

Raising Consciousness/Awareness of SDGs through English and Liberal Arts Courses

Saeko Urushibara
(Center for Fundamental Education)

Abstract

The purpose of this article is two-fold. First, after the brief overview of the emergence of the concepts and actions of “the Education for Sustainable Development” and “Sustainable Development Goals,” the approach and measures taken by the University of Kitakyushu to achieve Sustainable Development Goals are critically reviewed. Second, some of the in-class practices by the author to raise consciousness/awareness of such goals, gender equality and diversity in particular, are described.

KEYWORDS

Sustainable Development Goals, Education for Sustainable Development,
Political Correctness, Degendering, Surname

1. Background

1.1. Initiatives by the United Nations (UN)

The world has been facing serious problems with regard to environment, poverty, human rights, peace, and development, among many others. In order to cope with these problems as well as to create future generations that will responsibly solve them with new mindsets and values, it is of utmost emergency and importance to raise consciousness and awareness of these problems through education. The importance of education had already been recognized at the UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), also known as “the Earth Summit” held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in 1992. After the summit, UNESCO led continuous discussion at the UN Committee on Sustainable Development, and during the negotiation and adjustment procedures

for “the World Summit on Sustainable Development” held in Johannesburg in 2002, the Japanese government made a concrete proposal for the global action plans for sustainable development. This resulted in a recommendation to the UN general assembly to consider adopting “the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014)(DESD) .” Eventually, a resolution on the Decade was proposed in the 57th General Assembly by Japan and 47 other developed and developing countries, and was adopted unanimously.

1.2. Education for Sustainable Development (ESD)

In order to strengthen the above-mentioned resolution, Japan submitted subsequential resolutions to the 58th and 59th General Assemblies, with 45 and 34 co-sponsored countries, respectively. Both resolutions were again adopted unanimously. These resolutions designated UNESCO as the organization responsible for the implementation of ESD. Accordingly, UNESCO specified the global action plans for ESD, which was approved of in September 2005.

In 2009, the middle year of DESD, UNESCO World Conference for ESD was held in Bonn, Germany. In the conference, the practices and attempts made in the first half of DESD as well as exchange of opinions on actions in its second half were reviewed.

It was followed by another UNESCO World Conference for ESD held in Okayama and Nagoya, Japan in November 2014. The conference evaluated the outcome of DESD and discussed how to implement ESD after the Decade from various points of view. It also made a proposal for “the Global Action Plan (GAP)” as a successor of DESD. This was to develop into establishment of Sustainable Development Goals.

1.3. Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

Before the establishment of ESD, there had been discussion at various international conferences and summits during the 1990s with respect to the serious problems that developing countries were faced with. The goals aimed at that period were labeled as “the International Development Goals (IDGs).”

Then, at the dawn of the 21st century, the UN Millennium Summit was held in New York in September 2000, in which “the Millennium Declaration” was adopted by 189 countries. The declaration integrated IDGs and set out “the Millennium Development Goals (henceforth MDGs)” for the years 2001 through 2015. They are as follows, accompanied by 21 targets and 60 indices:

- (1) MDG1 To eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
- MDG2 To achieve universal primary education
- MDG3 To promote gender equality and empower women
- MDG4 To reduce child mortality
- MDG5 To improve maternal health
- MDG6 To combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases
- MDG7 To ensure environmental sustainability
- MDG8 To develop a global partnership for development

The UN aimed at achieving MDGs by 2015. Yet, while there are some goals that have been nearly achieved, many goals are left with unattained indices.

1.4. Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Their Shortcomings

Meanwhile, as DESD came to its end in 2015, the spirit of the project was taken over to its next stage, namely, “Sustainable Development Goals (henceforth SDGs).” At the UN Sustainable Development Summit held in New York in September 2015, “the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (the 2030 Agenda)” was adopted. In this agenda, SDGs are listed as a successor of MDGs: they incorporated the aforementioned eight MDGs, targeting seventeen goals associated with 169 targets and 232 relevant indices. The seventeen SDGs are listed in (2):

- (2) SDG1 No Poverty
- SDG2 Zero Hunger
- SDG3 Good Health and Well-being
- SDG4 Quality Education
- SDG5 Gender Equality
- SDG6 Clean Water and Sanitation
- SDG7 Affordable and Clean Energy
- SDG8 Decent Work and Economic Growth
- SDG9 Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure
- SDG10 Reduced Inequalities
- SDG11 Sustainable Cities and Communities
- SDG12 Responsible Consumption and Production
- SDG13 Climate Action
- SDG14 Life below Water
- SDG15 Life on Land
- SDG16 Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions
- SDG17 Partnerships for the Goals

The increase in number of goals, targets and indices reflects the fact that while MDGs were

concerned with the problems and tasks in developing countries, SDGs involves those regarding developed countries in addition. The problems with this aspect will be discussed in 1.4.1.

However, as pointed out by Matsushita (2014), the notion of “Sustainable Development” itself has evolved as a product of compromise between politics and economy. Therefore, the definitions of these goals and the ranges that they cover are quite vague.

Moreover, it seems to me that even though the goals sound right enough, they overlook and/or hide the essential properties of development in the capitalist societies, namely, development itself is greedy in nature. It is precisely because the majority of the problems that SDGs are trying to solve have their roots in the period after the Industrial Revolution and the subsequent colonialism in order to secure materials, labor and consumption. It is therefore only natural that SDGs and related agenda should be repeatedly criticized by developing countries in Africa and Central and South Americas, even as UN has disparities between developed and developing countries in mind. Thus, unless the neo-liberalistic capitalist economy reflects over virtue and empathy as mentioned in Smith (1759/2013) (cf. Chomsky (2015)), these goals are hard to attain.

1.4.1. Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Their Relationship with SDGs

As discussed in the previous section, MDGs have been incorporated in SDGs. Yet there are a considerable number of criticisms about their inclusion. One of them comes from Shirai (2018), who makes a structural comparison between MDGs and SDGs and points out the following shortcomings. First, the targets in SDGs do not match the problems and issues within domestic regions. According to Shirai, it is because the main purpose of SDGs is to resolve disparities between developed and developing countries. In doing so, they do not target regional problems and/or disparities within developed countries. Nor do they have in their scope the problems inherent in developed countries.

Second, the majority of targets do not assume regional issues in developed countries, even as some targets can be reinterpreted as those for agricultural areas.

Finally, there is a fundamental difference between developed and developing countries in the stage of social and economic development¹. Developed countries are faced with the tasks of the second stage reflexive modernization in the course of evolving into the matured and shrunk society. On the other hand, the issues surrounding developing countries are those of growth and

¹ This difference is indeed implied by the very designation of *developed* and *developing* countries.

expansion, which can be specified as the first stage. However, SDGs are not equipped with the framework that can capture the second stage of modernization. This means that these targets are inadequate for developed countries including Japan.

1.5. Japanese Government's Attempts to promote ESD and SDGs

The Japanese government strives to promote ESD and SDGs through various channels, political platforms, economic and industrial sectors, and academic and educational sectors. After the adoption of “the Agenda 2030” and SDGs at the UN Sustainable Development Summit in 2015, the government established “SDGs Promotion Headquarters” in May 2016 in order to achieve the SDGs effectively. It is headed by Prime Minister to ensure a whole-of-government approach in order to take a lead in implementing SDGs both domestically and internationally. Discussion of enhancement in politics, economic and industrial fields is omitted in the interest of space. Below I will summarize the approaches led by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (henceforth MEXT).

1.5.1. Implementation of ESD and SDGs in Schools by MEXT

Under the supervision of the aforementioned SDGs Promotion Headquarters, MEXT consulted the Central Council for Education (*chuuoo kyooiku singikai*) for how to implement ESD and SDGs in the country's “Curriculum Guidelines (*gakushuu sidoo yooryoo*).” The Council published a report in December 2016, in which they stated that “ESD is the fundamental concept in its entirety in the next revision of Curriculum Guideline.” Accordingly, ESD and SDGs are reflected in the forewords and general rules of “the Curriculum Guidelines” for kindergartens, elementary and junior high schools announced in March 2017 and those for senior high school announced in March 2018. In particular, emphasis is put on nurturing “creators of the sustainable society.”

Universities and colleges are not regulated by “Curriculum Guidelines” but are required to be examined every seven years by one of the five certified organizations for evaluation and accreditation. While no standards are set for implementation of ESD or SDGs as of yet, National Institution for Academic Degrees and Quality Enhancement for Higher Education (NIAD-QE) pride themselves in contributing to SDGs by accreditation and other activities (NIAD-QE). Also, Japan University Accreditation Association (JUAA) has picked up an organizational approach to research and implementation of SDGs from the viewpoint of Buddhism by Ryukoku University as

a good practice in Standard 3 (education and research organization).

2. Approaches to ESD and SDGs at the University of Kitakyushu

Following the strong incentives indicated by the Japanese Government, and MEXT in particular, the University of Kitakyushu (henceforth UK) has been incorporating ESD since the late 2010s.

2.1. Environmental ESD Minor Program

It is well-known that the city of Kitakyushu, the founder of UK, once suffered severely from air and water pollution during the high growth period of the 1950s and 1960s. Through the combined and continuous efforts and attempts by the city, public and private sectors, female housemakers in particular, the city got over the problems of pollution. As a result, the city has been selected as one of the four model cities for green growth, along with Chicago, Paris and Stockholm, and It is the first city in Asia. Based on this, the university made memorandum of understanding (MOU) on environmental research with the University of Chicago, universit  Paris Diderot and the University of Stockholm in 2017.

On the educational side, the university launched the Environmental ESD Minor Program in 2016. The organization responsible for this program is the Center for Regional Coexistence Education (*tiiki kyoosee kyooiku sentaa*). Setting SDGs 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), 13 (Climate Action), 14 (Life below Water) and 15 (Life on Land) as the key goals, focus is put on the following three features:

- (3) a. Acquire wide knowledge of environment
- b. Learn through real experiences
- c. Learn about the City of Kitakyushu, which aims to be an environmental future city

The program is open to all undergraduate students at UK. The qualification and the number of students are as follows:

- (4) a. Qualification for those applying at the end of the first year: Cumulative GPA 2.0 or more
- b. Qualification for those applying at the end of the second year: Cumulative GPA 2.0 or more

c. Maximum number of students: 40

The curriculum consists of the following three categories of courses, and students are required to get 22 credits, including eight credits of the courses offered by the faculties that they do not belong to :

- (5) a. Compulsory course: Introduction to Environmental ESD (2 credits) (the first year ~)
offered by the Center for Regional Coexistence Education
- b. ESD basic course: 13 courses (2 credits each) (the first or second year ~)
offered by the Center for Fundamental Education (Kitagata and Hibikino)
- c. ESD applied course: 22 courses (2 credits each) (the first, second or third year ~)
offered by five faculties and the Center for Regional Coexistence Education

2.2. SDGs

In addition to the launch of the environmental ESD minor program, promotion and enhancement of SDGs in the courses offered at UK as a whole started in the academic year 2018. Specifically, course instructors are asked to see if the course in charge has any relevance to SDGs, and if the course touches on any of the goals, it will be specified in the keyword field of the online syllabi.

This attempt is potentially effective in raising consciousness and awareness of the importance of sustainable development among students. However, there are two issues. First, not all students carefully examine syllabi when they register courses. Rather, they tend to take courses on the following criteria: class schedule and ease of getting credits. Therefore, the collective effort by instructors may not result in what the university hope for, namely, the proactive attitude by the students for ESD and SDGs.

The second problem has to do with so-called visualization of learning/study outcomes. As mentioned above, the SDGs relevant for the course in question are specified in the keyword field of each syllabus. Yet, as the field itself is just a blank space and not designed in such format as CSV or Excel, they are not calculatable through the syllabus system. This means that even if students are eager to explore SDGs and concentrate on some particular goals that they are interested in, the courses that are relevant for the goals of their interest are not readily visible. Students cannot review how many credits they have accumulated in terms of each of SDGs, either.

These may well impair students' motivation for attaining SDGs considerably. It is desirable that the current syllabus system be more intelligent so that students' learning/study outcomes can be readily available to both themselves and instructors, even under the current situation of the tight budget. And optimally, such learning/study outcome throughout one academic year should be reflected onto each student's course selection at the time of course registration at the beginning of the next academic year.

UK was selected for the subsidies from MEXT/Japan Society for the Promotion of Science in 2014 and received the grant "Acceleration Program for University Education Rebuilding: Theme II Visualizing Learning Outcomes" for five years until 2019. It is too bad that not much has been gained out of this grant.

2.3. UK Declarations of SDGs and Diversity by the President

On January 6, 2022, the Declarations of SDGs and Diversity were issued by Takashi Matsuo, President of UK. The first one makes clear the mission of UK and its commitment to SDGs. Specifically, the president declares that the fifteen goals are to be sought on the basis of the three visions set out by the former president Michiaki Kondo on the occasion of the university's 70th anniversary (6a) through (6c) and a new vision on diversity (6d):

- (6) a. Regional engagement: SDG1 (No Poverty)
SDG2 (Zero Hunger)
SDG3 (Good Health and Well-being)
SDG4 (Quality Education)
SDG9 (Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure)
SDG11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities)
SDG17 (Partnerships for the Goals)
- b. Environmental sustainability: SDG7 (Affordable and Clean Energy)
SDG12 (Responsible Consumption and Production)
SDG13 (Climate Action)
SDG14 (Life below Water)
SDG15 (Life on Land)
- c. Global connections: SDG6 (Clean Water and Sanitation)
SDG10 (Reduced Inequalities)

SDG16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions)

d. Embracing diversity: SDG5 (Gender Equality)

SDG8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth)

The two declarations are the indication that UK has a lofty aim for the stakeholders (students, faculty members and administrative staff members) of its own community as well as responsibility for the local and global communities in general.

At the same time, however, it is interesting to observe that SDG5 and SDG8 could not be subsumed under the pre-existing visions. This may well indicate that UK, like most of the public and private sectors in Japan, has not paid enough attention to gender equality and improvement of working conditions. This point is reinforced by the fact that emphasis is being put on diversity, including that of gender as well as that of sexual orientation and sexual identity (SOGI) across the country and at UK. It seems that it is precisely because of this situation that another specific declaration embracing diversity has been made.

Note further that in the Declaration of Diversity, there is a statement about the possibility that everyone may become ‘a minority’:

(7) Daibaasitii-o suisin-suru-ni atari zyuuyoo-na daizentee-wa, hito-wa daremo-ga mainoritii-ni nari-eru-to iu koto-desu.

(An important premise in promoting diversity is that everyone can become a minority.)

While this statement comes from good willing, and ‘everyone’ here is intended to refer to any human, personally I cannot help but take this to be an unconscious disclosure that the writer, whether be it the president himself or someone who has written this up for him, assumes that he (or she) belongs to the “mainstream” or the “core” of the society/community, and is not a minority. For what is entailed by the predicate phrase “can become a minority” is that the subject “is not a minority at the moment.” As a Tokyo-born non-Japanese female (in terms of nationality) currently living in Kyushu, the author would not word the statement this way.

2.4. Overall Review of the Attempts for ESD and SDGs at UK

All in all, conceptually the university’s various attempts are in the right direction, as the aims embodied in ESD and SDGs have good causes. Yet, if part of the motivations for these attempts

stems from the strong incentives from the government and MEXT, more careful steps should be taken. The reason is that “visions” and “policies” laid out by the government and MEXT are often changed drastically. Another reason is that UK has had the tendency to follow whatever is directed by the government, MEXT and the city without critically examining its contents and consequences.

Turning to implementation of ESD and SDGs, UK has been trying to construct a well-designed system. The above-mentioned declarations show the university’s strong will to integrate ESD and SDGs in accordance with the visions of the university. There is, however, still much room for improvement in practical details. As is mentioned above, the lack of visualization in syllabus and registration systems is one robust example of such problems.

3. In-class Practices to Raise Consciousness/Awareness of SDGs

In this section some of the in-class practices by the author to enhance students’ consciousness and awareness of SDGs are described. The courses taught by the author for the past several years are as follows:

- (8) a. Academic Skills I (first-year students): Compulsory Liberal Arts Course
- b. English (first- and second-year students): Compulsory Foreign Language Course
- c. Science of Language (first-year ~): Selective Liberal Arts Course
- d. Language and Communication (first-year ~): Selective Liberal Arts Course
- e. Language and Cognition (second-year ~): Selective Liberal Arts Course
- f. Language, Communication and Cognition(second-year ~): Selective Liberal Arts Course

Being a theoretical linguist, the contents of the lectures in the above courses, (8c) through (8f) in particular, are inevitably linguistically oriented. Below are the pieces that are related to gender and diversity (SDG5).

3.1. Gender in Linguistics

Gender in linguistics has been a focus of attention since the late 1960s, in harmony with the cultural trend of the time and the rise of the second-wave feminist movement. There are a wide variety of research questions ranging from vocabulary, discourse, style and even theorization in the

linguistic theory per se (cf. Butler (1997), Cameron (1992), among many others). As a theoretical linguist within the framework of generative grammar (cf. Chomsky (1986,2015, 2021)), I will not go into the realms of discourse and style, but limit myself to discussion of vocabulary, pronouns and anaphoric expressions.

3.2. Vocabulary

In this section cases of gender asymmetry in vocabulary are shown. Related to this fact is so-called “political correctness (henceforth PC)” in language use. In many languages, along with PC for ethnicity as shown in (9), many expressions that used to be used without any reservation are now often considered “sexist” and are replaced by more “politically correct” words or phrases.

- (9) (Alphabetical order)
- a. American Indian → native American
 - b. black → African²
 - b. white → Caucasian
 - b. yellow → Asian

There are persistent opinions and arguments against such “degendering” of language. One is a rather naïve one, claiming that those who oppose the usage of such words as the English *chairman* and the Japanese *syuzin* ‘husband (lit. master, lord)’ are too sensitive and picky. The other type of counterargument comes from a semiotic point of view. Namely, assuming the Saussurean notion of “linguistic signs”, the signifier (*signifiant*), or the sound/form is just a label for its concept/meaning or the signified (*signifié*).

However, as discussed in Urushibara (2004), by taking into consideration a function of “linguistic signs” pointed out by Saussure, one can understand how linguistic signs end up incorporating social and/or historical circumstances where various inequalities and stereotypes have existed. Saussure argues that the meaning of each word or linguistic sign can never be

² In the contemporary American English, (ia) is considered derogatory and (ib) is politically correct and used in a neutral context. But at the same time, (ic) is used when the context implies something that could not have been achieved up until the 1970s for instance, when *African-Americans* were called *black Americans* or even *blacks* or *negros*.

- (i) a. He is a black.
- b. He is an African-American.
- c. He is the first African-American President.
- d. He is the first black American President.

defined by itself but is only definable in relation with other words in the same semantic field. He calls this function of linguistic signs their “mutually defining property.” In other words, linguistic signs do not have their inherent, absolute values but are defined within the system of difference.

Saussure shows this by using examples from German. The German word *Kunst* used to mean “knowledge in general” including arts and sciences in the middle German. As time went by, knowledge became more specific and required more expertise. So a new word *Wissenschaft* came into existence to denote “academic science”. As a result, the denotation of the former, *kunst*, was narrowed down, denoting “skills of artisans” only.

If this mutually defining property of signs is applied to gender-asymmetric vocabulary, we can reveal that what the opponents of “degendering” assume are just “labels” that nonetheless contain social and historical backgrounds. Take, for example, Japanese words *isya* ‘doctor’ and *zyoi* ‘female doctor.’ In the past, the *signifié*, or the meaning of *isya* was only male doctors, given the situation of that time. With social changes, there emerged female doctors. Since the word or linguistic sign *isya* had been recognized by the linguistic community of Japanese as a set of *signifiant* [ifa] and *signifié* ‘male doctor’ and was well-established, the community coined a new word *zyoi*, a set of *signifiant* [d3oi] and *signifié* ‘female doctor.’

As I have shown, it is true that *isya* and *zyoi* are only “labels” without any intention of discrimination. Those opposing “degendering” are presumably against the claim by part of feminists that those words are “intentionally” sexist and discriminating. In that sense I am fully supportive of those who argue that they are just “labels.” Yet, as hopefully I have convincingly shown, since the very definition of *zyoi* presupposes that the default is the “male doctor,” we may as well get rid of the word *zyoi*. If it is virtually necessary to indicate the gender of the doctor in question, one can use a more productive compound such as *dansee-isi* ‘male doctor’ and *zyosee-isi* ‘female doctor.’ In fact this is the current practice in mass media, at least in news programs and documentaries.

³ The term “gender” is now more widely known as a sociological term. Yet in fact it is originally a linguistic term to denote “gender” associated with nouns in many languages. There is no principled motivation for the gender of nominals and is completely arbitrary. For instance, *the sun* is *le soleil* (m) in French and *die Sonne* (f) in German, whereas *the moon* is *la lune* (f) in French and *der Monat* (m) in German. It is precisely because of this arbitrariness that sociology borrowed the term from linguistics to express the arbitrary nature of gender roles defined in the society, as opposed to the biological term “sex”, even though the notion of the biological “sex” is fragile and fluctuating today from the viewpoint of “Sexual Orientation and Sexual Identity (SOGI).”

3.2.1. Gender Asymmetry in Derivational Morphology

In many European languages, where grammatical gender³ is active and often requires syntactic agreement, most nouns denoting the property, profession, title, and so on of an individual are masculine and the feminine counterparts of these nouns are in derived forms. In other words, the “unmarked” forms refer to males and the females are referred to by “marked” forms. For example, in French, the female form of such nouns is in general derived by adding a suffix *-e*:⁴

(10) a.	étudiant (m)	étudiante (f)	‘student’
	b. ami (m)	ame (f)	‘friend’
	c. baron (m)	baronne (f)	‘baron’
	d. duc (m)	duchesse (f)	‘duke’
	e. danseur (m)	danseuse (f)	‘dancer’

Note in passing that readers should be reminded that there used to be no feminine counterpart of *président*, the French word for ‘president.’⁵ So during the 2007 French presidential election, there was a serious and heated discussion of how to designate then-prospective Socialist Party presidential candidate Ségolène Royal should she become the President of the French Republic. It turned out that she was defeated by Nicolas Sarkozy, so the actual need for the female form of *président* never arose.

The same is basically true for German, where the relevant suffix is *-in*:

(11) a.	Student (m)	Studentin (f)	‘student’
	b. Schüler (m)	Schülerin (f)	‘pupil’
	c. Freund (m)	Freundin (f)	‘friend’
	d. König (m)	Königin (f)	‘king/queen’

Unlike many continental European languages including French and German that we just observed, English has lost grammatical gender over the course of its history. So most of the

⁴ If the ending of the noun is *r*, then *-re*, an allomorph of *-e* is attached.

⁵ *Le Dico Dictionnaire française-japonais* has a headword *président* with *-e* suffix associated with it. Interestingly, the *-e* is superscripted with 1 (*-e¹*), and just below is another headword *présidente²*, which is specified as an old usage and defined as ‘wife of a president, chancellor.’

English counterparts of the above examples do not alternate between male and female referents, or have completely different words such as *king* and *queen*.

However, the remnants of such derivation are still observed in the following words. In particular, with a notable and interesting exception of *widower* (m), which derived from *widow* (f),⁶ basically all the female forms are derived by suffixation of *-ess* to their masculine base:⁷

- | | |
|------------------|----------------|
| (12)a. baron (m) | baroness (f) |
| b. duke (m) | duchess (f) |
| c. count (m) | countess (f) |
| d. actor (m) | actress (m) |
| e. steward (m) | stewardess (f) |

Again, these are the results of the mutual defining property of linguistic signs, and thus do not claim that this system is sexist in itself. Yet in describing these facts in classes I point out the correlation between this linguistic “markedness” and the social and historical circumstances in which females have been placed.

3.2.2. Gender Asymmetry in Compounding

Just as in the case of derivation, compounds denoting the profession, title and so on of a female individual are “marked”:

- | | | |
|----------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------|
| (13)a. <i>isya</i> | <i>zyoi</i> (f) | ‘doctor’ |
| b. <i>haiyuu</i> | <i>zyoyuu</i> (f) | ‘actor/actress’ |
| c. <i>sakka/kisi</i> | <i>zyoryuu-sakka/kisi</i> | ‘writer/syogi player’ |
| d. <i>syatyoo</i> | <i>onna-syatyoo</i> | ‘president’ |
| e. <i>kyoosi</i> | <i>onna-kyoosi</i> | ‘teacher’ |

⁶ It is interesting that the same is true for Japanese *yamome* ‘widow’ and *otoko-yamome* ‘widower’ (lit. male widow), where the default noun denotes female and the compound form denotes male. This is the opposite of other pairs in Japanese, e.g., *isya* ‘(male) doctor’/ *zyoi* ‘female doctor’ and *syachoo* ‘(male) president’/ *onna-syachoo* ‘female president.’ It is presumably because the female life expectancy is in general longer than that of male and thus the chances are that female spouses outlive male spouses. Consequently, the majority of those who have lost their spouse is female.

⁷ Needless to say, the present-day English does not have the “grammatical” gender that requires syntactic agreement. (m) and (f) are added just for the ease of understanding.

(13a)-(13c) are examples of Sino-Japanese compounds, where *zyo* is a Sino-Japanese morpheme for ‘woman.’ (13d) and (13e) are those with native Japanese morpheme *onna* ‘woman.’ Adding the Sino-Japanese morpheme for ‘male’ *dan-* to the lefthand items in (13a) and (13c) and its native Japanese equivalent to those in (13d) and (13e) lead to ungrammaticality:

- (14) a. **dan-i* ‘male doctor’
 b. *dan-yuu* ‘male actor’
 c. **danryuu-sakka*⁸/*kisi* ‘male writer/syogi player’
 d. **otoko-syatyoo* ‘male president’
 e. **otoko-kyoosi* ‘male teacher’

This set of data confirms that the unmarked forms have the semantic feature of [+male] already woven in their definitions. Thus, the situation is precisely what our analysis of the linguistic signs with the notion of mutual defining function predicts. Although this is a rather sophisticated discussion of the phenomena at hand, I have included this in courses like “Language and Communication” and “Language, Cognition and Communication” and I receive quite positive feedbacks from students.

Readers might wonder about (14b), where *dan-yuu* (lit. male actor) coexists with the unmarked *haiyoo*. It is the Japanese equivalent of the English pair *actor/actress* in (12d). Now, two comments are in order. First, both in Japan and English-speaking communities, an increasing number of *joyuu* or *actresses* call themselves *haiyuu* and *actors*. I regard this as a proactive practice of language degendering by the first party.

Second, while there are many male-female word pairs where Sino-Japanese morphemes *dan-* ‘male’ and *zyo-* ‘female’ alternate, as in *dansee* ‘male’/*zyosee* ‘female’ and *dansi* ‘boy’/*zyosi* ‘girl’, the word *danyuu* ‘male actor’ as opposed to *haiyuu* ‘actor’ is used in limited contexts. *Danyuu* is used in the titles for movie awards such as the Academy Award: the translation of “starring/supporting actor” is *syuen/zyoen-danyuu*, not **syuen/zyoen-haiyuu*. Another context where *danyuu* is frequently used is the description on pornographic movies. I speculate that it is

⁸ There is a literary critique of the works by Japanese male writers by three feminist researchers/critics, which is entitled *Danryuu-bungakuron* (Literary Theory of Works by Male Writers) (Ueno et al. (1997)). The title seems to take advantage of the very ungrammaticality of the word **danryuu* to highlight the fact that it has always been women who have been “marginalized.”

because movies in general are a rather rare context where females are equally, if not more, featured as males. This again indicates that the existence and choice of particular vocabulary items are the reflections of their social and historical backgrounds.

3.2.3. Degendering of lexical items

So far we have seen gender asymmetry embedded in the morphological system. In this section some of the idiosyncratic expressions that do not match PC and the social atmosphere and have undergone changes are shown.

Let us first examine English:

- (15) a. Man → Humans
- b. mankind → humankind
- c. chairman → chairperson, chair
- d. policeman → police officer
- e. fireman → fire fighter
- f. cameraman → camera staff
- g. waiter, waitress → waitstaff
- h. steward, stewardess → cabin/flight attendant

These should be self-explanatory. Of course, I do not criticize the famous words by Captain Neil Armstrong of Apollo 11 in (16) when he landed on the moon as sexist, since that was way back in 1969:

- (16) That's one small step for (a) man, one giant leap for mankind.

Nonetheless, we cannot help thinking that expressions like mankind is outdated in the 21st century.

Let us now turn to Japanese:

- (17) a. hobo, hohu → hoiku-si
- a. kango-hu → kango-si
- b. huzin-keekan (hukee) → zyosee-keekan

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English, on the other hand, explicitly specifies the gender of the third person singular pronouns and reflexive pronouns. Observe the following examples:

- (19) a. Who is he/she/that person?
- b. Man/*person shall not live by bread alone.
- c. The applicant appealed himself/herself/*oneself/*themselves.
- d. Each applicant must bring his photo/her photo/*their photos.

As the translations of (18c) and (18d) show, one can circumvent the problem of gender by using the third person plural pronoun *they*, because unlike its singular counterparts *he* and *she*, it is gender-neutral. Yet if the syntactic and/or discourse context require(s) the singular form, as in (19c) and (19d), English is faced with the problem.

One way to get around such a problem is to use both masculine and feminine third person pronouns, as in (20):

- (20) a. Each applicant must bring his or her photo.
- b. Each applicant must appeal himself or herself.

But this is somewhat cumbersome. Now, there has been an ongoing change in anaphoric expressions of the third person singular nouns. Even though the antecedent is singular, more and more native speakers of English use the third person plural pronoun, clearing the gender problem. It is especially the case with anaphoric expressions whose antecedent contains every:

- (21) a. Everyone must do their best.
- b. Every applicant must bring their photos.
- c. Every applicant must appeal themselves.

This new usage of the third person plural pronoun is not well-known among beginning and intermediate learners of English, but nonetheless appears sporadically in reading materials. I take advantage of such instances to draw attention to gender in language.

In addition, with growing consideration of LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer) and SOGI (Sexual Orientation and Sexual Identity), referring to someone by explicitly

gender-marked pronouns is sometimes shunned. So, in referring to persons whose sexual orientation/identity is not clear or not identical with the biological sex, (22c), on a par with (22a) and (22b), can be used:

- (22) a. He is the manager of the department.
 b. She is the manager of that department.
 c. They is the manager of that department.

This is an even more drastic change in English grammar and may not be as widely accepted as the use of *their* instead of *his* or *her*. But there is little doubt that the driving force of these kinds of change is consciousness and awareness of many of the SDGs, gender and partnership, in particular.

3.4. Gender Asymmetry in Common Titles

Another area where Japanese is “gender-free” as opposed to “gender-sensitive” English is the titles that are used before surnames, or family names. Indeed, Japanese has *-kun* and *-san*, the former of which has been used for male pupils/students and the latter, for female pupils/students, especially at elementary, junior- and senior-high school stages. But there is no one-to-one relation between these titles and gender: *-kun* and *-san* are sensitive not to gender but age in many workplaces. In the diet, MPs are traditionally called with *-kun*.

I used to use *-kun* for male students and *-san* for female students in the university setting. Yet, from the aforementioned viewpoints of LGBTQ and SOGI, I stopped such distinction several years ago and use *-san* for both “male” and “female” students.⁸

Turning to English, gender is explicit in *Mister (Mr.)* (m), *Missus/Missis (Mrs.)* (f)⁹ and *Miss* [mis](f). In English classes, which involves many activities that require responses from individual students, it becomes a nontrivial issue for the same reasons I mentioned just above. on top of that, there is even another twist in titles in many European languages, namely, distinction with respect to the marital status of women. To my surprise, many students do not know those titles, not to

⁸ In February 2022, at the proofreading stage, UK notified its faculty and administrative staff to address students by *-san* throughout.

⁹ The etymology of *Missus* is *mistress*. The word used to mean “the head woman in the household.” But as time went by, the meaning was shifted and now it denotes “a female lover of a married man” in most cases. One of the few usages that retain the original meaning is *ballet mistress*, which denotes a senior female dancer who supports the director or choreographer of ballet works.

mention how to use them.

So, for the last several years, part of the first session in my English courses is devoted to the explanation of these titles. First, I describe the usage of each title, namely, *Mr.* for males, *Mrs.* for married females and *Miss* for unmarried females. Then I go on to ask the students why there exists an asymmetry between male and female titles. Why is it that females are distinguished by their marital status, while males are not? My account is that for the long history of humans, women have been objectified in the patriarchal society, so whether a woman is married, therefore she is already a possession of some other man, or not, therefore she is available, has mattered much.

The interpretation that *Mrs.* embodies the assumption that married women are the possessions of their husband may sound too extreme a feminist ideology, but there is evidence that it is the case. Although the situation is slightly different between the United Kingdom and other continental European countries on one hand, and the United States of America on the other, in a very traditional and formal style the grammar of addressing a married couple and a married woman are as follows, respectively:

(23) (Husband: Taroo Tanaka Wife: Hanako Tanaka)

- a. Mr. and Mrs. Taroo Tanaka
- b. *Mr. Taroo Tanaka and Mrs. Hanako Tanaka

(24) a. Mrs. Taroo Tanaka

- b. *Mrs. Hanako Tanaka

This is similar to the formal usage of the Japanese (*ree-*)*huzin* and (*go-*)*reesitu*, as in (24):

(25) a. Tanaka Taroo (*rei-*)*hujin/go-reesitu*

- b. *Tanaka Hanako (*rei-*)*hujin/go-reesitu*

Following the above description and explanation, I introduce another title coined during the second wave of feminism movement in the 1970s, i.e., Ms.[miz] (f). While this is specified for gender (female), this can be used regardless of whether a woman is married or unmarried. Thus, this is a counterpart of *Mr.*, and asymmetry is resolved. This is particularly relevant in most of the countries of the world where women can keep their “maiden names” after marriage. For, under different surnames, the grammar like (22a), (24a) and (25a) is in conflict with the fact and cannot

be applied. While of course there are Anglophone women who like to be addressed as *Mrs.*, there are much more number of women who keep their maiden names and prefer to be called *Ms.* especially among professionals. As I explain in courses like “Academic Skills I” as well as in English classes, Japan is about the only country in the world that disallows two married Japanese couple to keep different surnames, the issues surrounding these titles can be easily overlooked. This leads to observations of still another long-standing issue of surnames themselves.

3.4.1. *Koseki* as the Reason for “One Surname Principle”

I myself happen to be an exemplary case to reveal the fallacy of the arguments by the conservatives: according to them, the principle to keep one surname per one household is to ensure the unity of family and its value. Yet, as I worded carefully above, readers are reminded that this principle applies only to two married “Japanese” couple. If one of the spouses is non-Japanese, that person cannot change his or her name to the spouse’s. And the very reason is that non-Japanese persons do not have *koseki* ‘family registry.’ If one does not have *koseki*, there is no way one can *nyuuseki* into the spouse’s *koseki*. The other side of the coin is that it is precisely because of the system of *koseki* that forces the married couple to have the same surname: it would be impossible to have two surnames in one *koseki*.

And here is the reason that I criticize the conservative arguments as erroneous: if they stick to the idea that one surname is the key to the unity of family and family value, then they should allow non-Japanese to change his or her surname to that of the spouse’s. But it is not allowed altogether. This means that their arguments are driven not by values, but the system of *koseki*, which is retained only in Japan, the mainland China and Chinese Taipei, but in reality operative only in Japan.

Thus, even though my husband, Japanese, and I, a legal British resident in Japan, submitted *kon-in todoke* ‘marriage registration’ duly and was accepted without problem, somehow my name is not included in the “spouse” field of my husband’s *koseki*, naturally because I myself do not have one. Our marriage is recorded in *koseki-zikoo* ‘registration notes’ field only, and my name appears as the mother of our son. It is presumably because a child cannot be born without his or her biological mother (and of course a biological father, except for Jesus Christ.) Needless to say, my surname remains unchanged and it is legally valid without application for alias *bessei*.

This situation is more than welcome for me, as both my husband and I are professionals in the same field of study. But it was not the case with my mother, who got married to my late father

in 1960. My father, born in 1930 in London, chose to be British when he turned 22. Thus, he did not have his *koseki*, either. My mother's surname remains unchanged as well, but unlike my case, it was back in 1960 and keeping different surnames was considered that the woman was a mistress and was associated with stigma. When they went on honeymoon to Hong-Kong (then a British Concession), she wanted to have a passport issued with my father's surname. Yet, despite her strong plea, the Ministry of Justice would not allow this given that she could not change her surname legally.

4. Summary

ESD and SDGs hold idealistic concepts that are essential for the present world and much more for future generations. Yet, partly because of their history, there are some incoherence as well as contradictions. The approaches taken at UK are not free from such problems, either.

In order to raise consciousness/awareness for ESD and SDGs, it is important to contemplate on various legal and economic systems and socio-cultural situations surrounding these goals. It is hoped that in-class practices based on my rather peculiar situation and experiences will help students realize what they take to be granted is not so normal. In that sense, diversity should be cherished and embraced.

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