adults should study

Note. Bold fonts are applied to the words which appear very large in proportion to the rest.

してる (*kirakira-shiteru*). This could be translated as ‘attractive and charming’, but its literal meaning is ‘shining’ or ‘sparkling’, which is a colloquial expression favored by women to describe someone – usually a woman rather than a man, as in *kirakira-joshi*, or *kirakira-girl* - who seemingly lives a very glamorous life full of excitement and joy.

The other times when English or English study is mentioned is when it is treated as the second- or third-featured article, not the first (see Table 2). In each case the space dedicated to the featured article on the cover page was at best five percent.

2.2 Why study English?

Generally speaking, studying English does not appear to be very important to *Nikkei Woman* readers. When it matters, it is more as one of several means through which they might change who they are or change some aspects of their lives. In other words, it is more about becoming a more ideal, *kirakira* version of themselves. Interestingly, at the very bottom of the

cover page of the January 7, 2010 issue (Table 2), it states, “This one-week program will change you: English literature training”. What this represents is the notion that English study, or even exposing themselves to English literature, will transform women into a more ideal self. Reading literary works sounds a roundabout way to acquire English for the cut-throat, business-oriented environment, but it is presented as a more attractive study method than ploughing one’s way through a series of tedious TOEIC practice books. TOEIC does get a mention, but it does not take center stage, suggesting that it is probably not a very attractive topic for the female readership. Getting better TOEIC scores does not seem to be the main reason why women want to study English, or at least that is not what the magazine implies on their covers. If we assume that the magazine editors know what their readers want, we might conclude that many women prefer to think that they are studying English in order to become closer to a more ideal self, a more cultured and sophisticated self; their TOEIC score

Table 2 *The Second and the Third Largest Special Feature Mentioning English and/or English Study on Nikkei Woman’s Cover*

Issue	Japanese title	English translation
January 7, 2010	自分を変える！一週間プログラム 英文学トレーニング	This one-week program changes you: English literature training
August 7, 2010	0円からOK! 秋から始める 学びと資格 TOEIC, FP, 簿記 お金をかけない勉強法	You can study with zero-yen capital Starting from this autumn Studies and qualifications TOEIC, financial planning, bookkeeping How to study without spending money
August 7, 2011	TOEIC900点も 夢じゃない！ 必ず続く！ やり直し 英語術	Getting 900 points in TOEIC is no longer a dream! You won’t have to give up! How to start over your English study
August 7, 2014	困った時こそ 中学英語でなんとかなる！ 非ネイティブ外資系女子が教える 簡単だけど使えるフレーズ カリスマ通訳者が伝授！こなれ会話術 突然「英語公用語化」企業の女性がやって いる㊦勉強	In a pinch Junior high English helps you! Non-native English speaker who works for a foreign-affiliated firm will teach you simple but useful phrases Star interpreter gives you tips! How to make sophisticated conversation Secret study methods of a woman who works for a company which suddenly decided to use English as its official language

Note. Bold fonts are applied to the words which appear very large in proportion to the rest.

comes a distant second.

3. *President Woman/President Woman Premier*

President Woman was first published in 2014, and after two pilot issues, it became a regular monthly magazine in June 2015. Four years later, in 2019, it became a quarterly magazine and was renamed *President Woman Premier*. It is published by President, a publisher which also publishes *President*, one of the best-selling business magazines in Japan. *President Woman Premier* targets women in their 30s and 40s. More than 85% of its readership are in full time employment, with over 45% in management positions (San-an, n. d.).

3.1 Featured articles on the cover

Since its first issue, *President Woman/President Woman Premier* has published four volumes that present English and/or English study as one of their major featured articles on the cover. The cover pages usually highlight one very large feature article along with several smaller features, and the importance, or the length of the actual article inside, is again visible in terms of the size of the description of each featured article occupies: the description for the main feature,

or featured article number one, is the largest, accounting for approximately 20% of the whole cover page, while the other smaller articles takes up 2 to 3% of the cover page or less.

Table 3 includes two main features that mention English. Only one cover allocates its largest space solely to English and English study (*President Woman*, Volume 7, published on October 7, 2015). Volume 18, published on September 7, 2016, also mentions English in its major feature article, but English is presented along with other ‘qualifications’ considered helpful to the advancement of their careers, as in 資格 & 英語 (*shikaku to eigo*), or qualifications and English skills.

The other two issues mention English study but dedicate less than two to five percent of the available space on their cover page (Table 3). The printed letters are very small and can be missed unless one looks at the covers very carefully. In addition, English study mentioned in the October 6, 2018 issue is only part of the issue’s major article, 大人の教養 本と映画ガイド (*otona to kyoyou: hon to eiga gaido*), or “cultural education for adults: your guide to books and films”.

3.2 *President Woman/President Woman Premier* readership and English study

The overall design of the cover of *President Woman*

Table 3 *Special Features Mentioning English and/or English Study on President Woman’s Cover*

Issue	Japanese title	English translation
October 7, 2015	楽に楽しくペラペラに ときめく英語 最先端の学び方	You can become fluent in English with ease and fun English that sparkles Cutting edge study methods
September 7, 2016	キャリアアップ, 転職, 復職に有利 最強の 資格&英語 2016	These will help you with advancing your career, changing jobs, getting back to work: The most powerful qualifications and English skills 2016
July 7, 2017	夏の英語力アップ作戦	Plans to improve your English during summer
October 6, 2018	洋書と洋画で英語を楽しく学ぶ	Enjoy studying English: reading English books and watching American/British films

Note. Bold fonts are applied to the words which appear very large in proportion to the rest. The October 7, 2015 issue and September 7, 2016 issue represent the largest features. Topics that appear in issues October 7, 2016 and July 7, 2017 are much smaller articles compared to the major feature articles.

is much simpler than that of *Nikkei Woman*. There is more white space, or space left without any letters, whereas *Nikken Woman*'s cover is full of printed letters. When *President Woman*'s cover presents English study as its main featured article, as it does in the October 7, 2015, issue for example, it does so by using a large, bold font as well as by applying a different color to the phrase, *ときめく英語 (tokimeku eigo)*, or 'English that will spark joy', ensuring that those words will stand out.

One of the characteristics of the discourse provided by *President Woman* is the lack of any mention of TOEIC. Since most of the readers are on the management career track, many of them will be taking TOEIC exams with the aim of attaining a score, which is customary in Japan's business world. However, none of the issues that feature English and English study mentions anything about TOEIC target scores or how to study to improve scores. When business magazines tend to focus on providing practical tips, this may appear surprising. English, for *President Woman* readers, is presented as something that is supposed to spark joy in their life, and English study as something they can enjoy as they read books and watch films in order to educate and improve themselves. It promotes the notion that studying English anyhow and everyhow simply to achieve a better TOEIC score and beat their rivals is not really what the readers are interested in.

4. Comparison of the two magazines

4.1 Differences

While *Nikkei Woman* and *President Woman/President Woman Premier* both target working women, there are some differences to the cover designs and the way in which English-related contents are presented. Firstly as already mentioned, the cover pages of *President Woman* are much simpler, with fewer letters, and as a result, the overall look is more sophisticated than the covers of *Nikkei Woman*. *Nikkei Woman*'s featured articles are described in far more detail, with

more words and more letters.

Secondly, there was no mention of TOEIC on the four covers of *President Woman* as opposed to five mentions on the nine covers of *Nikkei Woman*. Thirdly, on three occasions, the catchy idea *Nikkei Women* used to attract readers was that they could study English without paying any extra money, or zero-yen. Furthermore, in *Nikkei Woman*, English language study is often presented as one of a number of womanly pastimes on a par with tea ceremony and flamenco dancing, which suggests that English study may be just that – a hobby – for its readership. English language learning for *Nikkei Women* readers is presented as a fun activity to enrich their lives at a small cost.

These differences may be explained by the different readership. *Nikkei Woman* targets women aged 25-35, while *President Woman/President Woman Premier* targets those in their 30s and 40s. *President Woman/President Woman Premier* readers are likely to hold more prestigious positions than their younger counterparts, and they are also likely to be wealthier. As such, the cover designs for *President Woman* - currently published as *President Woman Premier* - take on a more sophisticated look that will appeal to a more sophisticated readership; they do not have to mention how little it costs to study English. If the idea of studying for TOEIC is too banal for *Nikkei Woman* readers, it will be all the more so for *President Woman/President Woman Premier* readers.

4.2 Similarities

While *Nikkei Woman* and *President Woman* have different looks on their covers, there are some similarities to the way they present English and/or English study to their readers.

First of all, acquiring English language skills is presented alongside with acquiring other skills and qualifications that will help them with their career, such as bookkeeping. Second, there is an emphasis to enjoy studying English.

What is more interesting, though, is the use of words such as キラキラ (*kirakira*) (*Nikkei Woman*, September 7, 2018) and ときめく (*tokimeku*) (*President Woman*, October 7, 2015). When something or someone is *kirakira*, it means that the person or the object is so attractive and charming that they seem to sparkle, while *tokimeku* refers to the feeling when you are charmed and your heart will beat a little faster. It is not usual to associate these terms with study in general, implying that studying English, for many women, is different from studying, say, mathematics or educational psychology. In other words, women may find the idea of studying English attractive, charming, and even seductive and glamorous. In comparison, the author's earlier study on the analysis of four major business magazine covers did not find this type of discourse (2019), which suggests possible gender differences.

5. Discussion and conclusion: Representation of English and/or English study and its significance to Japanese working women

English, or English study, on the covers of the two magazines targeting working women is presented as something that will enrich their lives both in their personal and professional spheres. In a similar argument to the common discourse that English language skills are an asset to office workers, the two magazines also include English language skills in a useful skillset. There are differences, however, between studying English and studying for other business-related qualifications: studying English should be an enjoyable activity which can help change the readers as individuals so they can become more 'cultured' and 'attractive'. The emphasis on English study as a way to educate themselves and become closer to their more ideal selves is evident in the words used such as *kirakira* and *tokimeku*, as opposed to the lack of emphasis on more pragmatic aspects such as improving TOEIC scores, while TOEIC is usually the

most talked-about English-related topic in business magazines with a predominantly male readership.

The above characteristics found in the magazine cover discourse resonates with a general tendency among Japanese women to have *akogare*, or desire, for English and possibly the West, as described by Piller and Takahashi (2006). Additionally, the lack of urgency, or threat, in their attitudes to English study may imply Japanese women's relatively peripheral position in the current workplace. If they had the same opportunities as their male counterparts and were vying for the same positions, they might not be so relaxed in their attitudes to studying English: they could be just as serious about getting high TOEIC scores and might choose more pragmatic study methods rather than watching Hollywood films or reading Jane Austen.

Overall, studying English seems to be presented as a lifestyle choice for women, and by extension, work and career building appear to be equally just a matter of lifestyle choice. While it has been more than thirty years since the Equal Employment Opportunity Act came into effect, business magazine covers imply that the workplace represents very different kinds of landscape for women and men.

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