



一般社団法人 日本英語交流連盟
The English-Speaking Union of Japan

Summary of the ESUJ 20th Anniversary Symposium “Using English to Meet Challenges in the World”

Speakers and Panelists

Keynote Speaker: Mr. Yasushi Akashi, Vice Chairman, ESUJ; Chairman, International House of Japan; Former Under-Secretary General, United Nations

Panelists: Ms. Simona Leskovar, Ambassador of Slovenia to Japan
Mr. Jamie Gibbings, Director, English Language Services, British Council
Dr. Kiyoshi Kurokawa, Professor Emeritus, National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies; Chairman, Health and Global Policy Institute
Mr. M. James Kondo, Co-Chairman, Silicon Valley Japan Platform; Ex-Chairman, Twitter Japan
Ms. Aiko Doden, Special Affairs Commentator, Senior Commentator, NHK

Moderator: Mr. Sadaaki Numata, Chairman, ESUJ (Former Ambassador to Canada)

Symposium Summary

Commemorating two decades of fostering English communication skills by the English-Speaking Union of Japan, the ESUJ 20th Anniversary Symposium was held on October 10, 2017 at the International House of Japan. Leaders active in diverse fields in Japan offered insights to a full house on best practices to cultivate effective communication skills and a global mindset in Japanese people. In addition to a keynote speech by the Vice Chairman of the ESUJ, the Symposium featured a dynamic panel discussion moderated by the Chairman and an active Q&A session.

A major topic of discussion centered on improving mindsets and teaching methods to overcome Japan’s low English ability. The panelists delved into the psychological issues, including Japanese “shame culture,” shyness, and perfectionism. One major obstacle lies in the Japanese fixation on English pronunciation while neglecting discourse, vocabulary, and grammar. Mr. Gibbings said that Japanese teachers of English must be trained to go beyond inflexibly drilling English to teach grammar and vocabulary, connected speech, and how to present coherent arguments.

Another major theme was inspiring Japanese people, especially youth, to use English to speak up on the world stage. Ambassador Leskovar discussed the benefits of language learning for building confidence and becoming a better decision maker. The panelists also brought up the importance of relatable role models like Malala Yousafzai and developing bicultural education that preserves the beauty of Japanese culture while also fostering the courage to stand out from the crowd. Ms. Doden related a personal story of how she fought Japanese stereotypes abroad as a child by sharing



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Japanese tea with her classmates, and juxtaposing Japan's tradition, as represented by the tea, with its modernization.

In addition to giving Japanese people a voice, developing English skills will help Japan improve its standing in the world. Mr. Akashi said that Japanese politicians should improve their foreign language skills for better diplomacy, especially with countries with which Japan has had sensitive relations. Dr. Kurokawa emphasized that Japanese people can break down barriers that hamper much-needed reform by using English in place of the intrinsically hierarchal Japanese language. Mr. Kondo highlighted the vibrancy of Japanese use of social media, a platform enabling global English language conversations, and said that Japan should compete more aggressively in this promising arena.

Mr. Numata closed the Symposium by asking the panelists to give advice to the next generation. The panelists urged young people to go abroad, chase their dreams, get inspired to assuage suffering worldwide, make the most of educational opportunities, and consume English language media. Mr. Akashi concluded with the apt statement, "Learning a language is learning a culture or history. We are enriched through mastering languages."

Supporters of the ESUJ

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