



An English as a Lingua Franca Model for English Teaching in Japan: Pedagogical Implications

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Abstract This paper discusses the advantages that may be gained from employing an “English as a Lingua Franca” model in English Language Teaching in Japan. The current approach in many educational contexts in Japan could be described as an “English as a Foreign Language” model, which generally takes native-speaker norms as its basis for teaching. First, these two models are compared and contrasted. Then, after a discussion of the background and rationale for such a shift in focus, the article finally introduces practical suggestions for approaching the teaching of English in classrooms in Japan that takes into consideration the multi-cultural nature of English today. Areas where change might occur include the teaching of pronunciation, vocabulary and syntax, pragmatics and culture, as well as a reconsideration of the textbooks and methodologies used in classes.

Key words English Language Teaching, Sociolinguistics, World Englishes, English as a Lingua Franca

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Introduction

As with all languages, English is constantly in flux, a continually evolving communication system, which dictionaries and textbooks can only ever vainly attempt to contain or control. In the case of English, a long history of movement around the globe initially on the coat-tails of colonial ambition, followed by association with the two industrial giants of the UK and US, and then as one of the main languages of science (Crystal, 2003), has led English to become an international language *par excellence* (McKay, 2002). As such, English, perhaps more than any language before it, has arrived in a position as a language of diversity, expressing ideas, identities and cultures of people from widely divergent backgrounds. Indeed one of the language's greatest strengths is its "ability to represent effectively the contextual experiences of those who use it" (Kachru & Nelson, 2006, pg. 16).

The result is that English is now increasingly referred to in the plural *Englishes*, as in the sociolinguistic field of World Englishes (Kachru, 1985; Kirkpatrick, 2007). It is safe to assert that the ownership of English can no longer be claimed by a small number of so-called "native" speakers⁽¹⁾ (hereafter NSs) in countries such as Britain and the US. The fact that the number of so-called "non-native" speakers (see note at 1) now perhaps numbers more than 1 billion (as opposed to about 300 million NSs) bears this out (Crystal, 2003). Graddol's (2006) well-known estimate holds that at present, up to 80% of worldwide communication in English may take place between non-native speaker and non-native speaker (hereafter NNS). In fact, a quick calculation based on population shows that only 5% of potential interlocutors for anyone would be from the U.S. or the U.K. (Kachru & Nelson, 2006).

In the business domain in Japan, this is becoming a very likely proposition. In the 1980s, the share of exports from Japan to China and East Asia were 3.9% and 25.7% respectively, but the figures were up to 13.1% and 46.9% by 2004, while at the same time, share of exports to the US declined slightly (JETRO, 2005).

(1) The notion of what constitutes a native speaker is contentious (Davies, 2003), however I use the terms "native speaker" and "non-native speaker" in this paper in lieu of any alternatives, and in the sense that they are commonly used within Japan.

English as a Foreign Language vs. English as a Lingua Franca

The dominant paradigm for the teaching of foreign languages in Expanding Circle countries⁽²⁾ is presently English as a Foreign Language (EFL). However, the unprecedented situation whereby English has now spread through diverse environments has led to the growing field of English as a Lingua Franca (hereafter ELF) which has a research focus on interactions primarily between NNS-NNS. Such EFL interactions can be described as “interactions between members of two of more different lingua-cultures in English, for none of whom English is the mother tongue” (House, 1999, p. 74).

Another term, English as an International Language (EIL), is also used to describe similar circumstances, and sometimes interchangeably with ELF, but it may be seen to be more accepting of *all* English interactions in international situations, non-native or otherwise. However, for the purposes of this paper and for the sake of simplification, I will refer only to ELF because many ELF researchers also allow for NS-NNS interactions.

With regard to the key differences between ELF and the more traditional EFL, Jenkins (2009) suggests the following essential differences between the two.

English as a foreign language (EFL)	English as a lingua franca (ELF)
Part of modern foreign languages	Part of World Englishes
Deviations are seen as deficiencies	Deviations seen as legitimate differences
Described by metaphors of transfer, interference and fossilization	Described by metaphors of language contact and evolution
Code-switching - viewed negatively - compensating for gaps	Code-switching seen positively - promote speaker identity, solidarity with interlocutors

(2) Kachru's 1995 model of World Englishes delineates three areas of English use; The Inner Circle consists of those countries where English is used as a native language, (UK, USA, NZ, Australia etc); The Outer Circle refers to countries, often after British colonial rule, where English is used as an official language or language of everyday life (Singapore, India, Kenya etc); The Expanding Circle (so-named due to being an area where speaker numbers are increasing rapidly) are countries not traditionally associated with English as an official language but where the learning of it is growing in popularity (Russia, China, Japan etc.). While some critics suggest that this model is now outdated due to rapid global change, it still serves as a somewhat useful indicator of the kind of English speaker being described.

Proponents of an ELF approach thus suggest that it not only takes into account the reality of modern English use in a global sense, but also allows learners to express their own identities in the language. Kirkpatrick (2006) argues that an ELF model may be preferable to native or nativized (Inner and Outer Circle) models, because it can become:

the property of all, and it will be flexible enough to reflect the cultural norms of those who use it. In this it differs markedly from both native and nativized varieties of English, as native and nativized varieties must by definition reflect the cultural norms of their speakers. (Kirkpatrick, 2006, p. 79)

While the EFL viewpoint is growing in popularity and stature, there are detractors. Kuo (2006), for example, expresses concern about the possibility of an ELF corpus becoming the model for language teaching, and argues instead for a native speaker model (hereafter NSM) that at the same time takes context into consideration. For the purposes of this paper, I am not in anyway suggesting that an ELF corpus become a teaching model. Rather, the main focus is on preparing students for how a majority of them will probably be using English in the future (i.e. with speakers of diverse cultural backgrounds), allowing them more flexibility in the classroom with areas of variance among different Englishes (such as pronunciation), and focusing on communication and intelligibility rather than strict adherence to one “correct” model.

The situation in Japan

While English now exists as a global language capable of expressing the multi-cultural identities of its users, in many pedagogical situations in Japan, the NSM still prevails, with its focus on American or British standards of pronunciation, lexis, grammar, pragmatics and even culture. While this may be slowly changing, it would appear in the majority of contexts in Japan that this is probably still the case. Indeed, some scholars strongly suggest that for such EFL situations, a standard

NSM is still preferable (Mufwene, 2008), and it may be that the idea of the NS of English is “so embedded within the social fabric that it cannot be simply removed or replaced, especially if students favour and desire native speaking English models regardless of the political implications” (Rivers, 2009, pg. 71, cited in Houghton, 2009).

Supporters of a move toward an ELF model would argue however that Japanese students are spending unnecessarily large amounts of time and money chasing a NSM that most can never hope to attain, and at the same time that this model is removed from how many people will use English in the future, that is as an international language between people from many different backgrounds and cultures. As well as time and money, other repercussions that may derive from a focus on the NSM include the demotivation that can occur when students realize the unattainability of this model, and very real feelings of inferiority among non-native/Japanese teachers of English which in turn creates “unfair and discriminatory hiring practices” (Rajagopalan, 2004, p. 114). There are growing calls for a new approach, one sympathetic to the needs of Japanese students that allows them to express their own identities and gain a sense of ownership over *their* English (D’Angelo, 2010; Hino, 2012). This paper aims to outline some possible areas of change that teachers themselves can take in moving towards an ELF approach in language classrooms.

Background to change

Calls for re-evaluation of the prevalent NSM in Japan are not new. Over 30 years ago, Baxter (1980) argued that the L1 model was not “the most productive pedagogical model” for Japan (p. 56). However, at the same time this does not necessarily suggest that there should be the development of, or insistence on, “Japanese English” per se (Baxter, 1980; D’Angelo, 2010). Rather, the aim could be an approach to teaching English that takes into account the way that English will be, and is already being used as a global language between speakers of vastly different cultural backgrounds, and one that does not conflict with speakers’ identities. Yet for teachers

and researchers in Japan, it is still far from clear what this might practically entail. Starting points may come in the shape of more diverse listening materials (I. B. Brown, 2009), the teaching of core phonological features and accommodation skills (Jenkins, 2000; Walker 2010), employing teachers from various English-speaking countries (Miyagi, Sato & Crump 2009), a redesign of curricula that are informed by World Englishes or English as an International language (D'Angelo 2005; J. D. Brown, 2012), a reconsideration of the somewhat prevalent beliefs regarding complete avoidance of L1 in the Japanese communicative classroom (for a reexamination of L1 in the classroom, see Cook, 2001), new approaches to teaching culture (Harumi, 2002) and even the creation of an endonormative model (Hino, 2012).⁽³⁾ The following constitutes an overview of some of the pedagogical areas that may benefit from a move away from a NSM.

Areas of potential change

Japanese (accented) English/Phonology

The negative beliefs about Japanese accents in English that many learners and teachers hold in Japan may have serious consequences for learners (and Japanese teachers of English). Attempts to redress this negativity have had mixed results. Matsuura, Chiba, and Yamamoto (1995) found that Japanese learners' familiarity with Japanese accents didn't result in the learners viewing them favorably, and instead detesting them. Yoshikawa (2005) found that after a year in a university WE program, students developed even stronger affinities to "standard" Englishes. My own interviews with students also suggest that while some students are happy with their own "Japanese" version of English, most feel strongly that any form of Japanese English should not be the basis of input for their learning (Harris, 2012).

On the other hand, I. B. Brown (2009) suggests that exposure to NNSs of English in a classroom resulted in among other things, positive attitude change to the ac-

(3) Hino (2012) explicitly states however that rather than a national endonormative variety, he is referring instead to a pedagogical alternative to conventional Anglo-American English (p. 28).

ceptability of speaking with a Japanese accent. Kawakami and Kawakami (2009) discuss a program where elementary teachers were taught about WE after which many felt “emancipated from the pressure to have to teach ‘authentic’ English” (p. 12). Indeed there is the question of what exactly “authentic” English language is anyway (Sergeant, 2013).

Deterding & Kirkpatrick (2006) point out that for ELF speakers in Asia, certain non-native features are not only intelligible but actually serve to *increase* intelligibility:

It might be argued that some features, particularly the use of full vowels in function words and the clear bisyllabic pronunciation of *our*, actually serve to enhance the intelligibility for other listeners in the region. (Deterding & Kirkpatrick, 2006, pg. 394)

Awareness of this may help Japanese students to gain more confidence about their own English accents. This may be especially true for elementary school teachers. For English education in Japan, elementary school teachers constitute an increasingly important population because now they are the first people to teach English to Japanese students (presently from the fifth grade, with Ministry of Education plans to make it even earlier) and therefore influence future beliefs of students. Otsubo (1999) suggests that young learners need confidence about their own accent from a young age. Teacher trainers can help develop confidence among elementary school teachers, and subsequently young learners, by raising awareness of the many different accents used by English speakers from vastly different backgrounds around the world.

The virtues of shifting focus in this area are manifold. Walker (2010) for example, points out a number of benefits that come from an ELF emphasis on pronunciation, some of which include a lighter workload, increased progress and achievability, support of the speaker’s identity through accent, and the benefits that this would bring non-native speaking teachers.

Vocabulary Loanwords

The Japanese language features a large number of loanwords (called *gairaigo* in Japanese). This large, imported vocabulary is constantly growing and shifting, so it is hard to pinpoint a number of how many exist in daily conversation at any one time. To give an idea of the rate of absorption of *gairaigo* into Japanese, the 2nd edition of the *Sanseido Concise Dictionary of Foreign Words* (2000) listed over 45,000 entries. Ten years later, the 4th edition included 56,300 entries (*Sanseido Concise Dictionary of Foreign Words 4th Edition*, 2010). (Stanlaw, 2004) estimates that over 80% of common *gairaigo* are of English origin. As a result, some estimates suggest that over half of the most commonly used 3,000 English words now appear in Japanese *gairaigo* (Daulton, 2008).

It is perhaps not surprising that given the prevalence of English words in *gairaigo*, their presence is often discussed in relation to English Language Teaching. Again, there appears to be division into two basic camps, those who see *gairaigo* as a valuable lexical resource, lightening the load for Japanese learners of English (Daulton, 2008; Daulton, 2009; Brown & Williams, 1995), or instead as a barrier to communication in English (Simon-Maeda, 1995; Shepard, 1996). Arguments for the latter generally cite meaning shift (Stanlaw, 2004) and pronunciation differences and intelligibility issues (Ogasawara, 2008; Shepard, 1996). However, meaning shift may very well be the exception rather than the norm. Daulton (2009) believes that with exceptions, “the most common meaning of an English word is the most likely to be borrowed into Japanese” (p. 42).

Arguments regarding pronunciation and intelligibility are usually made vis-à-vis a single and static NSM, rather than in the context of international communication and are open to challenge when taking into consideration the reality of English in the world today. For example, two common complaints laid at *gairaigo* pronunciation, the addition of vowel sounds between consonant clusters (*bravo* becomes *buravo*) and at the end of consonant-final words (*ride* becomes *raido*) become less of an issue when General American or Received Pronunciation are no longer the model. Indeed, work on intelligibility in an international context supports this. Jenkins’ (2000) model of pronunciation for EIL suggests that vowel additions

such as the above might even assist in intelligibility in NNS-NNS speaker conversations.

My own small-scale study of the intelligibility of *gairaigo* suggests that while many Japanese learners think that *gairaigo* are for the most part impossible for non-Japanese speakers to understand, this is not necessarily the case in international communication (Harris, 2013).

Yet again, teachers, by helping students to become aware of *gairaigo* as a valuable learning resource, may help them to gain more confidence with English.

Sentence level/Grammar

Hino (2012) has discussed the possibility and benefits of an endonormative model which goes beyond phonological and lexical features and also includes grammatical, discourse and sociolinguistic features reflective of a Japanese background. The present context in Japan, where English is used for limited official purposes, would suggest that an actual model, replete with textbooks and dictionaries, would be somewhat implausible, however there is no doubt that most of the features Hino discusses are common examples of a developing 'Japanese English'. Some of these features appear in other varieties of Englishes, for example non-standard use of articles (Kirkpatrick 2011).

Conversational analysis of ELF interactions will also provide useful for language teachers. For example, Kirkpatrick (2007) describes a study investigating how ASEAN speakers interact with each other using English. The speakers were recorded talking to each other during a conference in Singapore. In such interactions the present tense made up 61% of tenses used, followed by the past simple and modals. He explains that other verbs forms, such as the present perfect passive, the past continuous and the past perfect, were hardly ever used. Kirkpatrick therefore questions "whether students in certain contexts should spend much classroom time on these rare' tenses" (pg. 157). While not an ASEAN member, Japan has a great deal of contact with the member countries. Yet in general, most language learning textbooks in Japan that have some focus on grammar usually devote nearly equal space to each of the various grammar points such as the past continuous and past perfect. Rethinking the distribution and attention paid to the various forms and focussing

more on grammar forms that ELF speakers are likely to use may be worth consideration.

Pragmatics and Culture

The central discourse of recent years that results in the huge emphasis on English education in Japan is undoubtedly that of *kokusaika* (internationalization), which has permeated every area of education from kindergarten to graduate school. Many schools now stress a focus on “English as a global/international” language in sales materials (Sergeant, 2009). Yet learners of English in Japan are still often encouraged to think and act like a NS (and most usually this is an imaginary singular American or British NS far from the multi-cultural realities of both of those countries). Examples of this include language learning textbooks focusing on how to use more direct speech with less “hedging”, or the need to place reasons for requests *after* a request (as opposed to *before* which tends to be more prevalent in Japanese speech). An approach to the teaching of pragmatics and culture in Japan that does not parrot one particular culture’s adaption of the language would provide students with a more balanced and realistic understanding of English speaking cultures. A look at how much pragmatic variation there is within the inner circle countries, let alone at how English is used by people from vastly different cultures around the world, supports this. Holmes (1986) for example, discusses differences between native English speakers in New Zealand and their North American speaking counterparts in their use of compliments. A broadening of focus toward description of such disparate uses among English speaking people of various cultures, as well as of how Japanese speakers use language to express their own culture and values should go some way to introducing students to the variety of pragmatic expectations among English speakers.

This broad view should also try to go some way in encapsulating the complexity that exists due to the many cultures using English, including both differences *and* similarities. Aston (1993) contends that in intercultural pragmatic situations, the goal of establishing “comity” (kind, considerate and culturally sensitive behavior to other people) can be achieved more successfully when we focus on individual

identities, rather than viewing people as representatives of their home country cultures.

Interlanguage pragmatics should operate with a difference hypothesis rather than a deficit hypothesis . . . and not simply analyse NNS discourse in terms of failure to conform to NS conversational norms. Pedagogically, it implies that the learner's task in developing an ability for interactional speech using the L2 is not simply one of acquiring native-like sociolinguistic competence in the attempt to mimic the behavior of a native speaker, but requires the development of an ability to use specific comity strategies appropriate to the context of NNS discourse. (Aston, 1993, p. 75–76)

The practice of teaching about culture also becomes somewhat complicated when the language being learnt no longer belongs to any specific country's population. For example, students learning Japanese as a second language generally learn about Japan's culture, as the language has few speakers outside of Japan. With English however, the question of which culture to teach becomes a complex issue. Similar to the approach with pragmatic norms, a starting point for language teachers may be to spend as much time as possible teaching about as many of the countries and cultures that use English as possible to give students a sense of the wide variety of English speaking people in the world today.

Language learning materials

A NSM focus is still undoubtedly present in many language learning textbooks in Japan. Matsuda (2002) analysed beginning EFL textbooks for Japanese students and found that they overwhelmingly featured characters from the Inner Circle, whether speaking in intra-national or international situations. She suggests that apart from the obvious need to bring textbooks in line with the current global usage of English, and thus feature speakers from a variety of language backgrounds, teachers could use supplementary materials to offset this imbalance within published textbooks.

The same may well be true for high school and university level textbooks. While some titles are beginning to feature characters from different English speaking countries, often these characters are voiced by native speakers, thus somewhat defeating the purpose of having multiple voices (Harris, 2012). Alptekin (2002) stresses the need for NNS-NNS and NNS-NS speaker materials to make up the bulk of language learning materials, which would be a truer reflection of English language use in the world now, and in particular, materials relevant to learner's lives. Related to this last point, Prodromou (1998) maintains that one reason students are not motivated by culture learning is the way culture is presented in many ELT textbooks. He maintains that globally designed textbooks remain:

stubbornly Anglo-centric: appealing to a world market as they do, they cannot by definition draw on local varieties of English and have not gone very far in recognizing English as an international language either. What were they about? They were mostly about situations which were not only imaginary ... but vacuous, empty of life. Even when the textbooks were technicolour, they were marketing a black-and-white cardboard cut-out world. (Prodromou, 1988, pg. 76)

Teachers can address this problem to an extent, by supplementing textbooks with authentic materials which feature English speaking people from different cultural backgrounds, and which highlight the many varieties of English in use today.

Teaching Methodology

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) has become the dominant focus for many language classes in Japan. Task-based learning teaching (TBLT—a subsequent development of CLT) for example, has become very popular in Japan in recent years (Lowe, 2012). This has sometimes resulted in negative views towards traditional grammar-translation methods, often even from teachers employing such methods. On the other hand, critics of CLT or TBLT in Japan usually suggest

that these methods may make students in Japan, familiar with more traditional styles, uncomfortable or may even result in them not being able to learn the language (Sato, 2010). This debate is ongoing, but the ELF-informed teacher should perhaps take a context-based approach, working to find the best teaching style that suits their class and individual students rather than any rigid adherence to any single methodology.

Conclusion

This article has focused on practical ideas for implementing a teaching model that avoids overattention on NS norms. In order to achieve this, areas where change may occur include phonology, vocabulary, syntax, pragmatics and culture, textbook choice and textbook augmentation, as well as teaching methodology. As stated earlier, the purpose of this article is in no way to suggest that a NNS-corpus or such should necessarily form the basis of teaching materials in EFL classrooms in Japan. Rather it aims toward an approach informed by, and more in line with, the realities of English in the world today.

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