Japanese Learners' Choice to Overcome Babel
– Standard English, Globish or Japlish? –

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0. 0 Introduction

It is said that there are one and a half to two billion speakers of English on this planet. Out of about 6,000 existing languages, one third to one fourth of the world's population grow up speaking or learn to speak the most global language in history. Although the spread of English can coincide with a threat to or even the death of irreplaceable indigenous cultures, languages and dialects worldwide, its appeal as a means for achieving global intelligibility and economic success has increased constantly since the days of the British Empire and is predicted to remain undiminished for at least another century (Graddol, 1997). This prophecy seems valid when we reflect on the current situation, where nonnative speakers overwhelmingly outnumber the 350 million native speakers and the approximately equal number of speakers of English as a second language (Crystal, 2003).

The popularisation of English in many parts of the world has brought about its diversification and inevitably given rise to localised varieties called "world Englishes", for instance, Indian English (Kachru, 2005), Singlish (Low and Brown, 2005) and Spanglish. Since the role of English as a lingua franca for communication among nonnative speakers has become more prominent than ever, English appears to be gradually losing its historical and cultural connection with the UK and the USA. The wide prevalence of anti-Americanism after September 11th has added a further political touch which has made many nonnative speakers, especially in post-colonial countries, feel resistant to linguistic imperialism. According to Phillipson (1992), English bears an aspect of Anglo-Saxon hegemony, which promotes social and economic

inequality and discrimination across the world. This political sensitivity encourages English language teaching professionals to see English as a mere tool for communication, separating it from its identification with the old and new empires. Furthermore, it has escalated global appreciation for world Englishes and international English or hybrid languages such as "Globish" (Nerrière, 2006), particularly in academia (Seargeant, 2005a) and transnational corporations and organisations.

Nevertheless, it may be too simplistic to assume that this awareness is shared by learners of English as a foreign language (hereafter EFL) in the Expanding Circle of countries where English is learnt in school to communicate with native speakers or other nonnative speakers as a lingua franca (Kachru, 1992). Kachru categorised world Englishes into three concentric circles, i.e., the Inner Circle, the Outer Circle and the Expanding Circle. The Inner Circle includes countries where English is spoken as a mother tongue, for example, the UK, the USA and Australia, whereas the Outer Circle contains countries where English is used as a second language as a legacy of colonial control, for instance, India and Singapore. Japan belongs to the Expanding Circle of countries where the study of English as a foreign language is promoted but where colonial control never led to the institutionalisation of the English language.

The current system of English education in Japanese junior and high schools still seems to foster the belief that General American and British RP are the only *real English* students should learn. Learners' knowledge of dialects of English used even in the Inner Circle is minimal, let alone their awareness of new Englishes used in the Outer and Expanding Circles. Our question here is once such learners become aware of the political aspects of English and are given a choice, do they stop wanting to learn *standard* varieties of English? Do they choose to learn more politically neutral varieties?

Several research surveys have been conducted on Japanese students' attitudes toward varieties of English. Matsuura et al. (2004), for instance, show that university students tend to think that they do not have to mimic American and British English, and that university

teachers tend to think there should be a Japanese variety of English. However, this is a quantitative study where the participants were requested to respond using a five-point scale of measurement. Although the survey provides statistically insightful results with a large number of participants, it is difficult to speculate in depth about participants' potentially complex and ambivalent views. In order to fill this gap, a small-scale study was conducted to pursue the following questions: What are Japanese learners' attitudes towards varieties of English in the language classroom? What are the reasons behind their judgements? What variety of English do they want to learn?

1. 0 Investigation

1. 1 Method

      32 Japanese students at the university level participated in the study. All of the participants had taken an elective seminar course entitled 'World Englishes' consisting of fourteen 90-minute classes conducted by the researcher in English. The course covered a variety of issues related to world Englishes, such as the historical, social and political context of English, pidgins and creoles, types of variation across Englishes, and the internationalisation of English. The textbook *World Englishes* (2003) by Jennifer Jenkins was used along with additional materials. At the end of the semester, students were instructed to (1) write about the pros and cons of each of the following options and (2) choose which option(s) would be the most plausible. They were allowed to choose a combination of more than two options. The participants were familiar with this type of task where evaluations do not depend on what option they choose but the extent to which they provide logical reasoning. With the task in question, the researcher emphasised that the participants should write their opinions freely but they had to be accompanied by convincing arguments. The researcher kept a neutral position and did not give any indication of her stance on the issue. The six options were proposed by Willis (1999, cited in Jenkins, 2003, p.129) in reference to teaching English as a lingua

franca.

Option 1: Teach standard (British?) English
Option 2: Define a form of 'international English' and teach that
Option 3: Offer a range of Englishes in the classroom
Option 4: Offer successful L2 speakers of English as models
Option 5: Give learners exposure largely to native-speaker English but place a very low premium on conformity
Option 6: Include the study of language and dialects in a language teaching programme

1. 2 Results
1. 2. 1 Advantages and Disadvantages of Each of the Six Options

Responses to the open-ended question on the pros and cons of the six options were collected and then categorised by the researcher as below. The results demonstrate the participants' high awareness of the pedagogical, social and political aspects of each option. They were conscious of the value of: effective teaching and learning (Options 1-C; 2-C; 3-G; 3-H; 4-A; 4-B; 4-E; 4-G; 4-H; 5-A; 5-D; 5-F; 5-G; 5-K; 6-B; 6-F): global intelligibility (Options 1-A; 1-F; 2-C; 2-E; 3-F; 4-F; 5-L; 6-D; 6-H); linguistic imperialism and linguicism (Options 1-G; 1-I; 2-B; 2-F; 3-C; 3-D; 4-C; 5-H; 5-I;); practicality of a system (Options 1-E; 2-D; 3-E; 4-D; 5-E; 6-E); social status and prestige (Options 1-B; 5-C; 5-J); freedom of choice (Options 3-B; 6-C; 6-G);. broadening one's perspectives (Options 3-A; 6-A).

Option 1: Teach standard (British?) English

Advantages   no.

 A) Learners can acquire English which can be understood 15
  in the wider parts of the world.
 B) Learners can acquire a prestigious variety of English. 8
 C) It is easier to teach a variety of English which has 2
  already been well established.
 D) Learning standard English will help learners better 1
  understand other varieties of English.

Disadvantages

E) It is difficult to choose which variety should be regarded as standard English. Is it British (RP) or American English (GA)? 13

F) The use of currently prestigious varieties such as British English cannot guarantee mutual intelligibility in all parts of the word because of the existence of a large number of distinctive dialects. 8

G) It may cause misunderstanding that standard English is the only "good" variety, which results in denigrating nonstandard varieties and their speakers. 6

H) If one variety has to be chosen as standard, speakers of other varieties may feel antipathy towards people in the country of the standard English. 1

I) Learning English spoken in a particular country may force learners to adopt its culture or way of thinking without their being aware of it. 1

Option 2: Define a form of 'international English' and teach that

Advantages

A) Learners can acquire English which can be understood in wider parts of the world. 16

B) Learners can learn a more politically and culturally neutral variety of English as a tool for communication. 5

C) Since it is easier to learn international English than culturally specified standard English, it is more likely that the world population will be able to achieve high levels of English proficiency skills, which consequently will assist mutual intelligibility of the language. 3

Disadvantages

D) It is difficult to define a form of international English unifying a wide variety of types of English in the world. 22

E) Defining international English will not extinguish existing dialects and therefore will not help mutual intelligibility.   3

F) It will denigrate or threaten existing varieties of English.   1

Option 3: Offer a range of Englishes in the classroom

Advantages

A) Learners can broaden their perspectives by being exposed to a range of Englishes used in the world.   11

B) Learners can choose which variety of English they want to use.   5

C) Exposure to a range of Englishes will encourage learners to accept and respect others' cultural identities, including those of minority groups.   4

D) It will be more politically neutral.   2

Disadvantages

E) It is neither practical nor efficient to teach/learn several varieties owing to the heavy teaching/ learning burden.   11

F) It will not ensure mutual intelligibility.   8

G) It is difficult to choose which varieties should be offered/ learnt.   3

H) It will be confusing to be exposed to a range of Englishes.   3

Option 4: Offer successful L2 speakers as models

Advantages

A) Successful L2 speakers can understand the difficulties of learning English and teach effective ways of mastering the language.   16

B) L2 English tends to be simpler than NS English, so it is more likely that the world population will be able to achieve higher proficiency.   3

C) L2 English is bound to be regarded with greater respect.   2

Disadvantages

D) It is difficult to choose criteria for successful L2 speakers.   7

E) L2 speakers' English may have features of their L1, so learners may pick them up.   6

F) L2 speakers' English may be unfamiliar and therefore incomprehensible to people outside their communities.   6

G) Each individual has his/her own way of learning the language, so models are not helpful.   2

H) If learners share the same L1 with a teacher, they may feel tempted to speak L1.   2

Option 5: Give learners exposure largely to native-speaker English but place a very low premium on conformity

Advantages

A) By practicing with native speakers, learners can be motivated and learn English more effectively.   8

B) Learners will be able to understand native speakers' English and can choose to keep their own English.   4

C) Learners can be exposed to the prestigious accents of native speakers.   2

D) The learning environment will be authentic, based on natural conversation.   1

Disadvantages

E) It will be costly because schools have to hire many native speakers, or learners have to study abroad, to ensure such a learning environment.   5

F) Native speakers with little knowledge of learners' L1 cannot teach grammar as effectively as teachers who have that knowledge.   2

G) A very low premium on conformity means that learners' goals are neither fixed nor predictable, and therefore this may not be effective.   2

H) Learning standard varieties, that is, British or American English often forces learners to adapt their culture or way of thinking without their being aware of it. 2

I) Learners' own local English and cultural identities will be neglected. 1

J) It will foster the social superiority of native speakers of English in the world. 1

K) Native speakers present a goal which learners cannot achieve. 1

L) A very low premium on conformity will lead to low mutual intelligibility. 1

## Option 6: Include the study of language and dialects in a language teaching program

Advantages

A) Learning about language and dialects can stimulate learners' interest in the culture of the areas where the varieties are spoken. It will broaden their perspective. 9

B) It will help learners to better understand the nature of language. 4

C) Freedom of choice and diversity can be respected. 3

D) It will help mutual intelligibility. 1

Disadvantages

E) It is neither practical nor efficient to teach several varieties owing to the heavy teaching/ learning burden. 8

F) Learning dialects will confuse learners, especially young learners and beginners. 5

G) Learners cannot choose which language or dialects they study. 2

H) It will not ensure mutual intelligibility. 2

1. 2. 2 The Most Plausible Options

As can be seen in the graph, learners' preference for native speakers' English can be observed by their choice of Option 1 (*Teach standard English*) and Option 5 (*Give learners exposure largely to native-speaker English but place a very low premium on conformity*). It should be stressed that they were not blindly attracted to the authenticity of native speakers' English without a knowledge of the political and social context surrounding the language. It was the advantages of mutual intelligibility, social prestige and effective learning that made them choose these options over other more politically neutral options.
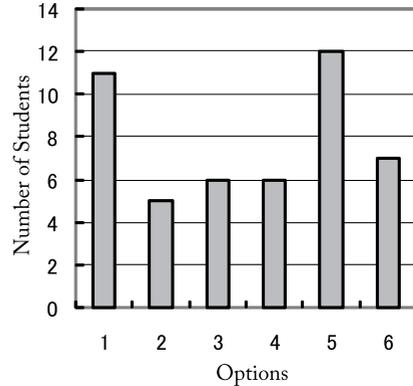
2. 0 Discussion

2. 1 Standard English

In this study, despite an awareness of the possible problems of employing standard English as a model, learners still see it as the best option available in classroom due to its mutual intelligibility[1], social prestige and role in effective learning. This result supports Spolsky's response to the criticism towards the link between English and imperialism: "A closer look at the process by which English has developed into a global language suggests that in fact the demand has continually exceeded supply" (1998: 76-77). In Japan, where English is

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[1] It should be noted that the assumption that a native-speaker standard helps advance the international intelligibility of English has been challenged. L1 speakers of syllable-based languages such as Chinese, Malay and French find speakers of stress-timed languages such as British English more difficult to understand than speakers of other syllable-timed languages due to their reduction and neutralisation of unstressed syllables (Hung, 2002). This was precisely the reason why Nerrière decided to develop Globish: his Korean and Japanese colleagues at IBM found his French-English easier to understand than British or American English.

not directly connected with the history of oppression or colonisation by Anglo-Saxon countries, university students are concerned more about the pragmatic aspects of the language: they want to learn a socially prestigious variety which can be learnt easily and used in a wider context.

Japanese people's strong attachment to prestigious varieties of British or American English can be observed readily in the advertisements of conversation schools and the Japan English Teacher (JET) programme, which started in 1987. In 2002, the Ministry of Education, Sports, Science and Technology decided to expand the JET programme and upgrade native speaker teachers from teaching assistants to full-time English teachers in junior high schools and high schools. This fondness for standard English speakers may come partly from Japan's strong admiration and worship for western culture, which dates back to the arrival of Perry's "Black Ships" in 1853 and, although it was consciously rejected as a result of wartime antipathies, was reinforced in the early postwar period (Yoshikawa, 2005). Alternatively, it may originate in Japanese strong preference for authenticity (Seargeant, 2005b), or simply in naivety.

Although post-colonial countries in the Outer Circle such as India and Nigeria show a general preference for learning nativised English over Anglo English, the situation can be different in Expanding Circle countries. In China, for example, learners as well as education officials would like to pursue the exonormative model of native speakers, particularly native speakers of American English (Kirkpatrick and Xu, 2002). This may be related to their cultural tradition of valuing established standards of correctness, as we have observed in the case of Japan. As with the JET programme, this preference is reflected in the constant recruitment of speakers of standard English as English teachers by the Chinese government. Although the recent trend in EFL is to move away from the unconditional appreciation of Anglo English, it is ultimately students (consumers) who decide what model they want to learn, and their choice should be respected.

2. 2 International English - Globish

The idea of developing international English is motivated by the hegemony imposed by the USA and the UK though the global spread of standard English. Although Ludwig Zamenhof's artificial language, Esperanto, which is independent of national origin, could have been an ideal lingua franca, history has proved its failure. Several proposals have been made to promote simple English without a cultural attachment to any specific "native" country. One of the most recent examples is Globish, consisting of 1500 basic words of English, which was proposed by a French businessman (Nerrière, 2006). The general consensus on Globish is that the concept may be good, but it is not yet a realistic option. At this early stage, it is difficult to judge whether Globish will be developed further as a real communication tool or remain simply a "good idea" in the manner of Esperanto.

Prodromou (2006) is pessimistic, arguing that successful bilingual users of English are unwilling to compromise with simple English since the core English grammar and vocabulary are relatively easy to master. For example, the University of Vienna ELF Corpus shows that simple present 3rd person –*s* can be omitted (she cook breakfast) and *isn't it?* can be used as a universal tag (we can go to school, isn't it?) without creating misunderstanding in the negotiation of meaning (Seidlhofer, 2001). However, acquiring these grammatical rules is a realistic and achievable goal for many learners of English. Therefore, lowering the target is unnecessary, and may even harm the motivation and self-esteem of learners.

If international English is to be united and codified, that process must be based on empirical research data on what grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation should be kept to insure international intelligibility and social acceptability. Furthermore, it also requires considering nonnative speakers' affective factors, such as a desire to speak like a native speaker to acquire social prestige. Creating an artificial international English and popularising it is probably ideal, but is not an easy solution.

2. 3 World Englishes – Japlish

Nativised English is generally considered as inferior to standard English in the Expanding Circle countries. Certainly, speakers of standard English can provide Japanese students with a good model to imitate. However, it is not productive to hold to unrealistic expectations of achieving "native-like fluency", a level they will never reach. Therefore, they also need to develop self-respect and confidence in its own form of educated English.

Then, what is a realistic goal? Jenkins (2006) argues that any language is subject to change over time. Language change in the Inner Circle is considered as a sign of creativity and innovation, whereas any change brought by the contact with L1 in the Outer Circle or Expanding Circle is simply regarded as an error often described as L1 transfer or L1 interference. Clearly, accepting a pluricentric approach on this matter leads to an unlimited number of new varieties of Englishes from different L1 backgrounds, which diminishes the prime purpose of learning English as a world lingua franca. According to Jenkins, therefore, local diversity should be accepted as long as it does not interrupt global intelligibility. She analyses the phonological features of English as a lingua franca and divides them into core features, which are vital to mutual intelligibility, and non-core features, which are not essential to mutual understanding. For instance, the former category includes the distinction between consonant sounds such as /l/ and /r/, and the latter includes syllable-based sounds. Accordingly, Japanese learners of English need to learn to pronounce /l/ and /r/ correctly, but their habit of inserting a vowel after each consonant such as *appulu* for an apple can be accepted as it does not seriously interfere with communication.

Although it may not be affectively easy for Japanese students to be satisfied with their own variety of English, it is by no means impossible to change their attitude with appropriate training. For instance, Chukyo University established a Department of World Englishes in 2002, where five out of 27 teachers are from Outer-Circle countries: the Bahamas, the Philippines, Zambia, India and Singapore.

Students who have studied world Englishes for two or three years are more accepting of Japanese English than those who have studied for less than a year (Yoshikawa, 2005). As also shown from the data in this study, learning about the social and political context of English can help learners be aware of the advantages and disadvantages of learning standard English, international English and world Englishes, and that can lead them to make more informed judgements about their learning goals.

3.0 Conclusion

This small-scale questionnaire study reveals that learners can develop a heightened awareness of their own learning environment by studying about world Englishes. They are concerned about the effectiveness of teaching and learning the target language, the global intelligibility of the language, issues of linguistic imperialism and linguicism, the practicality of the learning system, the social status and prestige of the variety of English they learn, freedom of choice in the way they learn and the possibility of broadening their perspectives by learning the language. Even after learning about the sociopolitical context of English, the students still prefer to take standard English as their model, which is comparable to the case in China but quite different from that in many post-colonial countries in the Outer Circle.

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