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The Importance of ‘World Englishes’ Education

—how it affects Japanese learners’ attitudes towards English

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to investigate how introducing the concept of ‘World Englishes’ affect learners’ attitudes towards English and English learning. 46 Japanese university students participated in the study. Data includes questionnaires conducted before and after the course and the weekly students’ reflection comments. Results indicate that most students’ beliefs about English remain consistent with the traditional native-like English, however, students had open-mind towards non-native English. At the same time, students reevaluated their accented English, which helped them gain confidence in using English. In addition, acknowledging the concept of ‘World Englishes’ results to broaden the students’ perspective towards English. Based on the findings, this paper suggests that a pluralistic view of Englishes should be promoted in English education in Japan.

Key words : World Englishes, English as an International Language, Global language

キーワード : 世界諸英語, 国際語としての英語, グローバル言語

1. Introduction

English is used as an international language to communicate with people for a variety of purposes in areas such as international business, sports, social media, tourism and academia. The number of people

across the world who use English has increased remarkably. Crystal (2002) suggests that there may be as many as two billion English speakers across the world. It is striking that there are more people who speak English as their second or foreign language than those who speak it as their first

language (Jenkins, 2009). With its spread worldwide, distinct characteristics have developed and English has become 'World Englishes' as a consequence. Kachru (1985) divides 'World Englishes' into three concentric circles: the Inner Circle, the Outer Circle and the Expanding Circle. The three circles "represent the types of spread, the pattern of acquisition, and the functional allocation of English diverse cultural contexts" (Jenkins, 2015). Japan, where English is taught as a foreign language in schools, is included in the Expanding Circle. In classes, target models are either American English or British English, and Japanese students have tendency to hope to use English like Americans or British people. The author reflected on whether the idea of learning English to be able to communicate in this way may be an obstacle for Japanese English learners to improve their English. If their goal is to be able to speak like native English speakers, they are trapped in the idea of 'I cannot speak English well'. They do not understand the situation they are in. Considering the present environment, in which English is not used in daily life and insufficient English learning time is available at junior and high schools, there is little possibility for them to speak like native English speakers. In addition, most students do not recognize the fact that various Englishes are used across the world. Although a contentious argument, there is no need to speak like native English speakers. There is no need to emulate them. It is important to have mutual understanding in conversation even when local accents are uttered. Although misunderstanding might occur, developing communication is crucial.

With the acceleration of globalization, Japanese students have more opportunities to hear diverse

English. As such occasions emerge, what attitudes should Japanese students have towards the variety of Englishes? With the introduction of the 'World Englishes' concept, students are allowed to perceive English with a different view. Accordingly, investigation is needed of how their attitudes towards native English and non-native English are influenced by familiarity with varieties of Englishes used worldwide.

2. Literature Review

2.1 World Englishes

The spread of English across the world resulted in a wide variety of English spoken in various parts of the world. The plural form of English, '*Englishes*', represents the current English language situation. English is not only one variety but has many varieties influenced by local languages. As it is said, "*World English (WE) belongs to everybody who speaks it, but it is nobody's mother tongue.*" (Rajagopalan, 2004, p.111), meaning that English belongs to anyone who uses it.

The concept of 'World Englishes' (hereafter WE) was developed by Larry E. Smith and Braj B. Kachru in the 1980s. Smith (1983) emphasized the existence of numerous varieties of English worldwide and their equal validity. He also claimed that people who speak English do not have to attempt to become like native English speakers. Kachru (1985) proposed the concentric three circle model (Figure1). The Inner Circle represents the native English speaking countries where English is used as a native language (ENL) such as the USA, the UK and Canada. The Outer Circle consists of the former colonies of the UK or the USA, such as

India, Singapore, Kenya, and others, where English is used as a second language (ESL) or an official language. Finally, the Expanding Circle includes countries that introduce English as a foreign language (EFL) learned in schools as a subject in the curriculum and not used in daily life. China, Japan, Korea are included in this Expanding Circle. These three circles indicate that a number of people speak English, even though they do not use English as their first language. With its spread worldwide, distinct characteristics have developed and English has become '*Englishes*' as a consequence. While this model does not accommodate all countries, it does present the current circumstances of English as it is used worldwide (Crystal, 2003). There is no doubt that many linguists considered it one of the most influential model for understanding the use of English in different countries (Pishghadam & Saboori, 2011).

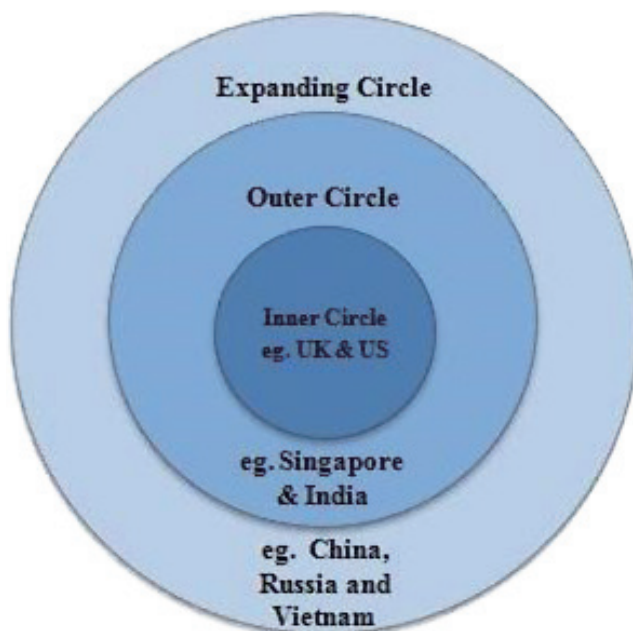


Figure1: Kachru's Three Concentric Circles (1985)

2.2 Students' attitudes towards varieties of English

The global spread of English has resulted in the development of WE, English as an International Language (EIL), English as a Global Language, and English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) as new fields of study in English Language Teaching (ELT). Traditional norms in ELT have been challenged by researchers and educators in association with WE. In this world of globalization, it is more likely that non-native speakers use English with other non-native speakers of English rather than with native English speakers. Considering the current situation, it is important and beneficial for English learners to recognize the existence of varieties of English with local accents (Choi, 2007). A number of previous studies focused on how to incorporate WE/Global Englishes into ELT to raise learners' awareness of the diversity of English and prepare them to use English in Lingua Franca (ELF) contexts (Rajagopalan, 2004; Suzuki, 2011; Galloway & Rose, 2014; Ke & Cahyani, 2014; Sung, 2015; Galloway & Rose, 2017; Liu & Cheng, 2017). In these studies, students' attitudes towards native English and non-native English were examined (Matuura et al., 1994; Chiba et al., 1995; Choi, 2007; Rajprasit & Marlina, 2019). The findings suggested that the subjects had more positive attitudes towards native English than non-native varieties of English. Chang (2014) reported that the subjects resisted using their non-native English. In other studies, students preferred to speak like native English speakers (Rajprasit & Marline, 2019). Moreover, the preference for native English teachers has endured (Choi, 2007; Ke & Cahyani, 2014). That is, there is a persistent belief among students that English belongs to native English speakers and their English is a model for

non-native English speakers to achieve. It is believed that American and British English are the 'gold standard' varieties of English.

In the studies on Japanese students' attitudes towards native English and non-native English, the same tendency was observed. The participants in the study (Matsuura et al., 1994) showed more positive reactions towards the American accent than they did towards non-native accents. Similarly, it was reported that American English was valued more favorably than Japanese people's English (Matsuda, 2003; McKenzie, 2010; Sasayama, 2013). In addition, another study showed that there was a strong belief that the ownership of English was the preserve of native speakers (Takahashi, 2012). It is suggested that the ELT situation in Japan plays a role in these results. ELT in Japan has been especially oriented to American and British English. English in the textbooks at schools is mostly from Inner circle countries, such as America, the U.K, Canada and Australia (Matsuda, 2003). Consequently, the majority of the dialogues in the textbooks are NS and NS or NS and Japanese. It indicates the lack of encounters of non-native English in Outer or Expanding Circle countries, which has resulted in students' unfamiliarity with varieties of English. Conversely, familiarity with native accents leads to a favorable view of native English (Chiba et al., 1995).

Alongside a change in attitudes towards NE and NNE, other findings also resulted after the WE information was provided in the curriculum. Students paid more attention to varieties of English and learned the importance of different varieties of English. Their awareness of WE prompted them to rethink native English and English as goals to achieve (Rajprasisit & Marlina, 2019). Also, students

gained positive attitudes as non-native speakers and became less reluctant to use English with their own accents. It indicates that they became more confident in their own English after the course (Kojima, 2017). Accordingly, it is meaningful to incorporate the WE concept in classrooms to expose learners to the diversity of English in ELT. Providing information on WE allowed students to realize the situation of how English is used in the real world. In addition, it developed open-mindedness towards unfamiliar varieties of English (Chang, 2014).

As previous studies indicated, providing WE information was essential. Nevertheless, little research has been carried out to investigate how the concept of WE influences students' assumptions regarding English and students' attitudes towards English learning in Japan. To focus on students' attitudes towards differences in English variants, much of the previous research provided examples to listen to or introduced discussion of WE-related topics. More sufficient background information about the topics could have been provided. Furthermore, additional information about the role of English as an international language and a multicultural language could have helped students' understanding of the WE concept.

The present study incorporated the concept of WE into a course and investigated Japanese students' perception of 'World Englishes' and how it influenced their beliefs and attitudes towards English and English learning. The research questions were as followed:

- 1) Are there any changes in students' attitudes towards native English and non-native English?
- 2) Are there any changes in students' assumptions in English learning?

Throughout the course, identify students' response to 'World Englishes'

3. Research Methodology

3.1 General background

The study was conducted in the 'English Linguistics III' course in the spring semester in 2021. The aim of the course was to raise the students' awareness of World Englishes and intercultural communication. The course textbook was *Understanding English across Cultures* (Honna, Takeshita & D'Angelo, 2012). Each unit of this textbook focuses on use of English as an international language and as a multicultural

language in the current situation across the world. Table 1 shows the contents of the textbook. The students were required to read and understand the English passage in advance in cooperative group work. It was believed that preparing for the class beforehand would allow students to gain profound understanding of the new concepts. In addition to the textbook, several video clips of non-native English speakers' talking were watched during some classes to raise awareness of varieties of English.

3.2 Participants

The students who enrolled in this course were in their second year at a university in Japan. The number of students in this course was 46 (male sixteen, female thirty). Their TOEIC IP scores ranged from 230 to 655 with an average score of 317 at the beginning of the course. None of the students had experience of living abroad more than one month.

3.3 Instruments and procedures

This study utilized the following two instruments.

- (1) Questionnaires
- (2) Reflection comments in a weekly worksheet

The questionnaire (see Appendix) was conducted anonymously on the first day and the fifteenth day of the course. The students were told that their participation in this study would not affect their evaluation in the course. It contained the same nine questions and one different question. The nine questions were designed to investigate the attitudes of students towards varieties of English, native English speakers (NES), non-native English speakers (NNES) and Japanese English speakers including themselves. The response options were in a four-

Table 1 Unit title

Week 1	Course guidance
Week 2	What is English as an International Language
Week 3	Why is English Important?
Week 4	McDonald's Stores in India Do Not Serve Beef Burgers!
Week 5	World Englishes
Week 6	More Non-Native Speakers than Native Speakers
Week 7	English as an Asian Language
Week 8	"The Official Language of Singapore is Singlish, Sir."
Week 9	English in India
Week 10	Expanding Circle as a Multicultural Language
Week 11	English as a Multicultural Language and Diversity Management
Week 12	"What's Your Point?" "Why Don't You Hear Me Out?"
Week 13	That Restaurant is Very Delicious!
Week 14	English as a Japanese Language for International Communication
Week 15	Can You or Can't You Read French, After All?
Week 16	Final Examination

point Likert Scale format, ranging from one (Strongly disagree) to four (Strongly agree). Besides the nine questions, the pre-questionnaire asked if students had heard of 'World Englishes'. If the answer was 'yes', students were asked to write everything they knew about 'World Englishes'. The post-questionnaire had a question about the course, which asked the students if the course had positively benefitted their understanding of English as it is spoken around the world. Students were required to complete and submit a worksheet at the end of each class. In the worksheet, students summarized the contents of each unit, answered two questions and wrote some comments about what they learned and found out through the class. These submitted worksheets were assessed and returned with some comments from the teacher in the following week.

The specific class procedure is as follows:

- (1) Discussion: group work; each student in the group gives a summary of an assigned part of the passage of the textbook unit and discuss the topic of the passage.
- (2) Lecture: the teacher gives a lecture with the slides, each student confirms the content with the shared information in a group.
- (3) Reflection: a worksheet is distributed, completed and submitted by each student.

A few more details need to be explained concerning the in-class discussion. First, each group consisted of four to five students. The assigned part was decided by the group members themselves. Second, during the discussion, students helped each other if one could not comprehend and complete the assigned part. It was a good opportunity to carry out collaborative learning.

3.4 Data collection

Based on the research questions, the data were analyzed using two kinds of instruments. Pre- and post-study questionnaires were distributed to students in week one and week fifteen, respectively. Each included nine questions in a four-point Likert scale. Also, reflection comments described in a weekly worksheet were collected. These resources were used to investigate students' assumptions towards English and English learning and to find out students' responses towards WE.

4. Results and Discussion

This section reports the analysis of the data collected from the pre- and post- questionnaires and students' reflection comments from worksheets. First of all, it should be noted that none of the students had any knowledge of WE before starting the course. This was established in the pre-questionnaire. The response indicates the students' actual present intention regarding English. The nine questions are divided into three categories: (1) students' attitudes towards native English (NE); (2) students' attitudes towards Japanese English, including their own; (3) students' attitudes towards non-native English (NNE). After presenting the students' attitudes according to each category, this section discusses students' responses to WE and changes in their assumptions regarding English and English learning.

4.1 Attitudes towards native English and non-native English

Table 2 shows the results of pre- and post-questionnaires. Accordingly, Questions 1 and 9 in

the first category did not show much change in the students' attitudes towards NES. Unsurprisingly, the majority of the students desire to use native-like English. Most of the students consider American and British English to be the best and strive to acquire them. Their preference for English teachers is unchanged. The belief in ownership of English is solid among Japanese university students. However, the degree of agreement concerning teacher preference was somewhat less after the course. It indicated that students understood the norm of American or British English was not the only option to choose. This category one results relate to the research question, 'students' assumptions in English learning'. The second category, Questions 2, 3 and 4, corresponds with the research question 'students' attitudes towards native English and non-native English'. This category showed the most significant change. Question 2 sees the pre-questionnaire's overwhelming majority of students who did not want to use Japanese accented English reduced by

half. This was also revealed in Question 3. Though their unwillingness to use English with Japanese accents was clearly revealed before the course, there was a significantly different result after the course. Recognizing the existence of varieties of English and how they are used across the world allowed them to feel more comfortable using their own English than before. It suggests that understanding the WE concept influences students' attitudes towards varieties of English. The results indicate that the students have open-minded attitudes towards varieties of English. Their enthusiasm for different kinds of English was observed. Conversely, Question 4 responses show little difference before and after the course. Most students agreed that they should use their own English even if it had a Japanese accent. Although they thought that it was not necessary for non-native English speakers to sound native-like, they would still ideally like to speak like Americans or British people. This ambivalence was observed in the results of the questionnaire.

Table 2 Results of questionnaires

			strongly disagree	disagree	agree	strongly agree
Category 1	1. I want to use English spoken by native English speakers like Americans or Britons.	Before	3%	3%	31%	63%
		After	0%	13%	54%	33%
	9. I think the best way to learn English is from native English speakers like Americans or Britons.	Before	3%	10%	42%	45%
		After	5%	31%	38%	26%
Category 2	2. I do not want to use English with a Japanese accent.	Before	3%	10%	29%	58%
		After	0%	46%	31%	23%
	3. I do not have confidence in my English because it has a Japanese accent.	Before	8%	10%	45%	37%
		After	15%	31%	36%	18%
4. I think we should use Japanese accented English with confidence.	Before	5%	11%	59%	24%	
	After	3%	15%	33%	49%	
Category 3	5. I want to interact with various kinds of English besides American/British English.	Before	3%	13%	26%	58%
		After	3%	5%	34%	58%
	6. I think it is fine not to be able to understand English used in non-native English speaking countries.	Before	24%	54%	22%	0%
		After	31%	56%	10%	3%
	7. I am interested in varieties of English used in non-native English-speaking countries.	Before	3%	24%	43%	30%
		After	5%	23%	39%	33%
	8. I want to communicate with people from non-native English-speaking countries.	Before	2%	8%	45%	45%
		After	0%	8%	41%	51%

Finally, as Questions 5, 6, 7 and 8 show, the students had positive attitudes towards varieties of English. They were interested in interacting with non-native English speakers and open-minded regarding English with local accents. Students' initial interest and desire to go abroad may reflect the results.

4.2 Response to World Englishes

Students' reflective comments in the weekly worksheet identified, three main topics: (1) the fact there is no one English spoken across the world; (2) the role of English as a multicultural language; (3) the necessity of acquiring English. First, having received information about WE, students gained different perspectives towards English from those they had acknowledged. They maintained their previous belief that native speaker English was the natural norm, but they felt free to use different English. The existence of varieties of English allowed them to feel comfortable using their own accented English. Some comments acknowledging diversity of English are set out below (they were written in Japanese and translated into English by the author):

- It is not necessary to speak like native English speakers. I would feel more comfortable speaking English than before.
- I learned that there are differences between American English and British English. So it is natural that there should be a variety of English in different countries. We should understand and accept it.
- English does not belong to anyone. It is time to say that.
- We should get rid of the idea of acquiring 'perfect English'.

Besides these comments, some remarks regarding

confidence in speaking English were observed.

- I should not be afraid of making mistakes when I speak English. I should be confident in my English.
- We should not worry about using English which is different from that of native English speakers'.
- Indians speak English with great confidence. They look cool. We have to learn from their attitude.
- Indians are positive about their English. I learned that the positive attitude influence English competency.
- When I learned about English in Singapore and how people are proud of 'Singlish', their way of thinking leads to motivation for learning English.

Second, students realized the fact that English is used as an international language among people with different backgrounds to achieve a variety of purposes. They found that the culture and customs of each country are reflected in the English they use, which was intriguing to the students. Some comments are as follows:

- English is a multicultural language, I found that our English (Japanese English) is not the wrong one.
- There are various expressions depending on the country and it is interesting to know. Also, it is important for us to understand that there are differences in English among countries.
- I thought that we should acquire American English or British English, but I am now interested in varieties of English.

It was observed that they understood the important role of English in different fields and that

it is an indispensable language to acquire for their future. The majority of the students mentioned that they recognized English as the most useful language for world-wide communication.

Finally, in the students' post-questionnaire responses to the question, 'Was the course beneficial for their understanding of English as a world language?', the importance of WE education was revealed.

- I obtained the idea of English which is necessary in this modern age through the course. I learned it is important to have an attitude to make efforts to convey my ideas, not to speak like a native speaker.
- We should not judge English according to the speaker. I was not confident in my English, but I would like to use English actively.

The students' responses showed that a different perspective towards English occurred through learning WE. In addition, it broadens the students' view of English as a significant language worldwide.

5. Conclusion

This paper investigated how learning the concept of WE influenced Japanese university students' attitudes towards native English, non-native English and English learning. The study showed that it allowed the students to reevaluate their beliefs about English. One of the students' commented, "*I understand that native English is not the only 'right English', our English and English used in non-English speaking countries are also 'right English'.*" This remark represents the students' understanding of the concept of WE.

Next, other findings indicated that the students

were open-minded towards non-native English as they realized the current situation of using English as an international language as well as a multicultural language across the world. This emphasizes the importance of understanding mutual varieties of English, including native English and non-native English. It would take time to have sufficient understanding and produce intelligible English expressions for non-native English speakers, but once students are aware of varieties of English, they are allowed to build up their confidence and feel comfortable in using English. (Ke & Cahyani, 2014).

Lastly, it is believed that introducing the concept of World Englishes in curricula is essential. Providing the reality of the use of English in this globalized world is indispensable to prepare English learners for their future use of English. Most Japanese students have focused on learning to use grammar, pronunciation and vocabulary correctly as native English speakers do. Little attention has been paid to how, where, and for what purposes English is used, or its role in the real world. Without being informed of the existence of different varieties, students would not have much opportunity to discover variations of English including native English. Culture is different in each country. Language used in different cultures should be different. This simple idea should be realized for students in learning English.

The number of non-native English users far exceeds the native English speakers at present. The WE education should be considered a part of ELT as emerging English varieties are different from Inner circle varieties. This research found that the students' view of English and English learning was broadened by knowledge of the WE concept. It

is hoped that the results of the study will become a springboard for developing and incorporating diverse English in the future.

For further study, more varieties of Englishes by video clips and listening journals should be provided to experience different characteristics of English. In

addition, learner-led projects ought to be emphasized, such as students choosing one of the Englishes in one country and independently researching the background, the role and the features. This will allow students to become more engaged in learning and develop further understanding.

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Appendix

英語に対する意識調査

これは、皆さんに、英語に対する考えをお聞きするアンケートです。すべての質問に回答してください。
調査の結果は研究に活用するもので、成績評価等には反映されません。

それぞれの質問について、該当する数字を○で囲んで下さい。

		全くそうは 思わない	そう思わない	そう思う	強くそう思う
1	私は、アメリカ人やイギリス人のようなネイティブが話す英語を使いたい。	1	2	3	4
2	私は、日本人なまりの英語を使いたくない。	1	2	3	4
3	私は、自分の英語は日本人なまりの英語だから自分の英語に自信がない。	1	2	3	4
4	私は、日本人なまりの英語でも自信を持って使うべきだと思う。	1	2	3	4
5	私は、アメリカ英語やイギリス英語以外の様々な英語に、もっと触れてみたい。	1	2	3	4
6	私は、非英語圏で使われている独特な英語は理解できなくてもよいと思う。	1	2	3	4
7	私は、非英語圏で使われている多様な英語に関心がある。	1	2	3	4
8	私は、非英語圏の人々と英語でコミュニケーションをもっと取りたい。	1	2	3	4
9	私は、アメリカ人やイギリス人のネイティブから、英語を学ぶのがいちばん良いと思う。	1	2	3	4

10	「World Englishes」ということばを聞いたことがありますか？✓をしてください。 <input type="checkbox"/> はい <input type="checkbox"/> いいえ	「はい」と答えた方、知っていることをなんでも書いて下さい。
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ご協力ありがとうございました。