

Japanese Ownership of English

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Key words: English Variety, Circles of English, Codeswitching

Fallacies of the Current System

ACCORDING TO KACHRU CIRCLES OF ENGLISH MODEL (2006) THERE are three concentric circles of language users; Inner, Outer, and Expanding. The inner circle represents the traditional bases of English which include the United States and the United Kingdom. The outer circle includes countries where English has been institutionalized through historical reasons. The expanding circle encompasses countries where English plays no historical or governmental role but is used as a foreign language or serves as a lingua franca. This is where Japan is situated.

At the beginning of the 2013 academic year, Japan's Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) implemented the guidelines set forth in their latest Courses of Study outline which included goals of incorporating communicative approaches set out in the 2003 Action Plan to Cultivate "Japanese with English Abilities" (MEXT 2011). The idea was to imbue Japanese people with English abilities to communicate with the global community. Although MEXT did not specify the variety of English to be modelled, the primary model adopted by educational institutions were almost exclusively American or British varieties of English (Matsuda, 2003a). Jenkins (2006) states that in outer and expanding circles countries, English as a Foreign Language (EFL) is still taught as if it were to be used with native speakers of English. While adopting a certain variety of English is ideal when that person wishes to successfully assimilate into a specific community, it is inherently problematic when English is merely used as a tool for transactional communication (Matsuda, 2003a). Furthermore, with

expanding and outer circle countries far outnumbering the members of inner circle countries, it would be more likely that transactional communication would occur between non-native speakers.

Along with the adoption of inner circle English varieties, Japan practices the monolingual approach to language teaching (Hawkins, 2015). This approach to teaching ignores the sociocultural histories of its learners and forbids students the use of their native language (L1) and purports its use of having no pedagogical value during language learning (Macaro, 2001). The monolingual approach has subtractive effects on linguistic aptitude as this approach's rationale aims to replace the L1 of its learners with the target language. This in turn stifles creative opportunities for each learners' repertoire of both languages to maximize their learning and take ownership of the English language.

Problem with Policy

Although, MEXT does not explicitly state which varieties of English should be used in their educational institutions, the overwhelmingly preferred variety used by both practitioners and learners are American or British English (Matsuda, 2003a). This inner circle orientation in EFL classrooms, as mentioned earlier, would be appropriate for ESL programs that aid learners to function in inner circle countries. However, it is inadequate for English courses in Japan as it neglects the real linguistic needs of the learners and fails to empower them (Matsuda 2003a). This is evident in most of the textbooks and materials, including audio and comprehension tests, stemming from the language and cultures of these inner circle countries (Kawanami & Kawanami, 2010). Furthermore, an emphasis on inner circle English does not promote international understanding. Rather, it likely promotes a narrow view of world cultures (Kabota, 1998) by focusing on the language, cultures, and norms of inner circle countries' usage of English. With the goal of cultivating Japanese people with English abilities set by MEXT, these policies often neglect to even identify the existence of other varieties of English used by the outer and expanding circle countries. This limitation has robbed students of the opportunity to develop awareness

and tolerance towards English spoken by nonnative speakers of English (Kachru, 1985, cited in Matsuda, 2003b). Thus, Japanese learners have developed a preference for certain accents and adopted it as the ideal model to strive for. This monolithic linguistic view is problematic as inner circle countries are regarded as owners of the language and others are expected to conform to its norms. Any deviation would be considered unauthentic or incorrect.

The problem with adopting a certain variety is that it is arbitrary. Moreover, differences can be found even within a particular variety. Lindemann (2017) discusses that even with ‘Standard American’ English there is no uniformity with how the language is pronounced by its native speakers. Lindemann further discusses how variations to this ‘standard’ would be perceived as errors within assessments involving pronunciation and intelligibility. Because of this continued practice, Japanese speakers have associated a stigma towards other varieties and even their own accented pronunciation of the English language. Studies conducted by Matsuda (2003a) and Kawanami and Kawanami (2010) found that Japanese students felt Japanese accented English was ‘uncool’ or ‘irritable’ and greatly favored the accents of inner circle countries. Their studies found a positive correlation with students’ preference towards inner circle varieties and their indifference towards expanding circle varieties due to the students’ familiarity and exposure to the inner circle varieties.

In addition to Japanese learner’s poor tolerance toward expanding circle varieties, there is also the prevalence of native speakerism, a term coined by Holliday (2006). Native speakerism is characterized by the belief that native speakers are the source of reference that provides the ideal cultural and linguistic model with learners of English in EFL classrooms. This is deeply rooted in the Japanese society (Kubota, 1998) and appears to be an underlying facet for their favorable attitudes and orientations toward American or British English. Takeshita (2000) noted that many Japanese still believe that English is the property of the US and Britain and they are ashamed if they do not speak English the way native speakers do. Further, this sentiment is mirrored at Japanese universities.

In a study conducted by Yoshikawa (2005), even the university students in the Department of World Englishes at Chukyo University believe that American and British English are the true models and native speakers are the best English teachers. Through his study, he found that even after one year of enrollment in the department, students developed an even stronger preference for traditional English varieties and lower tolerance of other varieties of English.

Currently, English education in Japanese universities primarily adopt inner circle English varieties as its ideal model in EFL classrooms. The instructors adopt coursebooks and materials that depict these English varieties' cultures and norms. Thus, expanding circle varieties are rarely depicted or even acknowledged (Kawanami & Kawanami, 2010). Consequently, Japanese learners are given little opportunity to view expanding and outer circle countries' usage of the English language. This inner circle bias will continue to mold students' dogmatic perception that English is the ownership of the inner circle.

Problem with Practice

Japanese policy makers believe English plays an important role in shaping future plans for the country in terms of globalization and national competitiveness (Lin 2014). They believed that English is the major medium of communication in the international domain. As a result, policy makers launched programs to promote the acquisition of English starting from junior high school as a mandatory subject (MEXT 2011). The goal was to improve communications skills along with proficiency and fluency of the English language. Although the integration of English education in the Japanese education system was perceived as important, Ishida et al. (2013, cited in Nakamura, 2017) found that teacher readiness was largely lacking. They believed there was a large discrepancy between the government's English language policy and the actual English teachers' practices in the classroom. They state that the policy makers altered laws without fully appreciating how it could impact teachers in terms of English proficiency, access to

appropriate materials, and teacher education or teacher training programs. As such, it resulted in unmotivated teachers promoting an over-reliance of one-dimensional approaches such as grammar translation.

Even with motivated teachers, this led to implementing approaches that did not take social and contextual factors of the students into account when presented with the language. Namely, English being taught monolingually. Currently, English taught in EFL classrooms intrinsically adopts the monolingual perspective in Second Language Acquisition. Where the model purports that the language will be predominantly used with native speakers, students' sociocultural background is largely ignored, (Sharma, 2008; Jenkins, 2006; Block, 2002; Cook, 1999) and that any language used in the classroom other than English serves little pedagogical value (Phillipson, 1992).

Scholars such as Pennycook (2003) and Kachru (1985) have already identified that the number of members of the outer and expanding circles of English speakers dwarf the number of members in the inner circle. The likelihood that Japanese people would interact with an outer and expanding circle interlocutors would be far greater than that of an interlocutor from the inner circle. By promoting a monolingual view, it solidifies the notion that English is owned by the inner circle countries and that it is not an international language. Furthermore, it discourages the acceptance of English varieties and the opportunity to acculturate their own variety of English (Jenkins, 2006).

Japan is classified as an expanding circle country. English in Japan has very limited roles in public life and even more restricted functions in the personal lives of the Japanese people (Kachru, 1985, cited in Matsuda, 2003b). In terms of the range of English use in Japan, it is mainly used in higher education and international business or administration capacities. In terms of the depth of English's societal penetration, it is extremely shallow, with only well-educated academics or people with more contact with inner circle members finding use for the English language in their daily lives. However, with regard to how English is taught in Japanese EFL classrooms, it not only models native speakers to native speaker interactions but ignores the sociocultural factors of the Japanese learner.

Matsuda (2003a) argued that having an inner circle country's accent or understanding its culture or values are not prerequisites for effective communication using the English language. This type of English is not constrained by British or American norms or cultural values. And that focusing on how to use the language of English will aid Japanese learners to shape their English for international communication (Matsuda, 2003a).

Japan's 2003 action plan dictates that English classes are to be primarily conducted in English (MEXT, 2009). This was part of the Japanese government policy maker's response from low rankings in English compared to its neighbors, in an ongoing attempt to improve the English capabilities of the Japanese people (McMillan & Rivers, 2011). The practice adopted by the education institutes of Japan follows the tenets of ELT set out by Phillipson (1992).

- English is best taught monolingually
- The ideal teacher of English is a native speaker
- The more English is taught, the better the results
- The earlier English is taught, the better the results
- If other languages are used too much, standards of English will drop.

Phillipson (1992) criticizes these tenets and labels the adoption of this practice as *Linguistic Imperialism*. That is, the monolingual paradigm has created an inner circle monopoly of expertise in the ELT field. He further states through Kumaravadivelu's study that this paradigm disempowers English language learners and that it is not optimal for 'good' intercultural interaction (Kumaravadivelu, 2016, cited in Phillipson, 2016).

Fostering Ownership of English

While this paper describes the fallacies, which permeate how the English language teaching has been implemented and practiced in Japan, these beliefs have been ingrained as the norm in Japanese society. This paper believes practices to remedy the fallacies need careful consideration on how they are introduced and implemented. As Weiner's (2009) organization theory states, there is a difference between an individuals' readiness and an

organizations' readiness to change. Thus, any huge paradigm shifts in policy and pedagogy would be met with resistance that institutionalization of any remedy would be extremely unlikely to succeed in Japan. This paper will introduce two practices that are within reach to remedy Japan's current situation.

Awareness and Tolerance of other Varieties outside Inner Circle English

First and foremost, other varieties of English must be used to educate Japanese learners. To promote international understanding, a complete representation of the English language should be presented to the students. This is because students may not be fully aware that there are a number of Englishes that deviate from the inner circle varieties (Matsuda, 2002). She believes that the education of other varieties of English is the initial step towards developing an ownership of English as it provides an insight for Japanese learners on how English is used within the different cultures. She posits that this could be achieved through these varieties being represented in coursebooks and listening materials.

For example, Singapore, a place of settlement for many ethnic groups, lists three main ethnic groups: Chinese, Malay, and Indians. Each ethnic group has been ascribed an official L1 with English serving as a lingua franca (Meyliana and Jaya, 2014). In the 1970s Singapore began to adopt textbooks that were written by Singaporean authors and published in Singapore which focused on oral communication skills (Chew & Spolsky, 2007). These books incorporated the cultures and varieties of the main ethnic groups in Singapore. The Singapore government at the time judged it imperative that English was chosen as Singapore's lingua franca to promote racial harmony as the government believed that it did not belong to any significant group. Moreover, it was believed that it would serve as a potential medium for international business (Pakir, 1994, cited in Chew & Spolsky, 2007).

For any positive attitudes towards Japanese-accented English or development of a Japanese English variety, Ohtsubo (1999, cited in Kawanami & Kawanami, 2010)

declares that the Japanese society should acquire a robust tolerance towards other varieties of Englishes outside the inner circle. By raising the Japanese students' awareness towards these varieties Kawanami and Kawanami (2010) believe that reciprocal understanding within the global community would be realized.

This paper turns to Singapore to show a prime example of how English varieties are intrinsically linked to its culture and identity. Singapore Colloquial English or Singlish (Leimgruber, 2011), is a blend of Singaporean slang and English and was first recorded in the 1970s. This variety has influences of Indian English, Baba, Malay, and southern varieties of Chinese (Leimgruber, 2011). This variety was first held in low regard in Singapore and not used among the more educated Singaporeans. Another variety is the Singapore Standard English. This variety closely resembles British English but differs slightly with grammar. This standard is often used in formal settings such as workplaces and government offices.

Contrary to the belief that Japan is an ethnically and linguistically homogeneous nation, although not to the extent of countries like Singapore, it has always had ethnic minorities such as Ainu and Okinawans (Kubota, 2002). And due to globalization, over the last few decades since the 1980s, Japan has attracted a large number of foreign workers and students. Furthermore, according to the Ministry of Justice (2000a, cited in Kubota, 2002), over 1.5 million Japanese citizens were born outside of Japan. It is the position of this paper that Japan could use English as a lingua franca to not only communicate with the growing international community found within its borders but also internationally. This resource of international communities in Japan could aid in further developing a Japanese version of English. Historically, Japan has its own variation of English. However, they are predominately loanwords from European and Western nations (Kachru and Nelson, 2006). The loanwords usage, however, is linked to the Japanese culture as having both a pragmatic and decorative function (Hyde, 2002, cited in Kachru and Nelson, 2011). English loanwords usage is evident in its prevalence in advertising and artistic mediums in Japan (Kachru and Nelson, 2006). Furthermore,

studies by Higa (1973) found that approximately eight percent of the total Japanese vocabulary stems from English. Exposure to English varieties gives learners a comprehensive view of how the English language is spoken. It not only helps prepare them for interaction with speakers from countries other than those found in the inner circle but also promotes potential development of their own variety.

With MEXT's goals to cultivate a Japanese society with English abilities to communicate on the world stage it is imperative to educate Japanese students of the different varieties of English that exist outside the inner circle countries (Ohtsubo, 1999, cited in Kawanami & Kawanami, 2010). By doing so, it will give students insights on how the English language is used by different cultures. This ranges from not only how it is spoken or written, but the language works within its society (Macaro, 2001). Matsuda (2002) suggests that this could be done through their inclusion in coursebooks and audio-lingual materials. Furthermore, adopting the practice used by the Singapore government in the 1970s to include its own culture and norms in course materials (Chew & Spolsky, 2007), Japanese learners take ownership of their English learning.

Codeswitching in EFL Classrooms to Promote English Learning and Variety

The first step to take in the emphasis away from the monolingual approach, as discussed earlier, and to continue encouraging development of a Japanese English variety is to include the learners' L1 into EFL classrooms. However, as language learning is at the heart of language teaching, this paper will first present the arguments regarding pedagogic efficacy of L1 in language learning.

Critics of L1 inclusion argue that any use of L1 in EFL classrooms cuts down the students' exposure to the Target Language (L2) and undermines the learning process (Chambers, 1991). However, advocates of L1 inclusion state that its pedagogic value extends to language instruction, classroom management, and cultural comparison and metalinguistic awareness (Harbord, 1992; Auerbach, 1993; Atkinson, 1987; Critchley, 2003). Furthermore, Macaro (2001) in her research to address the claims made by

detractors of L1 inclusion, found a large amount of studies that support the inclusion of the native speaker's language in EFL classrooms had pedagogical value and that there was no evidence that show the inclusion of the L1 impeded the learning of the L2. This led Macaro (2001) to posit three theoretical maxims on the inclusion of L1 in EFL classrooms. These maxims represent how L1 inclusion is viewed by the institution and practitioners.

1. The Virtual Position - The FL classroom is characterized by full immersion in the L2, with the L1 totally excluded. Furthermore, the use of the L1 provides no pedagogical value and serves no teaching function.
2. The Maximal Position - Use of the L1 provides no pedagogical value. However, teachers must resort to L1 use when communication breaks down.
3. The Optimal Position - There is some pedagogical value in the use of the L1. Its use has the potential to enhance L2 learning. Therefore, further exploration of pedagogical approaches regarding L1 use is justified.

Along with the monolingual approach, this paper believes that the Japanese education system promotes the adoption of The Virtual Position. However, Hawkins (2015) observes that the actual teaching practices prevalent in the Japanese tertiary system is the Maximal Position. It is not uncommon that instructors would use L1, reluctantly, in Japanese EFL classrooms (Hawkins, 2015). This is due to the stigma attached to using L1 in a Japanese EFL classroom. Namely, the use of L1 was the result of inadequate English skills and communicative competencies from both the teachers' and students' perspectives. However, to adopt practices to foster ownership of the English language, this paper believes that the Optimal Position would best serve this purpose. Harbord (1992) recognizes that there is a natural proclivity to switch from L2 to L1 during language learning. And by doing so students take control on how they learn. Guerrero's (1994) research into Inner and Private Speech Theory showed students would utter

information to themselves quietly and internally in their L1 as part of their acquisition process, which further supports this view. The adoption of the Optimal Position would eliminate the unjustified guilt of using L1 in Japanese EFL classrooms.

One method that would enable the judicious use of L1 in the EFL classroom is to promote the practice of codeswitching. Codeswitching is the mixing of words, phrases, and sentences from different languages (Bahtia, 1992). Advocates of L1 inclusion state that codeswitching is a normal, intelligent, and socially meaningful linguistic phenomenon (Blom & Gumperz, 1972; Jaffe, 2007; Macswan, 2000). A study into the practices of codeswitching by Liebscher and Dailey-O'Cain (2005) observed the codeswitching practices of their students during discourse related activities. They found that their codeswitching practices were similar to codeswitching practices utilized outside of classroom environments. Additionally, in a study conducted by Bertrand (2017) with multilingual students studying in South Korea, Bertrand identified some functions of code-switching in an EFL classroom.

- Delivery of culture-related message
- Compensation for the lack of L2 knowledge
- Maintenance of the communication flow
- Helping interlocutors' comprehension

The study suggests that codeswitching provides a vital strategy in learning a language. Along with having pedagogical value, it promotes cross-cultural communication. In Bertrand's (2017) study, the largest number of occurrences of codeswitching to Korean was for cross-cultural messages. Words and phrases that could not be easily translated to English or did not have an English equivalent would be better communicated to their interlocutors in their L1. Bertrand (2017) surmises that this type of codeswitching is important as the students took responsibility for their communication

development and that it was important in the increasing diversity of nationalities of EFL classrooms in South Korea.

Codeswitching is an important component in developing an English variety. Myers-Scotton (2007) in her analysis with the uses of codeswitching identified that codeswitching occurs when the speaker wants to make relevant their dual and simultaneous membership within the different groups symbolized by the different languages involved in the switching pattern. Furthermore, codeswitching normalizes the expected balance of rights and obligations between the participants through negotiated meaning during interactions (Myer-Scotton, 2007). In Bertrand's (2017) study, students attempting to directly translate Korean words with no direct translation to English would not have been able to communicate efficiently and settle on explanations to approximate its meaning. By adopting to use Korean words during their interaction, it made communication more effective. Also, Myer-Scotton (2007) states the practice of codeswitching when done within a particular community becomes a community norm. If participants want to express group membership, they will have to practice conformity to the community's norms. In essence codeswitching is a practice that enables the user to take ownership of the languages they are using by subscribing to each language's norms and melding it into a variety that that community can use.

The practice of codeswitching is already occurring in EFL classrooms in Japan (Hawkins, 2015). However, as mentioned earlier, it is not viewed in a positive light and stigmatized even with substantive research to support its efficacy. The inclusion of L1 in the form of codeswitching is vital in developing sociolinguistic competencies in the languages they are using. Furthermore, EFL learners' backgrounds and cultures have an inextricable influence with language learning and usage (Bertrand, 2017). This paper believes that neither L1 or L2 should be taken out and isolated during language learning. Rather it should be strategically used with teachers in future EFL curriculums. That the inclusion of codeswitching further aids the learners in taking responsibility for their language learning and encourages the development of their own variety. Additionally,

this paper echoes the stance of McMillan and Rivers (2011) with codeswitching. That this practice would provide an environment to encourage learners in Japan to create their own voice and identity by using full use of their languages' repertoires.

Conclusion

The current state of EFL education in Japan adopts inner circle varieties of English to serve as models to aspire towards. However, Japan's position as an expanding circle country of English speakers present fallacies with its inner circle adoption policy and practice. Namely, inner circle countries are the owners of the English language and any variation is incorrect or unauthentic. This culminates to the monolingual approach with is prevalent in EFL classroom around Japan. This native speakerism appears to be the underlying reason for the favorable orientations towards these inner circle varieties and an intolerance towards varieties outside the inner circle. This is problematic as it robs Japanese learners the opportunity to take ownership of the English language with the development of their own variety through incorporating their own cultures and norms within the usage of the English language. To reverse this negative attitude, Japanese learners should be educated with varieties of English outside the inner circle and present the number of ways other countries have incorporated their culture into the English language. Also, coursebooks and teaching resources should incorporate Japanese culture and norms to foster the notion that English is not owned by inner circle countries but by whichever country uses it. Concurrent with this practice, codeswitching should be promoted and practiced in EFL classrooms. Japanese learners presented with the opportunity to represent their culture and norms through English by incorporating Japanese words or phrases gives them power to take ownership of the English language.

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