Editorial:

The Value of Publishing in English

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In editing this issue of Educational Studies in Japan (ESJ), we encountered a pleasant novelty which could be interpreted as an indication of a larger trend: we received many unsolicited papers. Previous issues of the ESJ basically relied on invited papers. Special issues and invited papers are still important for the ESJ to retain its distinctive flavor, but unsolicited papers will be equally important for the ESJ in the future.

The increase in unsolicited papers for the ESJ is all the more remarkable when we observe the fact that the number of unsolicited submissions is rather stagnant for our Japanese journal, Kyoikugaku Kenkyu (Japanese Journal of Educational Research). It might be concluded, then, that the value of publishing in English is gradually but profoundly gaining recognition. More and more, English seems to be considered the *lingua franca* even in educational studies, a field closely related to the nation’s education system.

The merit of publishing in English instead of Japanese is obvious. Research findings which have heretofore only been available in the Japanese language can be made accessible to the academic community throughout the world. Since the third issue of this journal, we have selected one paper published in Kyoikugaku Kenkyu and translated it into English. Ikuo Amano’s paper on the higher education system in Japan is such an article in this issue. The special issue “Educational Studies in Japan: Present State and Challenges,” continued from the previous issue, should make investigations, almost all of which were solely in Japanese, accessible to non-Japanese.

The age of globalized educational studies may have already dawned. Borderless communication in educational studies indeed seems to be underway. However positive this may seem to be, we nevertheless should be aware of the following possible inevitable consequence of globalization: a tendency “toward universal standardization of the world,” as Christoph Wulf rightly notes in his essay in this

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issue. There emerges in fact the risk of reducing cultural plurality in educational studies and thus standardizing thinking about education.

Paul Standish, a British philosopher of education, sees in the hegemony of English the danger of the “vehicularization” of language. The “vehicularization” of language obscures “the abyssal nature of language,” which should especially be experienced in the act of translation, and thus excludes the possible experience of difference (P. Standish, “One Language, One World: The Common Measure of Education,” Philosophy of Education Yearbook 2010 [forthcoming]).

Let us take a prominent example: the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) conducted by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. One astonishing point of PISA is that it provides standardized outcomes of international comparisons not only in the areas of mathematics and natural sciences, but also in the area of reading literacy. Constitutive parts of the tasks for assessing reading literacy are written in the natural languages. The tasks are represented—by virtue of translation—in various languages. But translation always is transformation. How can we assume that the implications of the tasks in the various languages are identical? Such fundamental questions were raised, but were not taken seriously; what counted was standardized outcomes and their implications for educational policy. It should, however, have been possible not to use the assessment for standardizing the concept of literacy, but to use it as an opportunity for making us more sensitive to cultural or social differences in the concept of literacy. We may consider comparing writing literacy in order to imagine how different the concept of literacy could be.

In his famous essay “Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers (The Task of the Translator),” Walter Benjamin invented an excellent metaphor to express his concept of translation: “Fragments of a vessel that are to be glued together must match one another in the smallest details, although they need not be like one another” (W. Benjamin, Selected Writings, vol. 1, Harvard University Press 1996, p. 260). In the area of educational studies, too, what is transformed in English presumably is different from what originally is discussed in Japanese, like two fragments adjacent to each other. Publishing in English does not lead to “universal standardization” if we understand the implications of the supposition that translation always is transformation, as in the Benjaminian image—this image itself already transformed through English translation from the German text.

Publishing in English can be considered a contribution to a forum where the different semantics of education interact and respect one another, in the hope that together they are exploring the whole domain (the whole vessel) of the semantics of education. It will be increasingly important for the ESJ to introduce differences and diversities into the semantics of education in the future.