

Linguistic Contact and the Ideology of English in Japanese Society and Culture

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Abstract

English has become the dominant language used in international communications within politics, diplomacy, the mass media, academia, as well as sports and entertainment. In the late 1990s, the British Council estimated there were a billion English speakers (1997, cited in Crystal, 2003, p. 68). More recently Graddol (2006) predicted that there will be 2 billion speakers by 2020, and Crystal (2003, p. 69) stated that 25 per cent of the world's population were able to communicate in English to a useful level. This would suggest that English is at the very least a useful skill to acquire, and some might argue indispensable in the modern era.

Within Japan, the English language has a strong visual presence, but no official status, and few citizens gain fluency in it (Yano, 2011). This paper outlines the status and roles of the English language in Japan, a country where English is still very much considered “foreign” (Seargeant, 2011, p.1). It also presents the results of a quantitative analysis of Japanese university students' opinions of English in terms of importance, ownership, native-speakerism, and non-native varieties.

1. Introduction

The Japanese have a complex relationship with the English language. Unlike many other Asian countries, Japan never experienced colonization and the forced integration of English (or other colonial language) into the infrastructure of the nation. Additionally, the romantic ideology developed around the concept of

a national language is especially strong in Japan, despite Japan also being an enthusiastic borrower of linguistic resources from foreign languages (Loveday, 1996, cited in Stanlaw, 2004, p. 45). There are six phases of cultural and linguistic contacts between Japan and the rest of the world which can be identified as significant.

1. Buddhist impact (9th to 13th century) saw an emphasis on Chinese and Sanskrit learning following the introduction of Buddhism to the country. Chinese introduced thousands of loanwords and gave Japan its first writing system in the form of Chinese characters or kanji (Stanlaw, 2004, p. 45).
2. Christian impact (14th to 16th century) saw the first European contact primarily via Portuguese, Spanish and Dutch missionaries. The first bilingual dictionaries and grammars of Japanese appeared, and Portuguese, Spanish and Latin borrowings were not uncommon at this time. It is estimated that 200-400 of these loanwords still survive, for example, pan (bread < Portuguese pão), tempura (food fried in a batter < Portuguese tempero), and tabako (tobacco < Portuguese tobacco) (Stanlaw, 2004, p. 46). The process of combining a loanword with a native Japanese prefix or suffix became common, and is a common process of nativization still practiced to this day.
3. Self-imposed isolation (17th to 18th century) saw Japan isolated from the outside world, the expulsion of all Europeans and the banning of Christianity. Limited trade and contact with Dutch learning and language continued, restricted to the small artificial island of Dejima in Nagasaki Bay. Two centuries of sakoku (self-imposed, enforced isolation) lasted well into the nineteenth century, until the arrival of the Americans in the 1850s. Estimates of the number of Dutch words entering the Japanese language at this time vary from 700-3000 and include garasu (glass < Dutch glas), biiru (beer < Dutch bier), and miruku (milk < Dutch melk). Dutch directly influenced Japanese grammar, as “written Japanese began to use many more pronouns like ‘this’ and ‘that’, or ‘he’ and ‘she’ (kore and sore, kare and kanojo) due to direct translations from Dutch sentences, although Japanese is supposedly comparatively free of pronouns”, and there was an “increased use of inanimate

objects as sentence subjects and the appearance of a new copula, the so-called *de aru* forms” (Stanlaw 2004, p. 48). The first recorded encounter between the Japanese and the English language occurred in 1600 when the English sailor William Adams was washed ashore, later becoming a chief advisor to the ruling Tokugawa shogunate (Ike, 1995).

4. Meiji enlightenment (19th century) saw renewed contact with Western culture and exposure to English, German and French. The first English grammars were written in 1810, and the first English-Japanese dictionary was compiled in 1814 (Doi, 1976, cited in Stanlaw, 2004, p. 50) during the later stages of the Tokugawa era. The American Commodore Perry arrived in 1853 with a squadron of ships to force Japan to open to international trade and the *sakoku* isolation ended in 1854. With it interest in foreign languages expanded and the Kaisei-sho (Institute for Translation and Foreign Studies) began to enthusiastically support English in its curriculum from 1856 onwards (Stanlaw 2004, p. 53). Fearing invasion from colonial powers, Japan decides to “meet the West head-on and modernize the country ... [by] ... master[ing] their languages, especially English” (p. 54) which “quickly replaced Dutch as the language used to learn about the West” (Stanlaw, 1983, p. 169). The Meiji government was established in 1868, changing Japan overnight. The caste system was abolished, and compulsory education and military draft was introduced. A pidginized version of Japanese English known as the “Yokohama Dialect” developed between shopkeepers and traders (Stanlaw 2004, p. 56). Attempts made by public figures of the Meiji government, such as Mori Arinori, the first minister of education, to make English the official language of Japan through his *kokugo haishi eigo saiyooron* (Abolish Japanese, Adopt English), were ultimately an unsuccessful movement (Stanlaw, 1983, p. 169, Stanlaw 2004, p. 65). However, the prestige of standard English (RP) increased and began to be taught in schools, even becoming the language of instruction for a time (Stanlaw 2004, p. 61). Romaji (writing Japanese phonetically in the roman European alphabet) was introduced, but attempts to replace kanji with romaji also failed to gain traction.
5. Taisho democracy (early 20th century) saw an embrace of contemporary

Western culture and the rise of Japan as an important world power. 1912 to 1926 “was the heyday of Japanese-English language contact and borrowing ... [and] ...established patterns of taking, modifying, and creating English vocabulary items and English-language concepts and cognitive schemas which continue to this day” (Stanlaw 2004, p. 68). Many Taisho era loanwords are related to Western popular culture and everyday life, such as takushii (taxi), rajio (radio), and sarariiman (salaried-man). Linguistics was promoted, western novels and scholarly works were translated, and attention was devoted to English-language education. 1930s and 1940s nationalism tried to eliminate English borrowings, and Yamato-kotoba, the original language of Japan and the language of the gods, was promoted (p. 69). The teaching of English was curtailed leaving a generation with little to no English ability. Post Second World War, English once again regained its popularity, and the American occupation provided opportunity for more English borrowings. New pidginized forms of English developed alongside the reintroduced standardized institutionalized English. A second serious attempt was made to abandon Japanese for English, and despite support from liberal statesman Ozaki Yukio (1859-1954), the proposal once again failed (Blair, 1997, p. 74, citing Suzuki, 1987). The post-war period was one of great linguistic self-reflection for the nation of Japan and it is noteworthy that at this time there were also calls for Japanese to be replaced by other European languages. The revered literary figure Shiga Naoya (1883-1972) favored replacing Japanese with the French language, writing in April 1946: “how would it be if Japan on this occasion [the defeat of 1945] acted with direct and swift resolution, and simply adopted the best language, the most beautiful language in the world, for its national language!” (Stanlaw, 2004, p. 72). Shiga believed that Japan would be held back if it maintained a language that was not international, and in the post-war years as the Japanese language continued to be a barrier to international exchange, he was concerned for the future of his country (Heinrich, 2012, p. 111). Esperanto was also proposed, this time by the ultranationalist thinker Kita Ikki (1883-1939), who rather surprisingly for an ultranationalist used the argument that the Japanese language was “exceedingly inferior” to justify the change (Mizumura, 2015, p.194).

6. Economic growth (late 20th century) opened Japan to globalization and a more open attitude toward English, due to its increasingly common use in international communication, trade, industry and education.

These six phases of cultural and linguistic contact have had lasting impacts on both the development of the Japanese language and on the role, usage, teaching of and perceptions of “foreign” languages in the country, especially when it comes to English today. As we have entered the 21st century it has become impossible to deny the dominance and necessity of the English language for global communication, and the Japanese government has made repeated attempts to improve the English language skills of high school graduates (see section 2.5; also CJGTC, 2000a; CJGTC, 2000b; MEXT, 2003; MEXT, 2014).

2. English Language use in Japan.

The fascination with European foreign languages and English in particular is exhibited in advertising and other cultural displays, as well as in social practice. A comprehensive study by Haarman (1989) recorded the domains of usage of various foreign languages in Japan (Table 1). This research concluded that English occurs frequently in mass media, product naming, advertising, and (surprisingly) in private use. Despite the age of this study, the results are interesting and are largely true to this day (though the extent to which English plays a significant role in private use communication of the average Japanese person is likely low – see section 5). However, with the build up to the Olympic Games in 2020 there has been a noticeable increase in the amount of foreign language signage around the capital, Tokyo. Consequently, if Haarman’s study were to be repeated today the results may be a little different, though the extent to which the linguistic landscape outside of the capital and other destinations hosting Olympic events has changed is still likely to be minimal. Another change that has occurred in the 21st century is an increase in international students and tourists from parts of Asia, particularly China, Korea and Vietnam, so any future study should include non-European languages and their domains of use to better represent the changes that are afoot. With those criticisms in mind, it is still possible to make some

generalizations about English language use in Japan.

Table 1. Foreign (European) language use in Japan.

Languages	Domains of language use					
	Outdoor sign communication	Mass media (information)	Mass media (entertainment)	Mass media (commercials)	Product naming	Private use
English	OOO	OOO	OOO	OOO	OOO	OOO
French	OO	X	X	OO	OO	X
German	O	X	X	O	O	X
Italian	O	X	X	O	O	X
Spanish	O	X	X	O	O	X
Others	O	X	X	O	O	X

Source: Adapted from Haarmann (1989, p.50). OOO = frequently used, OO = sometimes used, O = seldom used, X = not used.

2.1 English in Advertising

English and other European languages can be found printed on consumer products and advertising as a catchy design element, intended to give a modern look and feel and to convey a sense of value in the products. Linguistic associations are: German for technical quality, French for romance, Italian for style, English for modernity (Haarmann, 1989). The majority of Japanese do not attempt to read the design element, and as these products are not intended for export less attention is paid to accuracy (Ikeshima, 2005), often resulting in amusing attempts at English that contain various grammatical, lexical and syntactical errors. This phenomena of the prominent use of incorrect English, mostly for decorative purposes on clothing and other items, is often referred to as “English” (see for example Ikeshima, 2005). The term does not caricature the Japanese learner of English, rather the businesses that do not spend the minimal effort required to have the English checked for accuracy before putting it on their products, because as already stated the purpose of the “English” is to be a purely decorative design element embodying a desired sense of value, rather than a linguistic tool.

Linguistic Contact and the Ideology of English in Japanese Society and Culture

Common errors of “Engrish” include spelling, prepositions and articles, errors using the word “let’s”, pronoun referencing, countable and non-countable nouns and their articles, the incorrect use of adverbs and adjectives to modify nouns and verbs, use of prepositions and apostrophes, machine translation of Japanese phrases and unfamiliarity with word nuances (Table 2). Studies conclude it is not important whether the consumer understands the words, as long as the sense of value is transferred (Blair, 1997).

Table 2. Examples of “Engrish”

Error	Example
Spelling	
Often due to phonological differences between English and Japanese. Japanese has five vowel sounds whereas English has eleven.	“Orange <i>mouth</i> pad” “We are happy to sarve you!”
Prepositions and articles. Often confused or omitted.	“Baby is on a car”
Errors using the word “let’s”. Often seen in sentences with a redundant or incorrect object.	“ <i>Let’s</i> play with us!”
Pronoun referencing.	“TWO DOGS. They are fortunate. They are very good friends. However, <i>it</i> sometimes quarrels. But it becomes reconciled immediately”
Countable and non-countable nouns, and their articles.	“Butter waffles is <i>the</i> traditional European cookie” “Pract always give you <i>many</i> dynamism” “Be careful of the <i>bee</i> ”
The use of adverbs and adjectives to modify nouns and verbs. A noun which ends in “ness” cannot normally act as an adjective. Adverbs incorrectly modifying nouns.	“Cuteness puppy” “We’re a <i>purely</i> couple” “I like <i>very</i> music”
Use of prepositions and apostrophes.	“Illustration by <i>Hory’s</i> ”
Unfamiliarity with word nuances. Here, the Japanese word <i>keshinomi</i> has been translated as opium, rather than poppy seed.	“ <i>Opium</i> Danish”
Machine translation of Japanese phrases.	“ <i>So much as happy lives lovely as for us</i> ”

Source: Adapted from Ikeshima (2005).

2.2 English as a Recreational Pursuit

The recreational pursuit of English language education is demonstrated by the size of the Eikaiwa (English conversation school) business, which represents a 670 billion yen industry, drawing customers from all geographical, social and age groups (Sergeant, 2009, p. 95). Their popularity is due to the fact that they offer conversation practice rather than grammar-translation, ‘real’ communication in small classes with native-speaker foreigners, and the promise of interaction with “foreign blue-eyed and blonde women or smiling, well-dressed, and handsome men”, as the advertising implies (McVeigh, 2002, p. 167). Sergeant warns that “their commercial popularism means that they are the propagators of stereotype” and their “shaping of the concept of the language in society ... is likely to be great” (2009, p. 94). Additionally, English language newspapers have a wide distribution, with one printed for every 1,000 households (Stanlaw, 2004, pp. 288-289).

2.3 English as Escapism

In Japan’s hyper-consumerist society, English is an experience that can be purchased. Simulations of authenticity abound, where students can imagine themselves in ‘real-life’ situations in which they exercise their English skills. British Hills is a theme-park ‘More English than England Itself’ modeled on a small British countryside village where visitors can glimpse a foreign culture without any risk. It is an ‘Educational and Cultural Resort’ where students can attend classes in an immersive, enforced monolingual environment, staffed by ‘native-speakers’ with ‘friendly foreign faces’ who are forbidden from speaking Japanese. Marketed as an educational opportunity, it is really escapism, drawing on aspects of popular imagination in Japan of what English and Englishness is, which “accords with commercial and ideological interests within the country” and positions English as firmly removed from mainstream Japanese society, perpetuating the perception that English is foreign (Sergeant, 2009, p. 103).

2.4 English in the Workplace

Few Japanese use English in the workplace, but some major corporations do

use the TOEIC test as a criteria for promotion or overseas opportunities (Chapman, 2003). Recently, Honda Motor Co. announced that English is to be its official corporate language. This decision “recognizes the future of Honda’s operations as more fully international in scope and ... internal documents that need to be in English will be written that way rather than translated from Japanese” (“Honda makes English official”, 2015). Other Japanese companies such as Fast Retailing (Uniqlo), Rakuten and Bridgestone, also now have English-only policies, following the lead of companies from other nations where English is not an official language including Lenovo, Nokia, Audi, Renault and Samsung which have all made English the corporate lingua franca. These changes only affect the corporate offices, and not the majority of employees working on the shop floor or in the factories, but it is a concession to the forces driving business towards greater use of English.

2.5 English in the Education System

The educational policies in Japan require mandatory English classes in Junior High School and High School from grades 7 to 12, 3-5 hours a week for 40 weeks a year (Yano, 2011, p. 133), however, 30% of students begin studying earlier than that at elementary school (Koike et al., 1985, cited in Blair, 1997, p. 77). English education has been grammar-focused, for the purpose of passing college entrance exams, “with minimal attention paid to the development of communication skills” (Ushioda, 2013, p. 5).

There have been calls for change in the education system for at least 40 years, and while there has been increasing interest in language teaching in Japan, there are certain fundamental issues that have remained unaffected (Seargeant, 2009, p. 47). Education policy documents acknowledge that “today’s Japanese are lacking ... basic skills. Their English-language abilities as measured by their TOEFL scores in 1998 were the lowest in Asia. The Japanese themselves are painfully aware of the inadequacy of their communication skills” (CJGTC, 2000a, p. 4). When discussing these problems, key dates in the history of linguistic development in Japan over the past 400 years are often presented (Ike, 1995;

Koike, 1978; Koike & Tanaka, 1995; Stanlaw, 2004). The two major transitional periods in modern Japanese history were the Meiji Restoration of 1868 and the American occupation after the Second World War. The importance of the exam system in Japanese education policy and the grammar-translation method were introduced at these times, “as an enabler of the modernization process ... as it allowed for the importing and deciphering of Western technology and expertise” (Seargeant, 2009, p. 49). English is still thought of as a code that needs to be mastered to this day.

Important policy documents of recent decades include the Course of Study which aims “to develop students’ abilities to understand a foreign language and express themselves in it ... and to heighten interest in language and culture” (Mombusho, 1989); the Action Plan which intends to cultivate ‘Japanese with English Abilities’ (MEXT, 2003); the Obuchi government proposal to introduce English as a second language (CJGTC, 2000a); and the Globalization Plan to introduce English lessons from the third grade of elementary school (MEXT, 2014). The most stressed aspect of reform has been the promotion of ‘communicative ability’ and communicative language teaching (CLT). Unfortunately, CLT is incompatible with the exam system. Seargeant (2009, p. 52) concludes that “the forecast for a successful transition to more effective communicative language teaching practices in the Japanese education system is repeatedly presented as being distinctly bleak”.

Ushioda (2013, p. 5) makes the depressing observation that “it is no exaggeration to say that nearly all the leading empirical research on demotivation in foreign language learning currently derives from Japan”. This is because “what is lacking in large part is an engaging English environment that develops a positive attitude in students’ early studies toward learning the language” (“Honda makes English official”, 2015).

3. English Ability in Japan

In 2014 Japan ranked 35th out of 44 nations in the TOEIC test (ETS, 2014)

and 145th out of 169 in the TOEFL test (ETS, 2015). Much is made of this apparent low ability in English but the data is misleading. 225,939 Japanese took the TOEFL test between July, 1989 and June, 1991, compared with 34, 35, and 31 participants from Bhutan, Mongolia, and Kiribati respectively, skewing the rankings (Brennan, 2014). Additionally, rankings are based on average scores for each country, and do not take into account the fact that many students score well above average. It has been argued that the fallacy of low test scores is promulgated to drive enrollment in test-preparation schools (Brown, 1993).

Other studies suggest the English ability of the Japanese is not as low as the test data suggests. A quantitative study by Miyake et al. (cited in Honna, 2008, p. 56) of English-language websites created for personal use by Japanese found only a 4.47% rate of misuse of articles, 2% rate of incorrect tense usage, and only 1% rate of subject-predicate agreement errors. These findings support the argument that the “English” phenomena so prevalent in advertising and fashion does not represent the English abilities of Japanese learners of English. English speakers from Japan have been found to be no less intelligible than native speakers (Smith & Rafiqzad, 1979, cited in Kachru & Nelson, 2006, p. 70), and more comprehensible than Indian speakers (Smith & Bisazza, 1982, cited in Kachru & Nelson, 2006, p. 71).

4. Ethnocentrism and the Ideology of English in Japan

According to Itoh (1998, cited in Seargeant, 2009, p. 54), Japanese ethnocentrism is closely connected to internationalization, as “the primary goal of Japan’s internationalization was to enhance its national economic interest, and thus the more Japan became internationalized, the more nationalistic it became”. It has been argued that this neonationalism has infiltrated education policy and that the promotion of English is a superficial act (McVeigh, 2002). Befu (1983, cited in Seargeant, 2009, p. 55) believes that the “ineptitude of foreign language instruction and learning is maintained ... for the purpose of convincing millions of Japanese of their separateness”, and Reischaur and Jansen (1988, cited in Seargeant, 2009, p. 53-54) state that “there appears to be a genuine reluctance to

have English very well known by many Japanese. Knowing a foreign language too well, it is feared, would erode the uniqueness of the Japanese people". In the social politics of Japan, "the English language itself is the divisive tool of a separatist nationalistic ideology" (Sergeant, 2009, p. 55).

Discussing how English is represented in relation to Japanese nationalism, Kawai (2007) explains that the values associated with the national language are transferred in negative form to the 'foreign' language. In October 2006, the former Minister for Education, Bunmei Ibuki, was quoted as saying, "I wonder if [schools] teach children [the] social rules they should know as Japanese ... [there are] children who do not write and speak decent Japanese. [Schools] should not teach a foreign language before improving the situation". This statement juxtaposes Japanese values (in part symbolized by Japanese language) against the need to teach English in elementary school, and essentially reasons that "if the study of Japanese promotes traditional values, then English (which denotes an international outlook) can only impede such values" (Sergeant, 2009, p. 16). This is in stark contrast to the views of Kawai Hayao (1928-2007), the former head of the International Research Center for Japanese Studies and later the Agency for Cultural Affairs, who said "If Japanese language and culture are so frail that a little thing like this [making English an official language of Japan] does them irreparable harm, then good riddance" (Mizumura, 2015, p.191).

The symbolic value assigned to English predisposes people to approach it in a particular way, and any engagement with English in Japan takes place within a context of cultural associations and an ideology of language-related social practice. However, "it is a fundamental fallacy to believe that cherishing the Japanese language precludes studying other languages or that caring for Japanese culture requires rejecting foreign cultures" (CJGTC, 2000b, p. 20).

5. Survey Results: Learner Attitudes Towards English

Midway through the spring semester of 2017, 52 students at a national university in Tokyo were surveyed to determine their opinions about English. All participants were Japanese, 19 to 20 years old commerce majors with a CEFR B1

to B2 English proficiency level. A questionnaire was provided in Japanese and administered during a scheduled English lesson. Students responded to statements on a 5-point Likert scale, selecting either 1 (strongly agree), 2 (agree), 3 (don't agree, but don't disagree either), 4 (disagree), or 5 (strongly disagree). Figures in tables indicate number of responses.

5.1 Importance of English

Attitudes towards the importance of English are summarized in Table 3. While most respondents feel that English is not important for them in their daily life at the moment, there is strong agreement that Japanese people need to learn English and that it will be important for their future career, even if they remain in Japan. English is not considered a tool used only when traveling internationally. There is a normal distribution of responses as to whether English ability is necessary to have high social respect from friends, but almost unanimous agreement that it is necessary in order to be taken seriously by an employer.

Table 3. The importance of English

Strongly Agree 1	Agree 2	Unsure 3	Disagree 4	Strongly Disagree 5
English is important for me now in my daily life.				
6	10	11	19	6
English is important for my future career.				
22	27	3		
Japanese people do not need to learn English.				
1	1	3	23	24
If I work in Japan it is not necessary for me to understand English.				
2	7	12	17	14
International travel is my primary reason for studying English.				
5	9	18	13	7
English ability is necessary to have high social respect from my friends.				
7	12	15	12	6
English ability is necessary for respect from my future employer.				
16	23	9	3	1

5.2 Ownership of English

Japan is an Expanding Circle nation in which English is treated as a foreign language (Kachru, 1992). Unsurprisingly, few respondents identified as an English speaker. The majority strongly disagreed with the idea (Table 4).

Table 4. Ownership of English

Strongly Agree 1	Agree 2	Unsure 3	Disagree 4	Strongly Disagree 5
I am a Japanese speaker.				
50	1	1		
I am an English speaker.				
1	3	16	14	18

5.3 English Education

Respondents are in overwhelming agreement that Japanese are poor at English, and most believe that English education in Japan is insufficient. Native speaker English teachers are considered far more desirable than Japanese multilingual teachers (Table 5).

Table 5. Opinions on English education

Strongly Agree 1	Agree 2	Unsure 3	Disagree 4	Strongly Disagree 5
English education in Japan is sufficient.				
5	9	11	20	7
I prefer a native speaker English teacher.				
15	22	12	3	
I prefer a Japanese English teacher.				
4	3	24	13	8
Japanese are generally poor at English.				
17	26	6	2	1

5.4 Native-Speakerism

There has traditionally been “an unstated assumption that whatever diversity may occur in the English usage of those for whom English is not the mother tongue, there exists in the usage of the native speaker both a unity and a hierarchical superiority” (Stevens, 1983, p.24). These ideas are being challenged with the acceptance of new varieties of English, but in Japan native speaker forms are still desired. Yano (2011, p. 133) reports that Japanese believe “only native speaker English is genuine and the model to learn”.

A survey conducted by Matsuda (2009) revealed the dominance of native English instruction: 82% of respondents reported a native variety of English being taught in their current university English language courses, with Anglo-American forms most dominant (American 38%, British 28%, Australian 9%, Canadian 5%, Japanese 5%, Irish 2%, Other 5%, Unknown 9%). An intelligibility and comprehensibility study by Matsuura, Chiba and Fujieda (1999, cited in Kachru & Nelson, 2006, p. 72) revealed that Japanese learners are more comfortable listening to American English than other native varieties, and recommended that Japanese institutions hire more non-Japanese English teachers from places other than North America, to expose students to different accents.

This survey confirms Matsuda’s findings. Respondents were asked to list the nationalities of all previous English teachers and once again, Anglo-American teachers dominated (British 100%, American 81%, Canadian 48%, Australian 42%, Chinese 10%, Singaporean 6%, Philippine 6%, Scottish 4%, New Zealander 4%, Other 14%). Seargeant (2009, p. 96) has noted that native speaker English instructors are used as a ‘key selling point’ in language teaching programs.

Approximately 50% of respondents initially did not think to include their Japanese English teachers, and when queried were surprised that a non-native speaker should qualify. In reality, most of their English teachers throughout primary and secondary education were Japanese and 33% had been taught at some time by a non-Japanese, non-native speaker of English, most commonly

from Asia. Despite this, “English teacher” continues to equal “native speaker” to most Japanese learners.

5.5 English Varieties

As expected, there was a strong preference for Anglo-American varieties of English and only native varieties were considered “real English”. There is a clear preference for American over British, and for British over Australian varieties. Non-native varieties, correlating to Kachru’s Outer Circle and Expanding Circle Englishes (Kachru, 1992), and represented in this survey by “Indonesian English” and “Japanese English”, are considered undesirable and inferior imitations (Table 6).

Table 6. Preference of English varieties

Strongly Agree 1	Agree 2	Unsure 3	Disagree 4	Strongly Disagree 5
Native speaker English is real English.				
28	19	4	1	
Japanese English is real English.				
	3	15	20	14
I want to speak American English.				
21	11	16	3	
I want to speak British English.				
8	20	21	2	1
I want to speak Australian English.				
2	6	18	16	10
I want to speak Indonesian English.				
	5	11	16	20
I want to speak Japanese English.				
1	1	7	20	23

5.6 English Ability

There is strong agreement that other Asian countries are more proficient at English than Japan, and large dissatisfaction with current English ability. Most

respondents lack confidence in their English listening and speaking skills, and are more comfortable with reading and writing as a consequence of the exam-preparation educational system they have mostly been exposed to (Table 7).

Table 7. Assessment of English ability

Strongly Agree 1	Agree 2	Unsure 3	Disagree 4	Strongly Disagree 5
Koreans are better at English than Japanese.				
16	16	18		2
Chinese are better at English than Japanese.				
17	19	15	1	
I am satisfied with my English ability.				
	1	5	21	25
I am comfortable reading in English.				
1	7	16	21	7
I am comfortable listening in English.				
	3	10	21	18
I am comfortable writing in English.				
	5	15	22	10
I am comfortable speaking in English.				
	1	8	27	16
I enjoy speaking English.				
1	11	22	15	3

6. Conclusions

The role of foreign languages in the linguistic development of Japan has a long and fascinating history, and discussions about the role and utility of other languages continues to be a topic of great importance. There is a general fascination with English in Japanese society. To this day, it is used in advertising and product naming to evoke a sense of modernity and to add an eye catching design element, but little care is taken with accuracy or authentic usage as it is not intended to be read and is used to communicate a feeling, sense or style to a domestic market rather than a verbal message or linguistic information to a global

English speaking audience.

When it comes to actually learning the English language as opposed to using it for stylistic appeal, native-speakerism is strong in Japan, and the misconception that only native English is real English is prevalent. However, “when Japanese speak English with Singaporeans, there is no room for American or British English and culture” (Honna, 2008, p. 6). English is a variegated language, and it is not necessary to abandon one’s own native culture in order to speak it. Perfectionism is an unrealistic target, and the purpose of learning English should be to acquire a working command for wider international communication. It would be good for policy makers in Japan to understand this as current English education is, and always has been, grammar-focused preparation for university entrance exams. As there is no speaking component to these exams, communicative skills are not emphasized and Japanese complete six years of compulsory English classes little able to use the language in authentic situations.

The survey results presented here are of limited generalizability due to the small sample size, but they are suggestive of trends in attitudes towards the English language within Japan. It is clear that the majority of English language learners, even after many years of study, are still not confident in their abilities to communicate and do not identify as an English speaker. There is great dissatisfaction in English ability, and little confidence due to unrealistic expectations of matching native speaker fluency. A shift away from unrealistic Anglo-American norms, towards a variety of “Japanese English” with ELF norms could be one solution to the current state of English education in Japan. This would increase the communicative competence of the population, and possibly lead to greater intranational use and the eventual establishment of a true Japanese variety of English with as much legitimacy and recognition as other Outer Circle Englishes such as Indian English.

Linguistic Contact and the Ideology of English in Japanese Society and Culture

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Linguistic Contact and the Ideology of English in Japanese Society and Culture

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