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Foreign and native languages and scripts in the Japanese linguistic landscape: A preliminary report

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Within Kachru's (1985) Three Circles model of World Englishes, Japan is designated an Expanding Circle country, indicating (1) that English is generally approached as a foreign language in Japan and (2) that Japan ostensibly draws upon English language norms from countries in the Inner Circle. Yet, in recent times, the ideas of 'English as a lingua franca' or as an 'international language', available to all and foreign to none, have arisen and now represent alternative perspectives on the roles and functions of English around the world. In the end though, the labels, 'native' or 'foreign', are applied by local people to actual instances of language use in specific contexts, rather than abstractly determined by linguists and scholars. As the English language and Roman script are prevalent on much of the signage throughout Japanese society, a question remains as to how the general public distinguishes between native and foreign languages and scripts on public display. One might ask: linguistically speaking, where are the boundaries which delineate native from foreign, and are these boundaries commonly observed? With these points in mind, this paper represents a preliminary report on the proposed design of a questionnaire intended to investigate how Japanese people relate to written English and other languages in various scripts.

Introduction

Within Kachru's (1985) Three Circles model of World Englishes, Japan is designated an *Expanding Circle* country, indicating (1) that English is generally approached (from social and pedagogical standpoints) as a foreign language in Japan and (2) that Japan ostensibly draws upon English language norms from countries in the Inner Circle, such as Australia and Canada. In recent times however, Kachru's model has attracted criticism on a number of fronts, not the least of which being that it does not account for the more recently realised

phenomenon of English as a lingua franca (ELF). At the end of Saraceni's (2008) discussion of the various roles and functions of the English language around the world - including ELF, but also World Englishes (WE), English as a Native Language (ENL), and English as an International Language (EIL), amongst others - he offers that, in the context of countries such as Japan:

[the] questions that need to be asked should address how people in the Expanding-Circle relate to English, what it represents to them, as it relocates itself from a foreign language to a lingua franca. Instead of '*which* English should we use?' we could begin to ask '*what* is English?' (p.26, emphasis in original)

Saraceni's question - what is English? - will provide the guiding line of inquiry for this project and the question will be approached from the point of view of the Japanese public: What is (and what is not) English, according to Japanese people? Specifically, the study will seek to elicit participants' interpretations of written language on public display in the local, urban context of the project, with a particular focus on English and Roman script (for other studies involving the roles and functions of English in Japan, see Dougill, 2008; Haarmann, 1984; Heinrich, 2012; Hyde, 2002; Inoue, 2005; Kawai, 2007; Kosciielecki, 2006; Seargeant, 2005; Seargeant, 2008; Seargeant, 2009; Takashi, 1992; Yamagami & Tollefson, 2011). To achieve this in a principled manner, the proposed study will draw heavily upon theory and methodology developed within the field of linguistic landscape (LL) research (see Aiestaran, Cenoz, & Gorter, 2010; Backhaus, 2007; Ben-Rafael, Shohamy, Hasan Amara, & Trumper-Hecht, 2006; Blommaert, 2013; Bolton, 2012; Coluzzi, 2012; Dagenais, Moore, Sabatier, Lamarre, & Armand, 2009; Garvin, 2010; Gorter, 2013; Jaworski & Thurlow, 2010; Landry & Bourhis, 1997; Lawrence, 2012; MacGregor, 2003;

Pietikäinen, Lane, Salo, & Laihiala-Kankainen, 2011; Rowland, 2013; Scollon & Scollon, 2003; Shohamy & Gorter, 2009; Spolsky & Cooper, 1991; Stroud & Mpendukana, 2009; Trumper-Hecht, 2010; Tufi & Blackwood, 2010; Wetzel, 2010). Generally speaking, LL research concerns itself with displays of written language in primarily urban environments as a way of exploring issues relating to societal multilingualism.

Through the construction and administration of an attitudinal survey and retrospective research interviews (see Dornyei & Taguchi, 2010), this study will investigate how Japanese participants differentiate between languages (Japanese, English and others) and scripts (Roman, *katakana*, *hiragana*, and *kanji*) in both decontextualised (e.g. individual words on a screen) and contextualised (e.g. photos of language on publicly emplaced signage) samples of language use taken from Japanese shops signs, advertisements, billboards and flyers (see Angermeyer, 2005 for a comprehensive discussion of the complex relationship between languages and scripts). The participants in this study will be asked to examine individual words and acronyms as well as images of written language on public signage and to give their opinions on what they classify as being foreign or native.

The proposed design of the questionnaire

It is envisaged that the questionnaire will consist of approximately 60 items in total. The first 50 items will ask participants to look at a word or acronym and to classify it as (1) *English*, (2) *Japanese*, or (3) *Another language*. The final 10 items will ask participants to look at photographs of public signage and to discern whether (in their opinion) there is any English displayed on the sign. If they answer ‘yes’, they will then be requested to type what they classify as ‘English’ into a response box. Thus, the first 50 items will be decontextualised samples of written language use (i.e. a single word taken from the local LL and displayed on a computer screen) and the final 10 items will count as contextualized

examples (i.e. photographed language *in situ* and as part of a publicly displayed text). Various words will appear in both sections of the questionnaire in an effort to determine whether context has an effect on participants' answers.

The first 50 items in the questionnaire will feature words from the following 12 categories:

- (1) English words in Roman script (e.g. happy)
- (2) foreign words (e.g. French, German or Italian words) in Roman script (e.g. *bonjour* – [good morning])
- (3) English language acronyms in Roman script (e.g. CD – compact disc)
- (4) Japanese language acronyms in Roman script (e.g. NHK - *Nippon Hoso Kyokai* [Japan Broadcasting Corporation])
- (5) English loanwords in *katakana* (e.g. フェスティバル – *festibaru* [festival])
- (6) Japanese words in *katakana* (e.g. トカゲ – *tokage* [lizard])
- (7) Japanese loanwords in Roman script (e.g. sushi)
- (8) Japanese words in Roman script (i.e. *romaji*) (e.g. *konnichiwa*)
- (9) Chinese words in *kanji* (e.g. 你好 – *ni hao* [hello])
- (10) Japanese words in *kanji* (e.g. 自転車 – *jitensha* [bicycle])
- (11) foreign loanwords in *hiragana* (e.g. たばこ – *tabako* [cigarette])
- (12) Japanese words in *hiragana* (e.g. みる – *miru* [to see]).

These categories were chosen as representative of common linguistic/scriptal forms on public display in Japan and they are meant to represent a language continuum of sorts from foreign (English and foreign words in Roman script) to Japanese (Japanese words in *hiragana*). The categories also allow for the inclusion of all four scripts (Roman, *katakana*, *kanji*, *hiragana*), which in turn, and in the particular sequence above, can also be seen as

representing a continuum from foreign to native. The words will not be presented to the participants in these categories in the questionnaire but instead will appear in random order.

The questionnaire will be in online format requiring participants to have access to a computer connected to the internet. Instructions and example items will be provided in Japanese at the beginning of the questionnaire. Each questionnaire item will then appear on the screen individually in succession, and participants will not be able to return to previous answers to amend them once they have submitted a response for that item. Each of the first 50 items will ask: *In what language is the following word?* A word from one of the 12 categories above will follow and the participants will be able to select either ‘English’, ‘Japanese’, or ‘Another language’ as their answer. The order in which these three answer-options appear on the screen (top – middle – bottom) will be randomised for each item to improve validity.

Hypothesis and predictions

It is hypothesised that script choice affects an audience’s determination of what counts as foreign or native written language use. In his study of script choice in classified advertisements by and for Russian-speaking immigrants in New York, Angermeyer (2005) found that:

a word is treated as Russian (i.e., as borrowed) if it is written in Cyrillic, and as English (i.e., as codeswitched) if it is written in roman characters. In bilingual writing, alphabet choice may thus function as an indicator of metalinguistic categorization for a given lexical item. (p.513)

With this in mind and in the context of the proposed study, one might predict that words

written in Roman script will more often be categorised as ‘English’ or ‘Another language’ than as ‘Japanese’. Conversely, it is predicted that words in one of the three Japanese scripts (*kanji*, *katakana*, *hiragana*) are more likely to be seen as Japanese language items. However, it is anticipated that participants’ answers may vary when they are asked to categorise, for example, English loanwords in katakana (e.g. フェスティバル – *festibaru* [festival]), Japanese loanwords in Roman script (e.g. sushi), and Japanese language acronyms using Roman script (e.g. NHK - *Nippon Hoso Kyokai* [Japan Broadcasting Corporation]).

Moreover, the final 10 items on the questionnaire are likely to produce a range of answers based upon the participants’ familiarity with the photographed signage and the product or service that the signage is associated with. For example, if a participant sees or makes use of a particular sign frequently in the course of their daily life in Japan, they may regard the sign as a wholly Japanese textual artefact even if Roman script is featured on the signage. On the other hand, an advertisement for a foreign brand product may lead the participants to classify more of the language on display as ‘English’ or ‘Another language’. Exactly how and why the participants answer in different ways will be the focus of the retrospective research interviews.

Once funding is re-established for the project, the questionnaire will be developed and piloted. Following this, the questionnaire will be distributed to a cross-section of Japanese society and the retrospective research interviews will be scheduled. Ultimately, the findings will be published and reported in an international peer-reviewed journal.

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