

English in Japan: From Foreign to International Language

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Abstract

From the well known lexical differences between native English speaking countries (e.g. BrE ‘pavement’, AmE ‘sidewalk’, AuE ‘footpath’), to the “striking variations in English which are emerging all over the world” (Crystal, 2003, p. 3), English is a plural language, it is spreading and dominating, and in the process it is changing and adapting to the needs of its new users.

This paper outlines the historical development of the English language before discussing the status and role of English in Japan, a country where it has been argued that English is still very much considered “foreign” (Seargeant, 2011). It also considers the extent to which ‘nativization’ has occurred, and situates these thoughts in a global English as an International Language (EIL) context.

Keywords

EIL, ELF, EFL, World Englishes, nativization

1. Introduction

English is the most widely used and learned language in the world (Yano, 2011, p. 126). Tracing its origins to Anglo-Saxon invaders sometime in the fifth century, the language developed through interaction with the indigenous population, and the lexicogrammatical assimilation of Latin, Scandinavian languages, and Norman French. The language then left the confines of the British Isles and through conquest, emigration and colonialism, spread first to North America and Australia, then to parts of Asia and Africa. The Industrial Revolution, global conflicts, the emergence of the United States as a global power, and the spread of the internet have all aided the global domination of the English language.

Beal (2012) provides a clear description of the seven stages in the development of modern English. Stage 1, Pre-English (- c.AD 450) was characterized by many local Celtic languages, and bilingual Celtic-Latin communities resulted from the Roman invasion c.55 BC. Stage 2, Early Old English (450 - c.850) developed through the introduction of various Germanic dialects from mainland Europe by the Anglo-Saxon invasion c. AD 449, and borrowings from Latin via the Church. Stage 3, Later Old English (c.850 - 1100) developed from the influence from Scandinavian languages following invasion and settlement in the north of England from Scandinavia. Stage 4, Middle English (c.1100 - 1450) became

affected by French, which became the official language following the Norman conquest. As many educated people became trilingual in French, Latin and English, vocabulary and spelling evolved. Stage 5, Early Modern English (c.1450 - 1750) evolved through attempts to standardize the language with dictionaries and grammars. As a result, the role of Latin and French declined. As Britain grew commercially and acquired overseas colonies, English became a language of science and government, and with the rise of printing acquired a typographic identity. English was taken to the Americas, Australia and India, and through the mixing with African languages during the slave trade, gave rise to English creoles. Stage 6, Modern English (c.1750 - 1950) was the language of imperial power as English was introduced as a medium of education in many parts of the world. Additionally, the industrial revolution and the growth of consumerism and advertising saw English become an international language. This was followed by Stage 7, Late Modern English (c.1950 -) when English became the international language of communications technology, first through radio, television and Hollywood movies, and later via the internet. As Britain retreated from empire, newly independent countries gave rise to new standardized varieties of English, leading Kachru (1992, p. 357) to argue that English had become a plural language, and that in order to reflect sociolinguistic reality the term 'Englishes' was more appropriate, thereby initiating discussions of the concepts of World Englishes (WE), English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) and English as an International Language (EIL).

2. English in a Global Context

"Today, English is used in politics, diplomacy, science and technology, the mass media, sea and air communications, mail services, academia, sports, entertainment and almost all fields in international communications" (Yano, 2011, p. 130). Estimates of the number of English speakers vary widely, but an often quoted figure of a billion has been stated by the British Council (1997, cited in Crystal, 2003, p. 68) and "is likely to reach a peak of around 2 billion [by 2020]" (Graddol, 2006). Crystal (2003) concludes that 25 per cent of the world's population "are now capable of communicating to a useful level in English" (p. 69). Estimates for first (L1), second (L2) and foreign language (FL) users of English have increased over the past decades (Table 1). Significantly, population growth is about 2.5 times greater in areas where English is a second language (Crystal, 2003, p. 69). In addition, Jenkins (2007, p. 28) estimates that interaction between non-native speakers accounts for 80 per cent of all communication in English. This shift in "the centre of gravity of the language" is echoed by Crystal (2003, p. 69), who gives a ratio of native to non-native users of around 1:3.

The growth of English as a world language has been rapid, but its continued popularity "depend(s) on what happens in the countries with the largest populations, notably China, Japan, Russia, Indonesia and Brazil" (Crystal, 2003, p. 71; Graddol, 2006). Honna (2008, p. 3) provides the results of an international survey conducted by the National Institute of Japanese Language to rank languages in importance for international communication (Table 2). English outranks all other languages, but the usefulness of Japanese is also noteworthy.

Table 1 Users of English as a first (L1), second (L2) and foreign language (FL) (millions)

| | L1 | L2 | FL |
|-------------------------------------|-----|--------------------------|---------|
| Quirk (1962, p. 6) | 250 | 100 (L2 and FL combined) | |
| 1970's (cf. McArthur, 1992, p.355) | 300 | 300 | 100 |
| Kachru (1985, p. 212) | 300 | 300-400 | 600-700 |
| <i>Ethnologue</i> (1988) | 403 | 397 | 800 |
| <i>Ethnologue</i> (1992) | 450 | 350 | |
| <i>Columbia Encyclopedia</i> (1993) | 450 | 400 | 850 |
| Crystal (2003, pp. 67-68) | 400 | 430 | 750 |

Source: Adapted from Crystal (2003, pp. 67-69).

3. World Englishes

Language expresses, embodies and symbolizes cultural reality (Kramersch, 1998, cited in Yano, 2011, p. 126). It is also adaptable and easily transformed when transmitted (Widdowson, 2003, cited in Yano, 2011, p. 126), therefore, “if there is one predictable consequence of a language becoming a global language, it is that nobody owns it any more ... everyone who has learned it now owns it” (Crystal, 2003, p. 2). The growth of American English from “colonial substandard” to “prestige language” (Kachru, 1983a, p. 8) illustrates how new forms can become standardized. As Britain retreated from empire, newly independent countries gave rise to new standardized varieties of English, leading Kachru (1992, p. 357) to declare that “the term ‘English’ does not capture [the] sociolinguistic reality; the term ‘Englishes’ does”.

Kachru (1992) proposed his Three Circles of English (3Cs) model as an attempt to illustrate the pluralization of English. The Inner Circle contains the UK, USA, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, nations where English is a native language (ENL). The Outer Circle contains nations where English is institutionalized and used as a second language (ESL) for certain functions such as administration, education, or literature. Members are mostly former colonies where English has become securely rooted in their culture. They have indigenized varieties of English rich in “their own local histories, literary traditions, pragmatic contexts, and communicative norms” (Kachru, 1992, p. 359) and are therefore ‘norm-developing’. Example countries include India, Kenya and Singapore. The Expanding Circle contains countries where English is viewed as a foreign language (EFL) or as an international language (EIL). These are performance varieties of English used for tourism, diplomacy and business, where first or second language speakers of English are rare. They are ‘norm-dependent’, relying on US or UK standards of English as their model (e.g. China, Japan, Russia). Though the 3Cs model is a simplification of complex sociolinguistic circumstances, it has been very influential.

According to Kachru (1983b, p.38) institutionalized varieties of English have ontological status with “an extended range of uses in the sociolinguistic context of a nation ... extended register and style range

Table 2 Languages necessary for world-wide communication

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|-------------|-----------------|-----------------|---------------|-----------------|---------------|
| U.S.A. | English (88) | Spanish (56) | Japanese (23) | French (18) | Chinese (13) |
| Brazil | English (72) | Portuguese (28) | Spanish (24) | French (8) | Japanese (5) |
| Argentina | English (86) | Spanish (25) | French (9) | Portuguese (5) | Italian (4) |
| Korea | English (93) | Korean (48) | Japanese (43) | Chinese (22) | French (14) |
| Australia | English (83) | Japanese (50) | Chinese (29) | French (18) | German (11) |
| Singapore | English (95) | Chinese (41) | Japanese (13) | French (7) | German (3) |
| Thailand | English (97) | Thai (22) | Chinese (15) | Japanese (10) | French (5) |
| U.K. | English (90) | French (56) | German (39) | Spanish (16) | Japanese (10) |
| France | English (96) | French (55) | Spanish (35) | German (30) | Chinese (7) |
| Germany | English (96) | German (54) | French (32) | Spanish (17) | Russian (13) |
| Holland | English (96) | Spanish (34) | French (26) | German (19) | Dutch (16) |
| Hungary | English (90) | German (67) | French (16) | Russian (6) | Hungarian (6) |
| Italy | English (95) | French (29) | German (21) | Spanish (12) | Italian (10) |
| Spain | English (94) | Castilian (59) | French (29) | German (23) | Catalan (4) |
| Portugal | Portuguese (99) | English (82) | French (37) | German (12) | Spanish (5) |
| Russia | English (88) | Russian (71) | German (31) | French (18) | Japanese (7) |
| India | English (89) | Hindi (32) | Marathi (11) | French (8) | Bengali (7) |
| Indonesia | English (87) | Indonesian (49) | Japanese (8) | Arabic (8) | French (6) |
| Philippines | English (98) | Tagalog (25) | Spanish (6) | Chinese (4) | Japanese (3) |
| Vietnam | English (98) | French (36) | Chinese (19) | Vietnamese (16) | Japanese (9) |
| Mongol | English (89) | Mongolian (36) | Russian (31) | Chinese (20) | Japanese (20) |
| Israel | English (96) | French (31) | Arabic (22) | Hebrew (15) | Spanish (10) |
| Turkey | English (95) | German (36) | Turkish (35) | French (23) | Japanese (11) |
| Nigeria | English (91) | Hausa (30) | Yoruba (21) | Ibo (14) | Pidgin (4) |
| Egypt | English (85) | Arabic (66) | French (36) | German (15) | Italian (5) |
| Taiwan | English (91) | Mandarin (36) | Japanese (17) | Taiwanese (8) | Spanish (1) |
| China | English (93) | Chinese (65) | Japanese (21) | French (8) | Russian (6) |
| Japan | English (90) | Japanese (21) | Chinese (9) | French (2) | Spanish (1) |

Source: Adapted from Honna (2008, p.3). Numbers = percentage of respondents.

... nativization of the registers and styles ... and a body of nativized English literature ... which mark it localized". Performance varieties become institutionalized varieties through attitudinal and linguistic processes including "(a) the length of time in use; (b) the extension of use; (c) the emotional attachment of L2 users with the variety; (d) functional importance; and (e) sociolinguistic status" (p. 39).

Since taking on the role of lingua franca, a reconceptualization of the English language has occurred. It has evolved from what was predominantly a national language with a limited number of dominant standards, to a manifestly multiplex global language. As English interacts with different languages and cultures, it is modified to suit the local pragmatic and lexicogrammatical demands, producing new varieties. As a result, World Englishes describes “an approach which takes account of the broadening global identity that the language has developed” (Seargeant, 2011, p.2).

4. English as an International Language and a Lingua Franca

Seidlhofer (2005, p. 339) describes EIL as uses of English “within and across Kachru’s ‘Circles’, for intranational as well as international communication”, and English as a lingua franca (ELF) as “the means of communication among people from different first language backgrounds, across linguacultural boundaries”. EIL represents a convergence of all the different Englishes for the purposes of higher mutual intelligibility.

Jenkins (1998, 2007) has conducted extensive studies on phonological intelligibility of non-native speakers of English in order to determine the features impeding mutual intelligibility. Jenkins’ Lingua Franca Core “prioritize(s) features which constitute more relevant and more realistic learning targets for EIL speakers” and does not include sounds which, though common in some native-speaker English varieties, are not crucial for mutual intelligibility and can be substituted (Seidlhofer, 2001, p. 142). Standard English sounds such as /ð/ and /θ/ are often problematic for Asian speakers. Some grammatical ‘errors’ common to ELF interactions, such as omitting the third person singular present tense ‘-s’ marking with verbs, also cause few problems (Seidlhofer, 2005, p. 339).

As recent ELF research has demonstrated, when English is used as a lingua franca it does not need to be measured against monolingual standards (Garcia, 2009, cited in Kirkpatrick, 2010, p. 172), but against efficiency of communication. Non-standard linguistic forms are tolerable provided communication remains possible. Quirk (1985, cited in Pennycook, 1994, p. 10) and Prator (1968) disagree, insisting that a central standard of English should be maintained for intelligibility. The orientation of TEFL has begun to shift from correctness to appropriateness, as “native speakers of this language have lost the exclusive prerogative to control its standardization” (Kachru, cited in Pennycook, 1994, p. 10). However, the target in teaching is still predominantly native-speaker norms (Seidlhofer, 2001, p. 135).

5. English in Japan

The concept of a national language and the romantic ideology developed around it is especially strong in Japan. However, Loveday (1996, cited in Stanlaw, 2004, p. 45) admits that Japan has always been an enthusiastic borrower of things foreign, including the linguistic resources of foreign languages. Unlike many other Asian countries, Japan never experienced colonization, and English was never introduced into the infrastructure of the country, even during the period of US occupation following the Second

World War.

Japan represents a compelling case study for examining the actuality of EIL (Sergeant, 2011, p.3). English has a strong visual and conceptual presence in Japanese society (Haarmann, 1989; Sergeant, 2009) and is a source of intense fascination (McVeigh, 2002), yet the language has no official status and very few citizens gain fluency in it (Yano, 2011). Despite this, English has become a significant part of everyday life (Haarmann, 1989; Stanlaw, 1983; Stanlaw, 2004).

The majority of researchers agree that Japanese English is far from an established variety. Yano (2011, p. 134) concludes that “it is not likely that Japan will develop a variety recognizable as Japanese English with its own endonormative standards like those that occur in Indian English and Singaporean English” as the Japanese do not study English intensively enough to internalize the language and they do not use the language intra-nationally. Sergeant (2012, p. 28) notes that in Japan, students “are not expected to use [English] as part of their everyday life in Japanese society, but as a useful tool should they travel abroad or want to learn about the cultures of English-speaking nations”. However, Stanlaw (2004) argues there is a Japanese English variety, stating that “English is not only an Asian language, it is also a Japanese language”. His main arguments are:

1. *English is necessary to speak Japanese today.* This is true, given the number of borrowed words which have become part of the Japanese lexicography (Kachru and Nelson, 2006; Honna, 1995).
2. *English is a creative force in artistic expression.* Sergeant (2009, p. 81) disagrees, noting “there is no tradition of native literature written in English”. It can be found in pop songs (Moody, 2006), and on television ‘language entertainment’ programs (Moody & Matsumoto, 2011) but there is strong nativization and it is used to identify with certain cultural affiliations (Pennycook, 2003, cited in Sergeant, 2009, p. 82).
3. *English linguistic forms are a created-in-Japan variety for use by Japanese in Japan regardless of how they may appear to native English speakers.* Haarman (1989) and Ikeshima (2005) interpret this in a different way, arguing that many of these created-in-Japan neologisms are coined to project a feeling or association rather than as authentic usages of language.
4. *English has a critical place in the Japanese symbol system.* This is true, but Haarman (1989) and Ikeshima (2005) note that *Romaji* (the Latin alphabet) is only used in advertising and other forms of media to catch the eye. Loanwords are usually written in *katakana*, a Japanese symbol system reserved for foreign words.
5. *English loanwords are used by all Japanese people.* Again this is true, but Kachru and Nelson (2006) and Honna (1995) explain that loanwords are first modified phonetically and semantically to become Japanese, losing their Englishness.

Honna (2008, p. 56-57) discusses the emergence of Japanese-originated English, citing examples such as *walkman*, *karaoke*, *case-by-case*, and *forward-looking* which have been received internationally. He also suggests that other lexical items representing ideas not codified in native English varieties such as

paper driver (a person who has a license but does not drive a car), *hot carpet* (an electrically warmed carpet), and *washlet* (wash + toilet: a toilet and bidet combined) could also be adopted under the right conditions. The English used in Japan has some unique characteristics and “in its Japanese form, English has acquired a stable status in the communicative strategies of Japanese people” (Kachru, 1983a, p. 4).

6. Characteristics of Nativization

Higa (1973, cited in Kachru and Nelson, 2006, p. 172) calculates that English borrowings in Japanese total approximately 8 percent of the language vocabulary, and that of all borrowed words used by the Japanese 81 percent are derived from English. Honna (1995) calculates that 10% of the lexicon of a standard Japanese dictionary constitute foreign words, the majority of which are English. Additionally, 13% of the words used in daily conversation are foreign, and 60-70% of new words in the annually revised dictionaries of neologisms are from English.

Japanese accommodates borrowed words through segmental modification to conform to its phonological structure (Kachru and Nelson, 2006, p. 172) via the following rules:

- i. insertion of a vowel to simplify consonant clusters, e.g. *sutuuru* (stool)
- ii. addition of *-o* and *-i* as a final, e.g. *sooto* (thought)
- iii. syllabic after words ending in *t*, *d*, and *č, ĵ*, respectively, e.g. *raunndo* (round)
- iv. addition of *-u* as a final syllabic in all other cases, e.g. *zisu* (this), *gorufu* (golf)
- v. the realization of voiceless inter-dental fricative θ as *s*, *z*, *š*, *t* or *ts*; voiced inter-dental fricative δ as *z* or *ĵ*; *l* as *r*; final *r* as *ā*; and *v* as *b*, e.g. *zisu* (this), *zato* (that), *kaa* (car), *sebunirebun* (seven-eleven)

All borrowed word are treated as nouns. Adverbs are formed by adding the postpositional article *ni* ('in, at'), and verbs by adding *suru* ('do'). Various adaptation patterns are used for English words to become part of the Japanese lexicon (Honna, 2008, pp.99-104), including:

1. Direct Borrowing. Words retain their original English meaning, but are written in the Japanese orthographical system and pronounced in the Japanese way.
2. Semantic Shifting. Can result in a shift or narrowing of meaning. The Japanese lexeme *hyuman* (human) means 'friendly to human beings', therefore *hyuman electoronicusu* translates as 'user friendly electronics'.
3. Japanese-made Coinage (*wasei-eigo*). This involves combining words and phrases to create new English-based items often unintelligible to native English speakers. *Beesu-appu* means an increase in (base) salary. It is created by combining 'base' and 'up' and is analogous to 'level up'.
4. Tail Cutting. Shortens words to the first two or three syllables, e.g. *biru* (building), *sando*

(sandwich), *kone* (connection).

5. Acronym Formation. Common acronyms include *OB* (old boy, meaning male senior alumni) and *DK* (dining kitchen).
6. Compound Reduction. Similar to English reductions such as “hi-fi” (high fidelity) and “blog” (web log). Examples include *geesen* (game center), *pasokon* (personal computer), and *sekuhara* (sexual harassment).
7. Japanese-English Combination. Combining the Japanese for tooth (*ha*) with the English ‘brush’ creates *haburashi* (tooth brush).
8. Word Play. The number five is pronounced ‘*go*’ in Japanese, so early-birds may set their alarm clocks for 05:55, read ‘*Go, Go, Go!*’. This kind of pun is common in advertising, and involves phonology, orthography, and semantics.

Honna (2008, p. 103) notes the conspicuous drive for Japanazition in all of the borrowing patterns which often makes the English origin unrecognizable.

7. Conclusions

English in Japan is a performance variety, and its study can reveal much about the processes of nativization, language change, and the interrelations of language and culture. There is a cline of proficiency in this performance variety of English, from those that only know ‘examination English’ to fully bilingual Japanese (Stanlaw, 2004, p. 289). However, code-mixing and code-switching between English and Japanese is uncommon among the majority of the population. It is likely to be some time before endonormative standards are established as English is not used intra-nationally between Japanese speakers and there is no tradition of native literature written in English.

Kachru & Nelson (2006, p. 175) have convincingly argued that English is nativized “for the Japanese audience with no regard for intelligibility with non-Japanese”. Honna (2008, p. 115) is likely correct when insisting that what is happening in Japan with regards to English is not a contamination of Japanese by English, but an indiginezation of English words into Japanese lexicon, creating Anglo-*Japanese* rather than Japanese-English.

Globally, English is beginning to be seen as an international language rather than a foreign language, and in this regard Japan is falling behind. In most discussions English is referred to as a foreign language, and “the distinction between ‘foreign’ and ‘international’ ... would seem ... not to have entered the consciousness of policy in Japan” (Sergeant, 2009, p. 60). It is this conception of English being foreign that shapes educational policy decisions on the one hand, and learner experience on the other.

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