

## Experiences Abroad and Its Influence on the Attitudes of Japanese English Language Learners Towards Varieties of English

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### **Abstract**

This paper investigates whether travel to non-English speaking countries by Japanese English language learners, where English may be needed as a lingua franca for communication, affects the attitudes of said learners towards different varieties of English. It also further investigates whether attitudes are affected due to the purpose of travel i.e. for business or pleasure. Adopting a survey used by Yoshikawa (2005) to investigate the perspectives of 483 university students, this study similarly found a preference for inner circle Englishes by a variety of different Japanese English language learners. Significantly it also found that those that had traveled for pleasure to non-English speaking countries showed a greater preference for the necessity of inner circle Englishes, rather than those not traveled. However, it was also discovered that overall all participants showed more positivity towards the use of any English variety as long as it is intelligible. Indicating that attitudes may be more open in practice if required.

### **INTRODUCTION**

English language learners are more likely to encounter using English with another L2 speaker, than with L1 speakers (Jenkins, 2007). In the context of Kachru's three circles of English this means that English language learners are more likely to communicate in English with speakers from the outer and expanding circles of English, where varieties of English different to that of the inner circle Englishes are

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spoken, such as Indian English and Singaporean English, or where English is a foreign language, such as Japan, China and Germany. Thus, English as a lingua franca has evolved, and local varieties have developed. However, despite this reality inner circle Englishes remain the preferred English for attainment, with a preference being for the most often studied, American English (Honma, 2010, McKenzie, 2008) for Japanese English language learners.

Indeed, Yoshikawa (2005) surveyed 483 Japanese university students, 261 of which were actually enrolled in a 'World Englishes' course, 100 in regular English courses and 122 non-English majors. He found a preference for American Standard English and British Standard English as a model for learning English from all three groups, over English varieties from the outer circle. Of particular interest was that he found the World Englishes students, actually assessed the suitability of outer circle Englishes lower the more they studied, however at the same time their willingness to accept Japanese English as a means of communication increased. Sasayama (2013) similarly found in her study of Japanese university students that the students also preferred American English, but also desired for Japanese English to be internationally accepted.

Other research regarding Japanese attitudes towards other varieties of English have also found more favourable attitudes towards English from the inner circle compared with other varieties of English. Indeed, Chiba *et al.* (1995) reported that 169 Japanese university students majoring in English or International Business, preferred the accents of those from the inner circle over those from the outer and expanding circles, when asked to listen to and assess a variety of accents from the U.S.A, U.K, Japan, Hong Kong, Sri Lanka, and Malaysia. Of note, two of the three Japanese accents were preferred higher than those from the outer circle countries. McKenzie (2008), also found that 558 Japanese students rated accents from the inner circle more favourably than those from the expanding circle. In particular he found a clear preference for the speakers of US English, followed by speakers of UK English, with the Japanese speakers the least preferred. Tokumoto and Shibata (2011), found further evidence of Japanese language learners' negative attitude towards their own English use, when 128 university students from Japan, Korea and Malaysia were asked to assess their own abilities and reactions to accents in English. The Japanese students, showed a clear tendency to devalue their English in regards to accent and intelligibly, whilst the Malaysian students scored themselves the highest and were least likely to feel the need to gain a 'native like accent'. Saito and Hatoss (2011), also found that Japanese high school students clearly positively evaluate native varieties of English when compared to non-native varieties. They also found that the students most negatively evaluate their own variety of English.

English as a lingua franca means in essence people from varying backgrounds

coming together to communicate in a common language. With this in mind, this paper looks to examine if exposure and experience with travel to English speaking and non-English speaking countries affects the attitudes of Japanese English language learners in regards to different varieties of English and English speakers.

## RESEARCH QUESTION

With the above in mind, the following research question was formed for this study:

1. Is there a difference in attitudes towards different English varieties between Japanese English learners who have traveled abroad and those that haven't?

Two further sub-category questions were also formed to investigate if autonomous or required exposure to different English varieties through travel or work affected the attitudes of Japanese English language learners towards different varieties of English;

2. Is there a difference in attitudes towards different English varieties between Japanese English learners who have traveled to non-English speaking countries for vacation, and those that haven't?
3. Is there a difference in attitudes towards different English varieties between Japanese English learners who have traveled to non-English speaking countries for work and those that haven't?

## METHODOLOGY

### *Participants*

A total of 53 Japanese English learners from 3 different kinds of classes were surveyed for this study. All participants were students of a male speaker of British English who teaches a variety of ages and class types. 34 of the participants were university students taking compulsory English language classes, and 19 were adult non-university students taking private English language classes for business and/ or interest<sup>1)</sup>. The youngest participant was 18, with the oldest at 78, however it should be noted that 5 participants did not fill in their age. The mean age of the participants was 26.1 years old. The teacher assessed the university participants to be low-

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1) It was anticipated that more students from private English language classes would participate in this study, however due to unforeseen circumstances this number was reduced from what was expected.

level learners, whilst the company and private class students were assessed to be intermediate to high-level English speakers.

### ***Instruments and Data Collection***

A background questionnaire was created to discover pertinent information about the participants such as age and in particular their travel experiences (see appendix 1). Furthermore, in an effort to gauge student attitudes to different varieties of English and speakers of these different varieties, including their own, a survey (see appendix 2) with 9 statements was formulated by adapting and adjusting the survey questions used by Yoshikawa (2005) in his study. Participants were asked to assess their attitude to the statements and mark their response on a 5-point Likert scale for each statement using the following scale:

- 1 = strongly disagree
- 2 = disagree
- 3 = neutral
- 4 = agree
- 5 = strongly agree

The teacher distributed the questionnaires and surveys to his classes over a two-week period during class. As the questionnaire and survey were both in English, the teacher, a proficient Japanese speaker, translated all parts of the survey. Once the surveys were returned the data were entered into SPSS for analysis. Mean results for the 9 statements were calculated, along with independent t-tests for each of the three research questions, which seek to find if there are any differences between two separate groups and their attitudes towards different varieties of English.

## **RESULTS**

After receiving the completed surveys, the information was entered into SPSS. Firstly, descriptive statistics were calculated with SPSS to get a broad view of the average responses to the different statements (see table 1).

Though mean scores can only give us a broad overview of the results, we can see that results for all statements were quite uniform, with standard deviations all 1 or below. As was found in previous studies (Chiba *et al*, 1995, McKenzie, 2008; Tokumoto & Shibata, 2011; Yoshikawa, 2005), the average responses to the above statements show a preference for inner circle Englishes, with statements 1 (US English), and 2 (UK English) scoring on average higher than attitudes towards the acceptability of outer circle Englishes (statement 3) and Japanese English (statement

**Table 1 Mean Scores of all participants to survey statements**

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
1. American English suitability for learning	53	3.49	.82
2. British English suitability for learning	53	3.75	.78
3. Outer Eng suitability for learning	53	2.58	.82
4. Importance of native teachers	53	4.09	1.00
5. Japanese English teacher effectiveness	53	3.00	1.00
6. Outer circle teacher effectiveness	53	2.79	.72
7. Japanese English appropriateness for communication	53	2.70	.95
8. Importance of grammatically correct English communication	53	3.28	.95
9. Any variety is appropriate as long as it is intelligible	53	3.73	.88

7). However, it should be noted that on average there was a slight preference for Japanese English over outer circle Englishes.

The most definitive result was for that of the importance of native English speaking teachers (statement 4), which supports the favourable attitude Japanese English learners have for inner circle Englishes. An average score of 4, with a standard deviation of 1, would mean that an average deviation would score the importance of native teachers as neutral at worst. Attitudes towards the effectiveness of Japanese teachers of English was on average neutral, however as the standard deviation was also 1 for this statement, the average deviation for the attitude to this statement could range from more positive (4 = agree), to more negative (2 = disagree), therefore feelings were more mixed about the effectiveness of Japanese teachers' ability to teach English effectively. Again, the outer circle scored slightly lower in regards to the attitudes regarding their effectiveness as English teachers compared with their Japanese counterparts. This result also had the lowest standard deviation and therefore the most uniformity in responses. The attitudes towards the importance of grammar in communication were neutral, however again, with the standard deviation taken into consideration, results ranged from more negative to more positive attitudes. Finally, despite the general preference for inner circle Englishes, the mean score for statement 9, regarding the suitability of any variety of English being appropriate for communication as long as it is intelligible received one of the more positive results, nearing a mean of 4 ('agree' on the Likert scale). Indicating broadly, that respondents may be more open to other varieties of English in practice if required.

### **1. Attitudes of the travelled vs. non-travelled**

To analyze the main research question of whether travel experience and therefore foreign language exposure affected the attitude of the respondents in regards to

**Table 2** Difference between the attitudes of travelled vs. non-travelled students

	t	df	p
1. American English suitability for learning	.11	51	p > .05
2. British English suitability for learning	.24	51	p > .05
3. Outer Circle Eng suitability for learning	.66	51	p > .05
4. Importance of native teachers	.51	51	p > .05
5. Japanese English teacher effectiveness	1.45	51	p > .05
6. Outer circle teacher effectiveness	.77	51	p > .05
7. Japanese English appropriateness for communication	.68	51	p > .05
8. Importance of grammatically correct English communication	1.02	51	p > .05
9. Any variety is appropriate as long as it is intelligible	.65	51	p > .05

different varieties of English, an independent t-test was run to see if any significant differences exist between those that have travelled abroad<sup>2)</sup> (N = 34) and those that haven't (N = 19) against each statement from the survey. However, with  $p = .05$  no significant differences were found (see table 2). However, with the uniformity in the mean scores (see table 1), it is unsurprising that no significant differences were found between the attitudes of these two groups.

## 2. Attitudes of the non-English vacation traveled vs. the untraveled

An independent t-test was run to see if any differences existed between the attitudes of those respondents who have travelled to non-English speaking countries (N = 20) and those that haven't (N = 33). Significant differences with equal variances assumed were found between the attitudes of the two groups for the appropriateness of outer circle English for learning ( $t_{(51)} = 2.424$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $d = .686$ ), the importance of native English speaking teachers ( $t_{(51)} = 2.068$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $d = .6108$ ), and grammar importance ( $t_{(51)} = 2.280$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $d = .6431$ ). As can be seen, the results for Cohen's  $d$  reflect a medium effect size for these differences. For full results see table 3, with significant results in bold.

However, surprisingly if we look at the mean scores for the significant results (see table 4) it is the group that has traveled to non-English speaking countries that score on average higher for the necessity of correct grammar and the importance of the native speaking teachers, and lower for the appropriateness of outer circle English, which might run contrary to the assumption that more exposure to other Eng-

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2) It should be noted that one respondent listed Kenya as a non-English speaking travel experience, despite English being one of Kenya's official languages. After consideration it was decided to record this response as the respondent listed, assuming that the experience of this participant in Kenya must have been one similar to that of visiting non-English speaking countries.

**Table 3** Difference between the attitudes of non-English speaking vacation traveled and the non-English speaking untraveled

	t	df	p	d
1. American English suitability for learning	.97	51	p>.05	n/a
2. British English suitability for learning	.32	51	p>.05	n/a
3. Outer Circle English suitability for learning	<b>2.424</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>p&lt;.05</b>	<b>.686</b>
4. Importance of native teachers	<b>2.068</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>p&lt;.05</b>	<b>.6108</b>
5. Japanese English teacher effectiveness	1.137	51	p>.05	n/a
6. Outer circle teacher effectiveness	.728	51	p>.05	n/a
7. Japanese English appropriateness for communication	.306	51	p>.05	n/a
8. Importance of grammatically correct English communication	<b>2.280</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>p&lt;.05</b>	<b>.6431</b>
9. Any variety is appropriate as long as it is intelligible	1.391	51	p>.05	n/a

**Table 4** Mean scores for significant differences from Table 3

	Non-Eng vac	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Outer Circle English suitability for learning	yes	20	2.2500	.78640
	no	33	2.7879	.78093
Importance of native teachers	<b>yes</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>4.4500</b>	<b>.75915</b>
	<b>no</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>3.8788</b>	<b>1.08275</b>
Importance of grammatically correct English communication	yes	20	3.6500	.93330
	no	33	3.0606	.89928

lishes may foster more flexible attitudes towards other English varieties and English in general. However, as Yoshikawa (2005) found, the more experienced and aware of different English varieties the students became in his study, the more they desired the standard inner circle varieties. He theorized that this may have to do with the design of the curriculum for the World Englishes students in his study. However, it could also be due to the fact that exposure to other Englishes and any difficulties communicating with other non-native speakers may further idealize the correct inner circle English that is taught in Japan, perhaps the thinking being that if only we could both speak 'perfect' English communication would be so much easier. Whereas, those that haven't travelled to non-English speaking countries, have not encountered such problems and therefore have slightly more flexible attitudes towards outer circle Englishes and the need for correct grammar and native English speaking teachers.

### 3. Attitudes of the non-English speaking work traveled vs. the untraveled

A final independent t-test was run to answer the final research question of whether any differences existed between those that have travelled to non-English

**Table 5** Difference between the attitudes of non-English speaking work travelled and the non-English speaking work untraveled

	t	df	p	d
1. American English suitability for learning	2.223	51	p<.05	.956
2. British English suitability for learning	1.163	51	p>.05	n/a
3. Outer Circle English suitability for learning	<b>.454</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>p&lt;.05</b>	<b>n/a</b>
4. Importance of native teachers	<b>.666</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>p&lt;.05</b>	<b>n/a</b>
5. Japanese English teacher effectiveness	.865	51	p>.05	n/a
6. Outer circle teacher effectiveness	.368	51	p>.05	n/a
7. Japanese English appropriateness for communication	.355	51	p>.05	n/a
8. Importance of grammatically correct English communication	<b>.008</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>p&lt;.05</b>	<b>.6431</b>
9. Any variety is appropriate as long as it is intelligible	.290	51	p>.05	n/a

speaking countries for work (N=7) and those that haven't (N=45), with one respondent not answering this section of the questionnaire. No significant differences were found between the attitudes of the two groups except for the results regarding the suitability of American English ( $t_{(51)}=2.223$ ,  $p<.05$ ,  $d=.956$ ) (see table 5). However, even with the large effect size, it must be noted that due to the large disparity in group sizes, an unforeseen occurrence explained previously, the results of this analysis are unreliable and further investigation between more balanced groups is needed before any conclusions can be drawn upon regarding differences between these two types of groups.

## DISCUSSION

As has been found in previous studies (Chiba *et al*, 1995, McKenzie, 2008; Tokumoto & Shibata, 2011; Yoshikawa, 2005) Japanese English language learners have a definite preference for inner circle Englishes, and idealize the goal of speaking 'correct English' (Honna, 2010), furthermore, as was found in this study the rise of English as a language for global communication has yet to see any change in this attitude, where US or UK English are still the ideal, along with grammatical correctness and the need for native English speakers as teachers as opposed to those from the outer circle. As this study showed, and as Yoshikawa (2005) found, even with experience and exposure to other varieties of English in the outer circle (Yoshikawa, 2005) and expanding circle (this study) attitudes stood fast against their legitimacy compared with attitudes towards the inner circle, in fact it even seems to consolidate their belief in this ideal. As Chiba *et al* (1995) state:

. . . with Japan's economic and technological progress, more and more Japa-



nese have been exposed to different varieties of English in their work settings or on other special occasions, like traveling abroad or education in foreign countries. Despite this exposure, it seems that in many places non-native English is not always perceived positively by the Japanese. (p.77)

It is perhaps, this belief in the appropriateness of inner circle Englishes only, that has been responsible for the acknowledged difficulty that Japanese language learners have in achieving success with English for international communication despite many completing six years of English language classes in junior high school and high school (Honna, 2010). Indeed, Honna (2010) declares that these classes, with a strong focus on written grammatical accuracy may be responsible for the negative attitude towards their own English abilities and other varieties of English:

. . . thus, despite the global spread of English as a language for wider communication, Japanese people still believe that English is the property of the USA and Britain. They are ashamed if they do not speak English the way native speakers do. Given an Anglophone goal as their guiding light, Japanese students of English not only cannot accept their limited proficiency as natural and inevitable, but also look down on non-native varieties of English used by Asian and African speakers. (p.58)

This certainly seems to be reflected in the attitudes of the respondents for this study. However, as McKenzie (2008) states there is evidence that small changes in the attitudes towards world Englishes are occurring in Japan. For example he notes that in 2000, citizens of Singapore, Jamaica and the Philippines became eligible to participate in the JET program, a Ministry of Education program that recruits native English speakers to work as assistant language teachers in Japanese schools. However, numbers of participants are still very small in comparison to those from the inner circle. It is these kinds of changes though that are welcomed by those that see the need for Japan to view English no longer as a foreign language, but that of a language of the world, and therefore also part of Japan (Hino, 2009; Honna, 2008; Matsuda, 2002). They claim that the promotion and acknowledgement of world Englishes in classrooms and in broader society, will not only change attitudes towards these other varieties of English, but also increase the ability of Japanese English language learners to communicate internationally in English, as they realize that there is no one standard English. Indeed, Mamoru (2009) has even created a framework for what Japanese English for International Communication might look like if it were to be taught in junior and senior high schools in Japan. Furthermore, Hino (2009) explains how he promotes world Englishes in his university EFL classes by

teaching using a method he calls the Integrated Practice in Teaching English as an International Language, where he not only exposes and promotes English as an international language throughout, but encourages reflection on the different identities, opinions and cultures of these different speakers of English, including the Japanese. The classes taught using this technique were very popular, with students evaluating it the best classroom teaching 8 times between 2002 to 2008 (Hino, 2009), proving that Japanese students are receptive to a more positive attitude towards world Englishes if presented to them in an informative and interesting context.

### CONCLUSION

As has been reported on many occasions, Japanese English language learners tend to prefer inner circle varieties of English, something that has been promoted by education policy (Honna, 2009), and has been seen to hinder English language acquisition and attitudes towards other varieties of English. This study found this still to be the case, with close uniformity on attitudes across all sections. Interestingly, the only reliable significant differences were between those that had travelled to non-English speaking countries, and those that hadn't, and the difference wasn't for a more favourable attitude towards different varieties of English and their speakers, but for a less favourable attitude after travelling abroad to non-English speaking countries. This is theorized to be due to problems associated in trying to converse with other non-native English speakers, and therefore reinforcing the need for a correct standard form of English. However, as has been discussed, the reality is that English is no longer the sole domain of the Anglophone, and that English communication is more likely to take place between two non-native English speakers than two native speakers (Jenkins, 2007). Therefore, as promoted by the likes of Honna (2008, 2010), Hino (2009) and Matsuda (2002), fostering a more favourable attitude towards world Englishes may help to improve not only language preferences, but also language attainment by removing the shackles of an unobtainable ideal.

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#### APPENDIX 1

1. Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Male / Female

#### 2. Please circle the type of English course you are studying

University course

Company course

Private lessons

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

#### 3. Please circle the reason why you are studying English

Personal interest

Must study for work

Travel

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

4. Have you ever travelled abroad for vacation? Yes / No

4a. Please list the English speaking countries you have travelled to for vacation.

4b. Please list the non-English speaking countries that you have travelled to for vacation.

5. Have you ever travelled abroad for work? Yes / No

5a. Please list the English speaking countries that you have travelled to for work

5b. Please list the non-English speaking countries that you have travelled to for work

## APPENDIX 2

Please place a check mark in the box that best matches your opinion.

		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
	Question	1	2	3	4	5
1	American Standard English is a suitable variety of English to learn.					
2	British Standard English is a suitable variety of English to learn.					
3	Singaporean English and Indian English are suitable varieties of English to learn.					
4	English should be taught by native speakers.					
5	English can be taught effectively by Japanese teachers.					
6	Indian English and Singaporean English speakers can effectively teach English.					
7	Japanese English is an acceptable form of English for communication.					
8	It is important that communication be grammatically correct.					
9	Any variety of English is acceptable for communication if it can be understood.					