

'REAL ENGLISH' IN JAPAN: TEAM TEACHERS' VIEWS ON NATIVENESS IN LANGUAGE TEACHING

SEAN SUTHERLAND

University of Westminster

ABSTRACT. *In Japan, English is often taught by teams composed of a local Japanese teacher of English (JTE) and a native English speaking assistant English teacher (AET). This form of team teaching is typically assumed to be beneficial as it provides the students with exposure to models of native English which they would otherwise not encounter. Research has found that students and JTEs approve of team teaching as it provides students with motivation to study a language that would otherwise have little relevance to their daily lives. Less research has been done to explore how team teaching affects the JTEs with regards to their feelings about their own skills as English language users. In this paper, based on interview research with JTEs, I argue that team teaching reinforces the dichotomy between native and non-native speakers to the detriment of both Japanese teachers and their students.*

Keywords: Teaching, English, Japan, team, native, non-native.

INGLÉS “REAL” EN JAPÓN: VISIÓN DE EQUIPOS DE PROFESORES SOBRE LOS PROFESORES NATIVOS EN LA ENSEÑANZA DE LENGUAS

RESUMEN. *En Japón es frecuente que la enseñanza del inglés se realice con equipos de profesores formados por un profesor local (JTE) y un asistente nativo (AET). Esta estructura de equipo de enseñanza se considera generalmente positiva, puesto que proporciona a los aprendices exposición a modelos de lengua nativa, imposible de encontrar de otra manera. Las investigaciones prueban que tanto los alumnos como los profesores no nativos aprueban este sistema de enseñanza por equipos, ya que resulta muy motivador para aprender una lengua que de otro modo tiene poca relevancia en su vida diaria. Sin embargo, todavía escasean las investigaciones que exploran cómo los equipos de trabajo afectan al propio profesor no nativo, especialmente en lo concerniente a sus sensaciones sobre sus propias habilidades para usar el inglés. En este artículo, y sobre la base de entrevistas con profesores no nativos, defendemos la postura de que la enseñanza por equipos refuerza la dicotomía entre hablantes nativos y no nativos en detrimento tanto de los profesores japoneses como de sus estudiantes.*

Palabras clave: Enseñanza, inglés, Japón, equipo, nativo, no nativo.

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1. ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING IN JAPAN

Many Japanese people could live quite happily and fully without English. As one Japanese student told Beale (2002: 26), “We rarely face the occasion where we have to speak languages other than Japanese in daily life. So some of us never need English and neither are we interested in learning English.”

Despite this, English is everywhere in Japan. Visitors to any of the cities of Japan, even those far from tourist areas, will immediately notice the prevalence of English on signs and printed advertisements. Martin (2007: 170) argues that the presence of English in advertisements “associates the product with modernity, quality engineering, exclusivity, professional mobility [and] international appeal”. The use of English, and not the actual meaning of the words used, may be enough to create those associations, because the English used in advertisements often has little or nothing to do with the products being advertised. Much of the English one sees comes across as nonsensical to native English speakers, such as shops and restaurants called Every Day’s and Tasty Plaza (Hyde 2002).

While there is therefore a certain amount of acceptance of English in Japan, both as a superficial adornment and as a tool for achieving status or employment

goals, there are also more negative feelings about English. Ike (1995) argues that Japanese people both desire and reject English simultaneously. Kubota goes further, calling it a "love / hate sentiment" (1998: 300) that causes linguistic tension in society at large and in education.

Notwithstanding the dislike some Japanese people may have of English, the language has become the primary foreign language studied in elementary, secondary and tertiary education. The Ministry of Education does not specifically equate foreign language education with English education, but in practice English is the only foreign language taught in most schools (Kubota 2002).

English is a key part of a Japanese student's progress from one level of schooling to another. The three years of junior high school for students from ages 12 to 15 culminates in what the Japanese sometimes call 'examination hell' (Ono 2005), the process of studying for, sitting and sometimes re-sitting entrance exams covering a variety of topics to secure admission to a senior high school. The process begins again in senior high school with a battery of examinations leading to admission to university.

English language education plays a large role in this cycle of examinations and admission to higher levels of schooling, and has been called "the most important school subject" (Kobayashi 2002: 184-185) because it is the only subject required on all university entrance exams (LoCastro 1996), even those such as engineering or mathematics where the need for English might not be immediately apparent. This has produced a school system that favours the teaching and learning of grammar and vocabulary for English exams (Butler and Iino 2005), which has in turn led some commentators to conclude that Japanese students are not getting sufficient instruction in other aspects of English use, in particular the chance to hear and use spoken English. This may contribute to studies that show Japanese students underperform compared to English as a foreign language students in other countries (Martin 2004; McConnell 2000). Even when teachers are encouraged to teach a curriculum based on oral proficiency, students who wish to attend university must continue to write entrance exams based on grammatical and lexical knowledge (Lamie 1998).

Since the late 1970s, in an effort to increase the oral language proficiency of Japanese students and to counter the grammar-based entrance examinations, Japan introduced what has been called one of the greatest social exchanges since World War II (McConnell 2000), bringing thousands of people each year to Japan to work as assistant English teachers (AETs). The AETs must be university-educated, but not necessarily in fields related to English or to teaching, and they come almost exclusively from countries in what Kachru (1985) called the inner circle of English: the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada,

Australia, and other countries in which English is the main language of the majority of the populace. These AETs work side by side with Japanese teachers of English (JTEs) in Japanese schools, with the JTEs largely being responsible for overall curriculum management, while the AETs provide a model of the language as it is used by native English speakers. In a typical lesson the AET might introduce the purpose of the lesson in English, followed by a translation in Japanese by the JTE. The two teachers might then model an English language interaction, after which the students try to do the same with partners while the teachers circulate and provide advice and feedback. The ultimate benefit of this form of team teaching, according to its founders, is for students to realize that “English is a living language through firsthand communication with a native speaker” (Brumby and Wada 1990: 3).

The idea that putting students in contact with native speakers of English will be beneficial to those students is relatively uncontroversial, perhaps to the extent that it is rarely examined critically. Jeon and Lee write that China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Japan and South Korea “have found that hiring NSET [native-speaking English teachers] is one of the most efficient ways to improve the local student English proficiency” (2006: 57). However, less has been written about how the presence of AETs affects their co-workers. The purpose of this study is to examine this gap in the research.

2. THE ENGLISH AS A LINGUA FRANCA PARADIGM

This juxtaposition of non-native English speaking JTE and native English speaking AET provides an interesting locale for examining current trends in the conception of English as a lingua franca. The concept of ELF can be summarised quite simply as “a way of referring to communication in English between speakers with different first languages” (Seidlhofer 2005: 339). For example, a study of ELF in a European context (Louhiala-Salminen, Charles, and Kankaanranta, 2005) examines how Finns and Swedes interact when they are brought together by corporate merger and how they use English to communicate with each other.

More generally, ELF research is concerned with examining the language of non-native English speakers without continuous reference to native English norms. Scholars such as Jenkins (2006) and Seidlhofer (2004) argue that ELF interactions should not be analysed from a deficit perspective, where questions of mistake and error (Corder 1967) or interlanguage (Selinker 1972) dominate the analysis and where reference to native English speaker (NES) English will be taken as the baseline for any comparisons.

The ELF paradigm changes the answer to the question of who 'owns' English. The standard idea of 'ownership' in texts like Hook's (2002) is that a native speaker owns his or her language. Other speakers of English may use it, but they do not own it like native speakers do. For some, the idea of ownership is especially important when it comes to English, because ownership of English is seen by them to be more important than ownership of other languages. There is a triumphalist attitude present in many descriptions of the current state of English, such as Hook's (2002: 35-36) exhortation: "With [English], doors in every field of endeavor stand wide open... Imagine what life is like for those knowing only Lithuanian, Czech, Pushtu or Turkish!"

This concept of native speaker ownership of English has been critically analysed, often using Widdowson's (1994) arguments as a starting point. Widdowson argued that if native speakers own English because they speak it more correctly than non-native English speakers (NNEs) do, then by extension some native speakers must own larger shares of English because they speak it more correctly than other NESs do. Or at least some native speakers will feel they own their personal variety of English more than other NESs own it, because they display certain grammatical, phonological and lexical features when they speak English that other NESs do not.

Had he stopped here, Widdowson's argument might have been relatively uncontroversial. However, he earned the ire of those whom he calls the self-appointed "custodians of standard English" (Widdowson 1994: 379) by going on to argue that English speakers from outer circle countries should be considered owners of English. He gave the example of the words 'depone' and 'prepone', both coined by replacing the prefix in 'postpone'. However, only the first is typically accepted as standard English, because it was created by NESs, while the second, created by Indian speakers of English, is not. Widdowson's belief that there was no difference between the two words beyond the linguistic character of their creators led him to conclude that it was irrational to call one standard English and not the other. This led to his controversial claim that English "is not a possession which they [NESs] lease out to others, while still retaining the freehold. Other people actually own it" (Widdowson 1994: 385).

This conception of ELF as a means to legitimizing the language use of Japanese speakers of English underpins my research. The default assumption for the implementation of team teaching was that JTEs' English is deficient in some ways and that native speaker support from AETs was a necessity, but ELF research helps for a re-conceptualization of the need for native speaker support in team teaching.

3. METHOD

For this study 20 JTEs were interviewed using semi-structured research interviews in an attempt to discover how team teaching affects them as teachers, and in particular how it affects their perceptions of the ownership of English. According to Sinding and Aronson (2003), research interviews can be a reliable method of data collection, potentially giving researchers a method of entry into certain social groups' otherwise closed discourses. The successful interview should provide access to members of those groups' subjective opinions about the meaning of various social phenomena, allowing the interviewer to gain access to what Patton (2002: 340) has called "inner perspectives", the ability to see things from the participant's point of view.

Little in-depth qualitative work has been done in this area. Some of the most-cited studies, such as those by Mahoney (2004) and Scholefield (1996), are primarily quantitative studies concerned with uncovering what teachers feel should be done when they team teach. Fujimoto-Adamson's (2004: 1) meta-analysis of the methodologies used in team teaching research in Japan puts forward "a proposal for qualitative, interview-based research at the local level."

All of the teachers I interviewed were fully-qualified JTEs with at least one year of experience working with an AET, but the majority had at least five years of experience. The JTEs ranged in age from 24 to 65 years old, worked in rural and urban schools, were male and female, and worked in both public and private institutions. While this is not quantitative research by any means, the range of JTEs interviewed does, it is hoped, provide a cross-section of answers from which to draw an analysis.

To analyse the data I used a discourse analytic / conversation analytic approach. Discourse analysis is the analysis of language in use (Brown & Yule 1983), especially language "beyond the sentence boundary" (van Dijk 1997: 7), and also within the sentence. Discourse analysis is also focused on the scrutiny of how knowledge is produced, a concern largely associated with the work of Michel Foucault and his assertion that "effects of truth are produced within discourses which in themselves are neither true nor false" (Foucault 1980: 118).

My data analysis does not completely adhere to the practices of grounded theory, Glaser and Strauss' (1967) research method which emphasises collecting data and looking for patterns in it before developing theories about the appearance of said patterns. My analysis is informed by literature to a greater extent than grounded theory's founders would likely recommend. However, grounded theory ideals informed my research to an extent, especially the notion that, as Eaves (2001) argues, data collection and data analysis should proceed

speak English the way he did, pointing out that his English was not perfect but was communicatively functional. However, other JTEs do not seem satisfied with communicatively functional English, which leads to their tendency to see the native English of the AETs as a more desirable target for their students. Both Teacher 01 and Teacher 05 earned Master's degrees in TESOL, Teacher 01 in the United States and Teacher 05 in the United Kingdom. Teacher 05 said she had studied the concepts of language variety and language change while she was a post-graduate student. Teacher 01 did not specify whether or not she studied these topics, but as most MA TESOL courses in the United States include courses on sociolinguistics (Nelson, 1998) it is possible she has some exposure to these concepts. Despite this, both made explicit reference to AET English as 'real English', thus implicitly relegating the English they themselves speak to the status of something else, something inherently less valid if it is being denied the label of being 'real'. These JTEs would certainly be classified as expert speakers, as defined by Rampton (1990), yet they did not see their own English as authentic. This apparent contradiction between most JTEs' actual use of English and their denigration of their own English abilities became evident during discussions about the roles they felt AETs should play in the classroom.

Teacher 07 told me that visits from AETs were consistently rated by students as the "most impressive" events of the year in students evaluations she administered. Similar comments about the popularity of AETs were made by other JTEs. The JTE is the one who spends more time with the students directly and more time behind the scenes working for them, yet the AETs are often more popular with students. In Excerpt 2 I ask Teacher 07 to tell me more about this.

Excerpt 2

- 01 Researcher do you do you what do you think about that does it seem /fair or <..>
- 02 Teacher 07 u:::m <.> well I prefer <.> teaching English u:::m I prefer um so very what can I /say really
- 03 good output <.> giving the really good output for to students <.> so our English is OK but
- 04 so it's quite far from maybe native English speakers' English <.> so in a foreign language
- 05 settings like in Japan <.> so we need a high quality input for my students so if even it's only
- 06 once <.> a semester or just a couple of of times in i:::n a month or something like that <.> I
- 07 \think so we need it <3>
- 08 Researcher OK

- 09 Teacher 07 so of course the students need it <.> otherwise students
can't cannot have any opportunity
10 to speak with native speakers

In lines 03 and 04, Teacher 07 has set the English of the JTEs ("our English is OK") in opposition to native speakers' English, saying that they are "quite far" from each other. Her obvious fluency in this excerpt, and the fact that she had just begun a PhD programme in an inner circle country, provide some evidence that she is an expert speaker of English. Despite this, she refers to her desire for high quality input for students as only being available a couple of times a month, that is, when the AET joins her in the classroom. She, and other JTEs who made similar comments, discount the possibility that they themselves could provide this "high quality input".

During my interview with Teacher 18, he told me that he had once worked in Australia for a period of two years as a Japanese teacher in an Australian high school. He was the sole native Japanese speaker in the school, and the rest of the Japanese language teachers were Australians. He was, in effect, in the position in Australia that the AETs are in when they work in Japan. I thought that this role reversal might allow him some especially interesting insights, so I questioned him at some length about his thoughts on native and non-native language models. In Excerpt 3 he begins by describing the Australian teachers of Japanese.

Excerpt 3

- 01 Teacher 18 they [Australian teachers of Japanese] know everything
even they know better than I do
02 about Eng ah Japanese grammar but they were not they
when they asked me to go maybe
03 they just want genuine you know Japanese language
/teacher it's the sort of same thing they
04 really we really want the native speaker of English and
also maybe parents still know <.>
05 yeah maybe Japanese teachers do not you know speak
English they do not know a lot about
06 English if compare about with a native speaker of
English maybe parents demand something
07 about that

Teacher 18 is quite complimentary regarding the Australian teachers of Japanese. He says that the Australians had more explicit knowledge of Japanese grammar than he did when he worked with them. This is not surprising, as they

were trained to be teachers of Japanese while he was trained to be an English teacher. (Several JTEs showed that they were aware of the difficulties of teaching a different language than one's speciality when they spoke of the frustration of trying to answer AETs' questions about the Japanese language.) Yet he still calls himself the "genuine you know Japanese language /teacher", with 'genuine' here echoing other JTEs' use of the term 'real' described earlier. The subsequent link to "native speaker of English" in lines 04 makes it clear that 'genuine' also refers to them, not just to Japanese teachers of Japanese in Australia. I had originally surmised that Teacher 18's experience in Australia as a untrained native speaker of Japanese working with trained non-native teachers, and his positive descriptions of those non-native teachers, might have made him less interested in defining teachers by whether they are native or not. It seems from this excerpt that this was not the case, and if anything his description of himself as 'genuine', despite his lack of training in Japanese language teaching methods, shows that the link in his mind between nativeness and teaching ability seems to be a strong one.

Excerpt 3 is also interesting because its beginning and its end are contradictory. In lines 01 and 02 it is trained non-native language teachers, the Australian teachers of Japanese, which are positioned as the more knowledgeable. Then in lines 05 and 06 the non-native language teachers, the Japanese teachers of English in this case, are positioned as being less knowledgeable. Either Japanese teachers are at fault, and they can never be more knowledgeable regardless of whether or not they are teaching their native language or another one, which seems unlikely, or something else is responsible for this contradiction. It is possible that Teacher 18 is positioning himself and other JTEs as less knowledgeable for cultural reasons, although Kubota (1999) warns against the tendency in applied linguistics to over emphasise cultural differences between East Asian and Western cultures. Instead, I can surmise that it is English itself that is the cause of this, because it is the other factor that distinguishes lines 01 and 02 from lines 05 and 06. In lines 01 and 02 the language being taught is not English, which perhaps makes the connection between it and the nativeness of the teacher weaker. In lines 05 and 06 the discussion has shifted to the teaching of English, which as we saw earlier in this section, is highly associated with nativeness for many Japanese people. As Teacher 18's two references to the demands of parents in this excerpt show, nativeness seems to override other factors when it comes to the question of English in Japan.

Teacher 19, the head English teacher at a senior high school, made the association between nativeness and language knowledge even stronger.

Excerpt 4

- 01 Teacher 19 so uh in Japan I I would say I dare to say that the native
 speakers is like a god
- 03 Researcher of course yeah
- 04 Teacher 19 they know everything <.> grammar and in many fields
- 05 Researcher yeah
- 06 Teacher 19 English they know they are the god and the teacher of
 English Japanese teacher English
- 07 teacher comes next

Teacher 19 is an English teacher with many years of experience. Prior to beginning his teaching career he worked for a Japanese company in Germany, using English to communicate with German and other European customers, so he has experience using English for practical purposes. The comments he made in Excerpt 4 were not expressed in a jocular manner, so I do not think Teacher 19 was being hyperbolic for comic effect. Rather, I think his comments reflect the feelings of many JTEs. This deification of NES English echoes the comment of one of Jenkins' (2005: 539) participants, who said that she, like other Japanese people, "worships" NES English accents.

In the context in which Teacher 19 and I were talking, "native speakers" in line 01 can be taken as referring to AETs more specifically than to all native speakers, so it must be frustrating for a person like him to see that the AETs' linguistic knowledge is treated as god-like, and therefore superior to his. This recalls Widdowson's (1994: 386) comment that "there is no doubt that native speakers of English are deferred to in our profession. What they say is invested with both authenticity and authority", although Widdowson did not go so far as to associate that authority with god.

In this section I have shown how some of the respondents to my interviews, all experienced English teachers, still felt that there was a major distinction to be made between their own English and that of NESs.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

As I explained earlier, English is not a necessary language for those Japanese people who live in Japan and spend their time dealing with Japanese people, seeing as Japan is linguistically quite homogeneous and day-to-day life for a typical Japanese person features few encounters with languages other than Japanese. (Of course the case is different for those Japanese people who live or work abroad, but that is outside the discussion of this paper.)

This suggests that the ELT industry would not be viable in Japan, and yet learning English is a very popular activity. This level of popularity seems to go beyond what would be expected even when the importance of English for high school and university entrance examinations is taken into account. Surely not every student wants to attend the most prestigious schools, which means devotion to mastering English syntax and lexis. The *kyoiku mama* [literally ‘education mothers’ in Japanese] who lobby for increased numbers of oral English classes in their children’s schools must be aware that spoken English is not tested on university exams, yet they ask for more classes led by NES instructors. This leads to the conclusion that it is the social value of native English, not its use as a communicative tool or as a means of passing gatekeeping entrance examinations, that accounts for the popularity of AETs.

The popularity of English, and almost exclusively native varieties of English, provides another answer to the question of why JTEs accept AETs as partners without much complaint, yet appear to do little to take advantage of the possibilities of team teaching. The answer lies in Teacher 13’s metaphor relating varieties of English to varieties of hand bags, presented in Excerpt 1. He described a division between ‘real’ and ‘fake’ branded bags, a metaphor for the division between ‘real’ and ‘fake’ brands of English. English is presented as something other than a communicative tool according to this metaphor. Any handbag serves the same function with regards to carrying things, but only certain ones do so in a style that matches whatever trends are current. So perhaps English can be seen to be functionally communicative regardless of variety, but some varieties lack the sense of style that makes them more desirable.

This division appears again in the term ‘real English’, the respondents’ own term for AET English, and their use of it seems to signify a deeper division than the typical native / non-native dichotomy. The English spoken by Japanese people may be communicatively valuable, but it is not socially valuable. To continue Teacher 13’s metaphor, Japanese English is not branded in the same way that native English varieties, especially American, are. The term ‘Japanese English’ as it would be used in the ELF paradigm means a variety of English spoken by Japanese people with certain characteristics marking it as unique. However, among Japanese people the term ‘Japanese English’ (or more rarely Japlish or Jinglish, echoing Chinglish, Spanglish, Frenghish, and so on) is used disparagingly, to mean something akin to borrowed English words at best, or broken English at worst. Japanese English in this sense is an unbranded, fake variety.

As Jenkins (2007: 244) points out, textbook and dictionary publishers promote their wares by presenting native English “as the only ‘real’ English, and

its speakers as the only 'experts'." Textbooks for Japanese students reinforce this idea of native English as 'real' by featuring NESs as the majority of the characters and presenting NNEs as eternal language learners, not as proficient language users (Matsuda 2002). JTEs who use the term 'real English' are part of this discursive construction, and in turn are reinforcing it, when they position NES English as the most desirable variety.

The discourse of 'real English' goes beyond the acceptance of it as the definitive brand, extending to the conclusion that NES English must also be the default choice for teaching. In Excerpt 2, Teacher 07 spoke of the need her students had for AET input. As was clear to me, and as should be apparent from the excerpt I presented of her responses, she can certainly provide her students with quality input. She is a proficient user of English and she possesses both linguistic and pedagogical knowledge. She should therefore be able to target her students' language level as easily as an AET could. In fact, it could be argued that she, as a JTE, will have additional knowledge available to her that allows her to target her students' level of English better than an AET might. As a NNE with the same first language as her students she would have some memories of the earlier stages of her language ability and would thus be more able to mimic a realistic model of simplified English. A NES would not necessarily have access to these memories. Teacher 07 would also be more knowledgeable than an AET about the language curriculum her students were following, so she would be able to target her language to the students' existing level.

This makes it difficult to argue that AETs are providing something that JTEs cannot in terms of language input. Teacher 07's references to input, and her assertion that "of course" students need input from native English speakers, seem especially illogical when one considers that AETs must almost always modify their speech, slowing it and simplifying it, to make themselves understandable to their students. The typical unmediated spoken language of an AET is incomprehensible to most Japanese high school students.

Teacher 05 was quoted as saying that students are excited when they listen to AETs' 'real English'. However, it became apparent from the interviews that there was little of what she called 'real English' in the classroom. JTEs said some of the AETs' spoken language was too difficult and required a JTE's mediation, some was too simple and could be easily replicated by the JTE, and some was scripted and easily replicable through technological means. If the goal of the AETs is to provide examples of nativised English, then the goal is often not being met in practise.

The point of team teaching is supposedly for students to encounter English as a "living language" (Brumby & Wada 1990: 3). This seems a distant goal, as

students are one step further removed from the AETs' use of 'real English' than are the JTEs. Based on what they said in their interviews JTEs seem to feel removed from 'real English', so it seems probable that students, who have had far less opportunity to use English for whatever reason, would feel their own English was even more removed from 'real English'. Based on her questionnaires and interviews, Matsuda (2003) reaches a similar conclusion, saying that the view of English as internationally-owned that is held by some researchers is not shared by language students, who still see it as something for NESs.

The assumption, popular in Japan as elsewhere, is that exposure to native English will produce speakers of native English (Honna & Takeshita 1998), if only the teaching methodologies can be tweaked, changed and modernised such that English input can flow into the students, be acquired by them, and then flow out again in new, but still 'real' forms. JTEs like Teacher 07 seem to have accepted this assumption in spite of their own obvious capabilities. Leung (2005: 139) argues that "an idealized native-speaker model should not be an automatic first choice" of target for language learning goals, but the JTEs seem to have done so, ignoring the possibility that they themselves might serve as better models.

It does not seem reasonable to argue that students need the AETs' native English input for any pedagogical reasons, so it is instead possible that the need is related to the social value of native English. The AETs are not providing 'real English' at a level that the JTEs cannot match, therefore it might be this social value that the JTEs are referring to when they discuss it. This is not to say that there is no value in this social aspect of learning English, but team teaching should not be positioned as providing students with native English or 'real English' when it cannot be doing so.

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