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Japanese English and International Communication

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Gary Littlecott

Abstract

Amongst the many new English varieties developing in the world today, an identifiable Japanese variety of English is emerging, albeit slowly. This paper argues that people with an active interest in the English language should embrace the variety and encourage its development and use. A fully formed Japanese English would have three distinct registers: educated, standard and broad. The educated register would be very similar to the educated registers of other English varieties, and would prioritise communication. However, the standard register, and especially the broad register, would reflect Japanese identity and culture. Therefore, Japanese English would best suit the needs of the Japanese people. Furthermore, it is argued that a gradual shift from a native speaker model to a Japanese English model for the classroom needs to begin so that the variety can develop and be an established and respected one. However, there are some important caveats. First, a number of misconceptions and prejudices about English in general and Japanese English in particular need to be addressed in order for the variety to develop. Next, since Japanese English, and especially its broad register, is currently little used or understood internationally, accommodation and negotiation of meaning skills need to become key parts of the English language syllabus. If these points are addressed, then the Japanese variety can be promoted with enthusiasm and confidence.

Keywords: Japanese English, exonormative model, endonormative model, language prejudice, Japanese lexical items

Introduction

Although English is spoken all over the world, there is no single variety that is spoken by everyone. Instead, as well as established native speaker Englishes such as British English, there are a multitude of new English varieties, all at various stages of development. All these Englishes have unique characteristics, which reflect individual identity and cultural differences between English speakers around the world. As Park and Wee state 'English has been locally adopted and transformed as an expression of local cultural identity.' (Park and Wee 2014: 83) This paper will argue that amongst these Englishes, a Japanese variety

of English is developing, albeit slowly, and that people with an interest in the language such as teachers, should actively encourage its development and use. Currently, Japanese schools and universities use exonormative, native speaker English teaching models such as American English. According to Kirkpatrick, an exonormative model 'originates from outside the place where it is spoken. This is contrasted with an 'endonormative model' which is a locally grown model.' (Kirkpatrick 2007: 30-31) Exonormative models, such as American English and British English, are popular international teaching models as they have prestige, are codified in dictionaries and grammars, and have available a wide range of teaching materials. However, this paper will argue that Japan needs to move away from an exonormative, native speaker teaching model and towards an endonormative, local Japanese one. This is because Japanese English serves the needs of the Japanese people better than a native speaker English. For example, exonormative, native speaker Englishes such as American and British English reflect American and British identity and culture, and not Japan's. Identity can be expressed in a first or additional language. As Jenkins states 'a language does not have to be a mother tongue in order to be capable of expressing aspects of a speaker's social identity.' (Jenkins 2003: 143) Furthermore, Kirkpatrick argues that '... far from English being a purveyor of Anglo-cultural norms, the development of new varieties of English shows how English can be adapted by its speakers, to reflect their cultural norms. (Kirkpatrick 2007: 36) Stanlaw also believes that Japanese English matches the requirements of the Japanese people, stating that 'Japanese English is English for Japanese purposes - and not for American or British purposes...' (Stanlaw 2004: 287) Nevertheless, adopting an endonormative model for the classroom may take a considerable amount of time due to a number of key reasons, which will be discussed later in this paper. As Kirkpatrick states 'Despite its existence and its inventiveness, it will be a long time before...Japanese English becomes formalised and taught in schools. Yet a move towards adopting as a learner target, a Japanese variety of English that allows for international communication could greatly enhance the prospects of successful language learning in Japanese schools.' (Kirkpatrick 2007: 193) Therefore, although Japanese English may not become a teaching model anytime soon, it is argued that a move from an exonormative to an endonormative model, however gradual, needs to become a fundamental goal of English education in Japan. English varieties vary according to lexis (vocabulary), pronunciation, grammar and syntax. Although Japanese English has various identifiable characteristics, this paper will primarily focus on lexis since vocabulary is a major difference between English varieties. As Bao states '...to a large extent,

it is the restructured...vocabulary that differentiates one regional variety of World English from another.' (Bao in Low and Pakir (Ed) 2018: 144).

English speakers in Japan, especially native English speakers, may have heard Japanese people say that they are a member of a *circle*, such as a *tennis circle* or a *film circle*. However, Anglo-Americans may have considered the use of *circle* as odd because in native speaker Englishes such as British English *tennis club* or *film society* are standardly used. Some native speakers, especially English language teachers, may have corrected Japanese people's English due to the fact that it differed from their own English variety. However, in light of the new varieties and forms of English developing around the world, a different English does not necessarily mean that it is a wrong English. By using *circle* instead of *club* or *society*, Japanese speakers are expressing identity and culture through Japanese English. As Jenkins argues 'It should be (but often is not) manifestly clear ...that its (non-native English) speakers can no longer be assumed to be deficient where their English use departs from ENL (English as a Native Language). (Jenkins 2003: 238) In addition, Honna states that 'We can be different in our English, but still mutually communicable enough for interpersonal relationship, information exchange and other endeavors.' (Honna 2008: 11) Therefore, by correcting Japanese people's English if it differs from a native speaker's, may be undermining the development of a local, Japanese English.

However, there are some important caveats if Japanese English is to be promoted and eventually become a teaching model. First, there are various misconceptions about English and prejudices against Japanese English that need to be addressed in order for it to be fully accepted. Next, due to the fact that Japanese English is a new variety and may not be well understood internationally, the Japanese need to acquire effective accommodation and negotiation of meaning skills for international communication. In addition, teachers need to present lexical alternatives in classroom instruction such as the aforementioned *club* and *society* if international communication is prioritised. If these points are addressed, then the Japanese variety can be promoted with enthusiasm and confidence.

Functions of Language

This paper follows the social linguistic concepts put forward by Kirkpatrick. In essence we all speak languages in different ways, depending on the situation or context. As Kirkpatrick states there are three main functions of language: communication, identity and

culture. (Kirkpatrick 2007: 10) He then discusses an ‘identity-communication continuum.’ (Ibid: 5) At one of the continuum (or cline) is an educated register for facilitating international communication. At the other end of the cline is a broad register to prioritise the functions of identity and culture. Midway along the cline is a standard register, which uses regular lexical items, but excludes (very) formal vocabulary, culture specific lexis as well as non-standard and slang words. All varieties of English need three distinct registers depending on whether the communicative function takes precedence or whether the identity and culture functions are the primary considerations. As Kirkpatrick states ‘all varieties must on the one hand, reflect the cultural realities of their speakers and, on the other hand, be adaptable enough to allow international communication.’ (Ibid: 34) While there are only a few differences in the educated registers of English, there are big differences between broad registers, as they reflect the differences in cultures (and identities) of English speakers worldwide. If an interlocutor has little knowledge of Japanese culture, then an educated register of Japanese English is appropriate as it prioritises intelligibility by using core, standard lexical items used by (almost) all Englishes. The educated register of Japanese English would be very similar to other educated registers of English, but it would be carefully tweaked so that as many Anglo-American culture-specific lexical items as possible are replaced by neutral words to maximum intelligibility across all Englishes. In theory, a Japanese educated register would be truly international, as it would transcend any one variety of English. Naturally it would include some words that have originated in Japan, as these lexical items have become standard in (almost) all educated English registers. Some lexical examples include *karaoke*, *sushi*, *sashimi*, *geisha*, *judo* and so on. A larger number of Japanese English lexical items would appear in the standard register and a very large number would form part of the broad register. Lexical items would include *kawaii*, *shinkansen*, *anime*, *manga* and so on. In addition, there would be many other Japanese words in the broad register that may not have been codified in native speaker Englishes. These words, which may have no established English equivalents, would be used to express unique aspects of Japanese culture and society. In turn, these lexical items would become part of the English language in the form of Japanese English. As Kirkpatrick states ‘the vocabularies of varieties of English are enriched by words from local languages, English needs these words, as they refer to local cultural practices and traditions.’ (Ibid: 20)

In the following example, an educated register of Japanese English is used to prioritise international intelligibility, as the interlocutor has little knowledge of Japanese culture:

If you're travelling from Tokyo to Kyoto, then it would be best to take the bullet train. In Kyoto, I would recommend that you stay at a Japanese-style inn and watch a geisha dance.

In the example below, the speaker prioritises the identity and culture functions of language by using a broad register comprising of culture specific lexical items. A broad register may be appropriate for communicating with foreign people who have some knowledge and understanding of Japan:

If you're travelling from Tokyo to Kyoto, then it would be best to take the shinkansen. In Kyoto, I would recommend that you stay at a ryokan and watch a geiko dance.

Due to the fact that words such as *shinkansen* and *ryokan* are culture specific to Japan, and *geiko* is highly culture specific as it refers to the culture of Kyoto, they form part of the broad (or standard) registers of Japanese English. However, the lexical item *bullet train*, is used in the educated register, as it has been part of the English language since the train's introduction in 1964. Therefore, it is preferable to *shinkansen* if intelligibility is prioritised. In addition, *geisha* has been part of the English language for more than a century. Nevertheless, if identity and culture are prioritised, especially Kyoto's, then *geiko* may replace *geisha*.

Japanese English

In Japan, although English does not have the status of an official language or is used as a lingua franca among Japanese people, it is firmly established as a second language. Students learn English at school for a minimum of six years, and it is extensively used in daily life, whether it is business, advertising, entertainment, travel and so on. In addition, English is now being used much more widely within Japan due to the enormous increase in the number of foreign tourists visiting the country. According to Stanlaw 'there is no non-Anglophone nation where English is so pervasive.' (Stanlaw 2004: 8)

According to Kachru's Three Circles Model of World Englishes, Japanese English is part of the expanding circle of new Englishes. This circle consists of countries where English was not transported by colonisation, but instead by globalisation, or by governmental policies regarding language education. By contrast, the inner circle comprises of native speaker

Englishes such as British and American English. Finally, the outer circle is made up of Englishes that were developed in countries that were colonised primarily by the British, such as India and Nigeria. (Kachru and Nelson 2006: 10) Despite claims to the contrary, new Englishes can develop in expanding circle countries. As Pakir and Low state 'In today's increasingly interconnected world, the spread of English as a global language both for local purposes and international encounters is rampant. With this unflagging spread of English, there have emerged nativized L2 (second language) varieties in territories, which have never been colonized by the British. (Pakir and Low 2018: 224) Kirkpatrick also argues that new English varieties can develop in the expanding circle. In his words 'it is possible that new varieties are also developing in what Kachru termed 'expanding circle' countries, where, by definition, there has been no significant settlement of English speakers.' (Kirkpatrick 2007: 32)

Japanese English is also classified as a nativized (or indigenised) variety. This means that English was first imported into Japan, and then underwent a series of changes so that it has become (or is becoming) a recognised variety. As Kirkpatrick states 'The original imported English starts to lose its cultural roots and grows new cultural roots – the culture of the local speakers of the variety.' (Ibid: 31) Unlike outer circle Englishes, Japanese English was not imported through colonisation (Japan was never a formal colony of the West). Instead, the first main English importation was as a result of Japanese governmental policies during the Meiji Period of the 19th century. The second main English import began when the United States and its Allies occupied Japan after the end of the Second World War. In the 21st century, English importation has accelerated not just in Japan but also worldwide due to globalisation.

Characteristics of Japanese English

Language contact between English and Japanese provides the foundation for the development of Japanese English. Although Japanese English is still in its formative stages of development, identifiable characteristics are emerging. As was mentioned earlier, this paper is focusing on the lexis of Japanese English.

Words of Japanese Origin (Educated Register)

Japanese English (JE) Educated Register *sushi/karaoke/tsunami/bonsai/origami*

Japanese English (JE) Broad Register *sushi/karaoke/tsunami/bonsai/origami*

These words, which were once uniquely Japanese, now form part of a lexical core that is shared by other educated registers of English. These words also feature in the standard and broad registers of Japanese English. Other examples include *judo, manga, tempura, tofu, miso, sashimi, kimono, kendo, ninja, sumo, samurai, Zen* and so on.

Words of Japanese Origin (Standard and Broad Registers)

JE Educated Register *cute*

JE Standard/Broad Registers *kawaii*

JE Educated Register *bullet train*

JE Standard/Broad Registers *shinkansen*

These Japanese words form part of the standard and broad registers of Japanese English. This is because lexical items with the same meanings already exist in educated registers of most other Englishes. *Kawaii* and *shinkansen* can be used in the standard and broad registers to give a distinct Japanese flavour to a speaker's English. *Kawaii* has become internationally known due to the popularity of Japanese culture such as Hello Kitty, Doreamon and Pikachu, amongst others. While *shinkansen* has become an English word due primarily to the huge increase in the number of international tourists visiting Japan. Other examples include *ukiyo-e, shamisen, koto, wagyu (beef), bento, pachinko, sudoku, wasabi, gyoza, futon, ikebana, izakaya* and so forth.

Use of Acronyms and Abbreviations

JE Educated Register *Not in full time education or work*

JE Broad Register *NEET* (acronym)

JE Educated Register *flight attendant/cabin attendant*

JE Broad Register *CA* (abbreviation)

JE Educated Register *female office worker*

JE Broad Register *OL* (abbreviation)

JE Educated Register	<i>commercial/advertisement</i>
JE Broad Register	<i>CM</i> (abbreviation)

Japanese English is characterised by the frequent use of acronyms and abbreviations. Other examples include *OB/OG* (Old Boy/Old Girl), which refers to male and female university/school alumni, *GW* (Golden Week), which is a series of Japanese public holidays, *JAL* (Japan Airlines) and *JR* (Japan Railways), and so on.

Truncation

JE Educated Register	<i>department store</i>
JE Broad Register	<i>depato</i>

JE Educated register	<i>concert/music venue</i>
JE Broad Register	<i>(a) live/live house</i>

JE Educated Register	<i>television</i>
JE Broad Register	<i>terebi</i>

The truncation of lexical items is a common feature of Japanese English. Other word shortenings include *anime* (*animation*), *sando* (*sandwich*), *konbini* (*convenience store*) and so on. This is also a feature of English varieties such as Australian English, which has *barbie* (*barbecue*), *footie* (*football*), and *uni* (*university*) amongst others.

Word Adaption/Semantic Shifting

JE Educated Register	<i>steering wheel</i>
JE Broad Register	<i>handle</i>

JE Educated Register	<i>flat/apartment</i>
JE Broad Register	<i>manshon</i> (<i>mansion</i>)

JE Educated Register	<i>hotel reception desk</i>
JE Broad Register	<i>furonto</i> (<i>front desk</i>)

JE Educated Register	<i>(all you can eat) buffet</i>
JE Broad Register	<i>baikingu (Viking)</i>

Many English words that have been imported into Japanese have been adapted or have undergone a change in meaning (semantic shift). For example, in Japanese as well as Japanese English, a *manshon* does not mean a luxury house but a standard apartment/flat made of reinforced concrete.

Cultural Differences

Inner Circle Englishes	Christian name/Surname	<i>Maya Yoshida</i>
Japanese English	Surname/Christian name	<i>Yoshida, Maya</i>

In Asian societies such as Japan's, surnames usually come before Christian names. However, in inner circle Anglo cultures such as Britain, the US and Australia, Christian names usually go before surnames. The difference is primarily due to Asian societies placing more importance on family ties and Anglo cultures on individuality. Japanese English and inner circle Englishes reflect these cultural differences. Therefore, in the broad register of Japanese English, the surname would come before the Christian name to reflect Japanese culture.

Misconceptions and Prejudices

This paper argues that in order for Japanese English to become a fully developed English variety, a number of misconceptions and prejudices about the English language in general and Japanese English in particular, need to be addressed. These misconceptions and prejudices are held both by Japanese as well as foreign people, including teachers of English. As Stanlaw argues 'Many English language teachers in Japan, both Japanese and foreign, appear to detest the occurrence of Japanese English, in all its various forms.' (Stanlaw 2004: 32) These misconceptions and prejudices adversely affect English language teaching in Japan as well as the development of the local English variety.

There are a number of factors that contribute to negative attitudes towards English and Japanese English. First, there is a fear of the power of English and how it overpowers other languages. Even in the 19th century, Japanese statesman, Mori, Akinori declared that

Japanese was 'doomed to yield to the domination of the English tongue.' (Ibid: 65) Therefore, English's international dominance has led to distrust of the language in Japan and of its required learning in schools.

Next, there is resentment about English's influence on the Japanese language itself. For example, many thousands of loan words have entered Japanese from English. These words either replaced the original Japanese words (for example *camera* for *shashinki*, *necklace* for *kubikazari*) or they have provided lexical alternatives. Kachru and Nelson state that English loan words in Japanese are '...a striking indicator of the degree to which elements of the English language have been made an integral part of the Japanese language.' (Kachru and Nelson 2006: 172)

Third, to some Japanese there is the belief that English is un-Japanese and thus can never be a language for its people. Therefore, English is considered a foreign language and that the Anglo-Americans have ownership and its custodial rights. As Stanlaw states that 'Japanese ideas of race and national identity are crucially tied to language.' (Stanlaw 2004: 300)

Finally, any English usage, which deviates from an exonormative, inner circle teaching model, is often considered inferior, strange or plain wrong. This leads to the misconception that Japanese English is erroneous since it is different than native speaker Englishes. Therefore, speakers of Japanese English may be stigmatised for speaking a 'wrong English.' As Honna states 'Teachers and students in Japan invariably characterize Japanese English as full of errors.' (Honna 2008: 56) Stanlaw also makes this point while discussing native English speakers. He states that 'Westerners criticize the inability of the Japanese to learn 'correct' English...and mock the many bastardized 'Japanized' English phrases...' (Stanlaw 2004: 276).

In order for English language teaching in Japan to be more effective and for Japanese English to develop, these prejudices need to be challenged. First, concerning the power and dominance of English, it is understandable why the Japanese are concerned. However, the Japanese government's policy of bilingualism (Japanese for communication amongst Japanese people and English for communication with non-Japanese speaking people) is likely to ensure the continued survival of the language.

Next, regarding English's influence over the Japanese language such as loan words. It could be argued that these loan words enrich the Japanese language by offering lexical alternatives for nuances in meaning. As Stanlaw states 'Borrowing, or the nativization and

use of English loanwords in a wide variety of registers has been an important and critical aspect of Japanese communicative strategies since the late 19th century onwards.' (Ibid: 64)

Third, the belief that English is not a Japanese language so it can never be owned by the Japanese needs to be rejected. In order to do this, important questions about the ownership of English and its custodial rights need to be raised. Until the 17th century it could be argued that it was the British who owned English and had custodial rights as the language was only spoken in the British Isles until that point. However, from the 17th century onwards, when English was transported outside of the British Isles and new varieties created, the ownership and custodial rights of the language had to be relinquished. Today, no one people, nation or territory can claim ownership of English, nor have custodial rights of the language. Instead, it is argued that everyone who has a stake in the English language can claim ownership, regardless of proficiency, nationality or whether it is a first or additional language. This means that for the Japanese, English is a Japanese language for international communication.

Next, concerning prejudice, there has often been bigotry towards new varieties of English. In Singapore, for example, there has been hostility and prejudice to Singlish (the broad register of Singaporean English). (Crystal 2003: 174) This has also been the case in Japan, where the local Japanese variety has sometimes been termed 'Japlish.' However, just because Japanese English differs from inner circle varieties does not mean it is wrong. All English varieties differ to a greater or lesser extent. As Honna states when referring to language variation, 'A lot of allowances have to be made, and differences accepted.' (Honna 2008: 72)

To sum up, many factors contribute to undermining English language learning in Japan and the development of Japanese English. This paper calls for the Japanese as well as foreigners to overcome these misconceptions and prejudices in order to advance Japanese English.

Japanese English and Pedagogy

First and foremost, in order to promote Japanese English as a valid and respected variety and to underline its important role in international communication, this paper argues that all Japanese students should be taught about world Englishes. Instruction would raise awareness to the fact that English has many varieties and forms. These varieties and forms are not just limited to inner and outer circle Englishes, but to new Englishes developing

in the expanding circle, such as Japanese English. Furthermore, instruction about world Englishes would highlight the fact that English is a Japanese language for international communication. Next, teachers need to encourage students to use Japanese English, and to instil the belief that the variety is both obtainable and desirable. Japanese learners may feel embarrassed or anxious about Japanese English, so teachers need to reassure them that it is natural that their English differs from inner circle Englishes, as it reflects Japanese identity and culture. As Honna states 'Japanese teachers and students underestimate Japanese English...simply because it is different from native speakers' varieties, most probably from American English.' (Honna 2008: 143).

Next, accommodation and negotiation of meaning skills need to become an essential part of the English language syllabus in Japan, to ensure effective communication, especially when expressing identity and culture. Accommodation skills mean having the cultural knowledge and language ability to modify one's language in certain ways and in certain circumstances so that an interlocutor may be able to understand one's meaning. As Jenkins states '...speakers need to be able to adapt and adjust their speech to make it more comprehensible – and, no doubt, acceptable – to particular interlocutors in particular settings.' (Jenkins 2000: 21) Therefore, due to big differences in the broad registers of world Englishes, speakers need competence in these skills. It should also be noted that accommodation and negotiation of meaning skills have become increasingly important for all English speakers, no matter what English variety (or dialect) they are speaking. This is due to the fact that an ever-increasing number of people from all over the world are speaking varieties of English, from an ever-expanding number of cultural backgrounds. Therefore, communication breakdowns are more likely to occur due to these cultural differences. As Stanlaw states '...the current existence and growth of diverse world Englishes brings home a very obvious fact: Just because English speakers all 'speak' the same language does not mean they all understand each other. The evidence seems to indicate that as English becomes more widespread, the greater variation in norms and standards of communication.' (Stanlaw 2004: 297) Jenkins also believes that these skills are crucial for international communication. She argues 'If...speakers come from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds, then accommodative processes will have a far greater role in enhancing mutual comprehension than they would in communication between speakers from similar backgrounds.' (Jenkins 2000: 170) Therefore, accommodation and negotiation of meaning skills need to be featured prominently in the classroom. Negotiation of meaning phrases such as "do you know the (shinkansen)?" "are you familiar with (ryokan)?"

“have you ever heard of a (geiko)?” and so on, are typical phrases that could be practised.

Finally it should be acknowledged that there are some inherent difficulties to teaching Japanese English. First, there are no published Japanese models available that can be readily used in the classroom. In addition, Japanese English has not been codified in the same way that inner circle Englishes (and some outer circle Englishes) have been. Therefore, language teachers in Japan, whether they are Japanese or foreign, need to have a good understanding of Japanese English as well as the society and culture from which the variety originates, in order to teach it appropriately and effectively.

Conclusion

This paper has argued that everyone with an interest in English in Japan, such as English teachers, need to embrace Japanese English, and promote its development and use, even though it differs from native speaker varieties. Japanese English is important for the Japanese due to the fact that all three functions of language: communication, identity and culture are most effectively expressed through its application. Whereas, in comparison, by using an exonormative, inner circle variety such as American English, the functions of identity and culture may be compromised. This is due to the fact that American English reflects American identity and culture and not Japan's. Therefore, it is believed that a gradual shift away from an inner circle model such as American English to a Japanese English model needs to occur so that it can develop as an established and respected variety. Nevertheless, there are some caveats that need to be addressed if Japanese English is used. Long held prejudices against English and Japanese English, which may have held back its progress compared to other new varieties of English, need to be challenged. Second, since Japanese English currently has limited use and so may not be understood very well internationally, especially its broad register, accommodation and negotiation of meaning skills need to become key parts of the English language syllabus in Japan. Japanese people will need to be able to explain their culture to those people who are unfamiliar with it. Despite these caveats, Japanese English is recommended for the Japanese people, just as British English is recommended for the British or Indian English for the Indians, and so on. This is due to the fact that each respective variety of English reflects the identity and culture of its speakers.

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