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[研究論文]

Variation within Kachru's Expanding Circle of Englishes: A Comparison of English Use and Learning in Japan and Sweden[1]

Fred E. Anderson

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Circles of Englishes

A now well-known model dividing English-using countries into "circles" of Englishes was first proposed by Braj B. Kachru in the 1980s (Kachru 1985, 1989). The model defines three concentric circles of Englishes. An *Inner Circle* contains the countries where English is the native language for the bulk of the population, as in the USA, Britain and Australia. An *Outer Circle* contains those countries where English is not the first language of most speakers, but where it does fulfill important functions within the society, and hence is used as an intranational language—as a lingua franca between speakers from different language backgrounds, and often as an official language for use in education, government, and media. Representative countries in the Outer Circle include India, Singapore, the Philippines, and Nigeria. Typically the countries in this circle were colonized by Inner Circle countries and hence represent the earliest stage in the spread of English from native to non-native settings. Finally, the *Expanding Circle* includes all other countries where English is learned for international communication but has few if any intranational functions. In other words, it is taught in school as a subject of study, but is rarely used as an actual medium of education; moreover English in these countries lacks important functions in government, business, and so forth. The Expanding Circle is the largest of the three, and includes Japan, China, France, Sweden, Mexico, and essentially any other country where English is studied as a school subject. In pedagogical terms, the Inner Circle corresponds to ENL (English as a native language) countries, the Outer Circle to ESL (English as a second language) countries, and the Expanding Circle to EFL (English as a foreign language) countries (Tripathi, 1998; Yano, 2001, 2009).

Since its proposal, the Circles-of-Englishes model has become a staple of the world Englishes literature, as evident in its adoption by eminent English linguists such as David Crystal (1995, 2003), and by ESL researchers such as Sandra Lee McKay (2003). Nevertheless, while the model has been useful in helping linguists and English-language educators understand sociohistorical factors involved in the spread of English around the globe, as well as certain aspects of language use, it is—like all models—over-simplified. A close examination reveals that none of the circles are completely airtight; a clear distinction between the circles is lacking, with some countries seeming to straddle the border between adjacent circles (Berns 1995, 2005). Moreover, there is a good deal of variation among countries within any of the circles (see Kubota, 2001, regarding the Inner Circle; Tripathi, 1998, on the Outer Circle; and Berns, 2005, on the Expanding Circle). The Expanding Circle, however, is particularly problematic. As Berns (2005, p. 91) has noted, because the content of the Expanding Circle by definition is the "rest of the world," it is less monolithic than either the Inner or Outer Circle, and hence must be characterized by the key distinguishing feature of diversity. As one direction for future research on English in the Expanding Circle, Berns suggests sociolinguistic comparisons of similarities and differences in English use across regions and countries. The present paper follows up on this call by focusing on two countries with very different sociolinguistic profiles.

1.2 Variation within the Expanding Circle: Japan and Sweden

This paper thus compares the functions of English, and—insofar as it is related to language use—English language learning in Japan and Sweden. These countries were chosen as the object of comparison for two reasons. The first reason is a logistical one, and also a personal one. I have a firsthand familiarity with both countries, having spent most of my adult life working in Japan (nearly 30 years total), and three semesters teaching at Växjö University (currently a campus of Linnaeus University) in Sweden in 2002-2003. The second reason is that, while both would be placed in the Expanding Circle, they represent nearly polar opposites of Expanding Circle types, at least in terms of language proficiency. If, for example, one were to visit a smaller Swedish city such as Växjö (which had a population of approximately 70,000 when I lived there) and needed assistance with directions or making a purchase, there is, I would estimate, at least an 80% chance that one could get the necessary help simply by approaching the nearest passer-by. If one were to avoid questioning people over 60 years of age, and were somehow able to exclude those who had immigrated to Sweden as adults (who would likely speak Swedish but not necessarily English), then the probability may well surpass 90%. While English abilities would differ markedly, ranging from basic communication to native-like, the fact remains that a large proportion of the population has little trouble communicating through English. Author John Mole—in a guide for business communications within the European Union—has even proclaimed that "Swedes are among the world's best English speakers—and that includes native Anglophones." (Mole, 2003, p. 89) Although Mole's claim may be exaggerated, the fact remains that there is a huge gulf between the overall level of English proficiency in Sweden and Japan. If one were to transplant the above situation to Japan—that is, if a foreigner were looking for English assistance in a smaller Japanese city—this person may have to question many people of all ages before finding one who would be able to provide the necessary help in English, even in halting English.

In Japan, English is rarely used outside of EFL classrooms, except in interactions that involve non-Japanese participants. In Sweden, on the other hand—while not the everyday language for conversation among Swedes—English does appear to have an increasing range of functions within the society. By comparing the functions of English in these two countries, we can glimpse the range of variation possible within Kachru's Expanding Circle. Moreover, from a Japan perspective, a country such as Sweden which has a history of success in foreign language acquisition may be able to provide valuable hints for language acquisition policy and English education. This is particularly true considering recent curricular changes in Japan, such as the introduction of mandatory English classes in elementary school from 2011.

The analysis that follows is based on an interpretation of academic and popular sources, combined with personal observations from having lived in the two cultures. In some cases I have also cited senior theses written by students whom I supervised in Sweden, where they provide additional light on particular issues, or where they have allowed me indirect access to Swedish sources (which I am otherwise unable to read at a high enough level). The scope of the paper is broad, touching on many areas that have been researched little if at all. Therefore the paper is not intended as a definitive statement, but rather as an overview and an attempt to integrate a range of topics, any of which is open for more rigorous investigation in the future.

2. DOMAINS FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE USE

The analysis of English use described in this section is based on the sociolinguistic notion of *domain*, which refers to a typical setting or situation in which a particular code (a distinct language, or language variety) is used (see, e.g., Holmes, 2008). In any society, and especially in multilingual ones, competing codes—such as Japanese and English, or Swedish and English—may operate in a given domain. The domains described in the present analysis—media, education, business and industry, and emblematic domains—were selected because they are all domains in which English is used in one or both cultures.

2.1 Media

Popular music

It will be appropriate to begin with a discussion of popular music, as this is a domain that is increasingly influenced by English throughout much of the world. Traditionally the English found in Japanese popular music—what is commonly called J-pop—has been limited to isolated words and phrases within a Japanese superstructure. In other words, occasional code-mixing into English provides a creative complement to the Japanese lyrics, for emphasis or other affective purposes. Nevertheless, the early twenty-first century has seen the emergence of some J-pop groups that compose and sing more heavily in English. One of these is the female-male duo Love Psychedelico whose lyrics are often the mirror image of the typical J-pop pattern: that is, lyrics that are mainly in English, but with periodic insertion of Japanese phrases for affect. According to Moody (2006), the duo's female singer, Kumi, sometimes appears to be singing with an English accent even while performing the Japanese portion of the lyrics. Moody describes this pattern of mixing as "code ambiguity," and suggests that it creates the impression that she is a Japanese ***kikokushijo***—a returnee who has lived abroad for an extended period of time. (In fact, Wikipedia reports that Kumi did spend a number of years in the United States, but only as a young child.)

Another duo that has been widely popular, Def Tech, consists of two male singers, one American and one Japanese, whose music combines J-pop, reggae, and Hawaiian styles. Def Tech songs tend to use both English and Japanese lyrics, often alternating English and Japanese verses. Yet another pattern of English use is shown by Ellegarden. Despite consisting of all Japanese members, Ellegarden compose and perform most of their songs in English alone, without recourse to Japanese. Conversely, the songs that they do compose in Japanese have little or no recourse to English. But despite these recent encroachments of English into Japanese popular music, the domain as a whole remains overwhelmingly Japanese-language based, with English appearing in limited quantities, mainly as an ornament, or fulfilling what Hyde (2002) would term an "emblematic" role.

In contrast, Swedish pop musicians have long written and performed songs entirely in English, to the extent that it is usually impossible for listeners to identify Swedish bands as consisting of non-native English speakers. While some Swedish bands do perform in Swedish, performing in English has allowed many to gain international popularity that would have been unlikely had they used their native language. The most prominent is ABBA, which first achieved worldwide fame during the 1970s, and is now among the most commercially successful bands of all time; indeed, ABBA continues to have a significant following around the world, even many years after disbanding. While no other Swedish band has matched ABBA's level of fame, subsequent acts—including Roxette, Europe, Ace of Base, and the Cardigans—have achieved international success through performing in English. In Sweden, therefore—as in other Nordic countries, where the national languages have a limited population base—English has become the major language of the pop music domain, even in an otherwise Expanding Circle environment.

Television

In Japan, television consists mainly of programs produced in Japan in the Japanese language. Foreign dramas and movies, particularly those from the United States or Great Britain, and recently from Korea, are also common; however, with the exception of those that are specifically for the purpose of language learning (see Moody, 2006), nearly all programs are dubbed into Japanese. Many of the foreign programs, as well as some Japanese news broadcasts, are also offered bilingually, the source language (usually English or Korean) being accessed through a bilingual switch on the remote control device. It is difficult to know, however, what percentage of viewers actually make use of the bilingual function. It would seem from my informal observations that the percentage is rather small. Most likely, the bilingual function is used mostly by those who are consciously focusing on improving their English comprehension skills, or who are already fluent in English.

During the time of my residence in Sweden, in 2002-2003, a majority of the programs available on television, especially on the cable networks, were from foreign countries. These were especially from the United States and Great Britain, but programs in other European language—such as Danish, Finnish, German, and French—were also regularly seen. Thus, television provided immediate exposure to a multilingual world. If anything, the trend toward English has only increased since my period of residence. In a 2007 article, *The Local* noted that "the amount of Swedish-language programming on Sweden's network television channels has fallen drastically over the past few years, with mainly English language imports taking up much of the slack." (The Local: Sweden's News in English, 2007). It is significant in relation to language learning that foreign programs are nearly always broadcast in the original language, with subtitles only in Swedish, rather than being dubbed. The one case where dubbing may be used is where a program is aimed at young children who have not yet acquired reading skills.

Movies

English-language movies—at the cinema and for private DVD consumption—are popular in both Japan and Sweden, despite the fact that both have well-developed film industries of their own. However, they treat the English on the screen in somewhat different ways.

At the Japanese cinema, many of the films shown are English-language films. Tanaka (1995) stated that more than half of the films shown in Tokyo theaters in February, 1994 were in English. Interestingly, at the time of the present writing (May 16, 2012) the percentage may have actually declined, if my brief internet search of films playing at two large multiplex Toho Theaters in Tokyo is representative. Only five of the twelve movies playing at the Roppongi Hills cinema on this date were English-language films, and only four of eleven at the Shibuya cinema. Often, but not always, two versions of the same movie play simultaneously, with one in the original English and the other dubbed into Japanese, especially (but not exclusively) for English films targeted at children. With DVDs, of course, the viewer can normally choose whether to listen to the original language (with or without subtitles), or switch to a dubbed version. As with television, however, it may be only a small percentage of people who actually listen to the English rather than reading the subtitles or falling back on the Japanese dubbing. This point was driven home to me not too long ago, when a student who was analyzing an English-language movie for his senior thesis research revealed that it was the first time for him to actually "listen to a movie in English." This was especially surprising to me, considering that, as a major in English linguistics and literature, he was the type of student that one would expect to try and struggle with the original English.

In Sweden, English-language films dominate, with 50 percent of all new films coming from the United States (Weilbull, Jönsson & Wadbring, 2011). Weilbull et al. also mention that Swedish origin films are more popular with viewers than foreign language films; nevertheless they account for only a little more than 10 percent of films annually distributed in Sweden. The English films are nearly always shown in the original English, albeit with Swedish subtitles. Similar to the case of television, dubbing into Swedish is normally done only for movies targeted at children who are too young to read subtitles.

Gaming and computer software

Video and computer gaming are popular pastimes in both countries, especially among children and young adults. And of course, computers are ubiquitous in both, as they are throughout the developed world. Nevertheless, although I am unaware of studies that specifically address this point, my experience living in the two cultures suggests a major difference in the languages used in this domain. In Japan, on the one hand, essentially all of the popular software for both recreational and business purposes has been localized into the Japanese language; in fact, many of the internationally popular games were originally developed in Japan. In Sweden, on the other hand, largely due to the low population base of the Swedish language, much of the software—even for games played by elementary school children—is available only in English. This would seem to have an effect on their English acquisition, as will be discussed later in this paper.

2.2 Education

In this section, I would like to consider how English is used as a language of instruction in educational environments, together with, or in preference to, the local language. In other words, the focus here is on English as the medium of instruction, rather than on the teaching of English itself. The latter will be taken up later.

Primary and secondary school: Comparison of International Baccalaureate programs

While other English-medium programs also exist, it will be convenient to use the International Baccalaureate (IB) programs that are available for Japanese and Swedish students as a measure for comparison, since current information about IB programs is readily available and would seem to reflect wider trends. International Baccalaureate is a non-profit educational foundation, founded in 1968, that authorizes English-medium programs of study in 141 countries throughout the world (http://www.ibo.org). These are generally open to any student who can meet the standards of the program and would like to learn through English. They are not solely for expatriate children, though expatriates do account for part of the clientele. IB programs at the elementary level (Primary Years Program, or PYP), junior high school level (Middle Years Program, MYP), and high school level (Diploma Program, DP) must meet the foundation's rigorous academic standards in order to be officially authorized. The IB Diploma is recognized by top tier universities throughout the world as meeting the standards necessary for college admission.

Traditionally IB programs, and English medium programs more generally, have been rare in Japan, although they have increased markedly in recent years. As of May, 2012, a total of 23 schools in Japan offered IB programs at one or more levels (http://www.ibo.org); this compares with only 10 IB schools in September, 2007. In Sweden, the number was 40 schools in May, 2012, compared with 29 in September, 2007. Although the percentage of recent growth has been higher in Japan, it should be noted that the population of Japan as of this writing (127.7 million) is approximately 13 times that of Sweden (9.5 million), whereas the number of IB schools in Sweden remains nearly double that of Japan. Per capita, then, Japan still has only a fraction of Sweden's IB programs. Table 1 breaks these numbers down further according to the course level. While there is a marked difference in the total number of IB schools, this is due to the much greater number of Diploma Programs (DP) in Sweden. There is little difference in the PYP and MYP numbers, probably because both countries have fixed curricular guidelines that schools are required to follow through the age of compulsory education (junior high school in both countries). It would be difficult to meet these requirements in a program taught through the students' second language.

Table 1. Numbers of IB programs in Japan and Sweden, 2012.

	IB Schools (total)	PYP	MYP	DP
Japan	23	13	8	16
Sweden	40	10	9	30

Further insight can be gained by examining more closely the schools listed on the IB homepage (http://www.ibo.org). The lists reveal that a large majority of the Japanese IB programs are housed in international schools. One notable exception, begun in 2000, is the program administered through Katoh Gakuen Gyoshu Junior and Senior High School in Shizuoka Prefecture, which was already a pioneer in bilingual education in Japan before adopting IB (see Bostwick, 2001). But even the Katoh program, and a few others that have been initiated in regular Japanese schools since 2009 (Ritsumeikan Uji Junior and Senior High School in Kyoto, AICJ Junior and Senior High School in Hiroshima, and Ota Kokusai Gakuen in Gunma), are located within private (for profit) Japanese schools, and are hence beyond the financial means of many parents. Tokyo Gakugei University International Secondary School, which in 2010 began a Middle Years Program, appears to be the sole public (state supported) Japanese school with IB participation. In contrast, many of the Swedish programs are located within ordinary Swedish public schools, and students are thus not excluded based on their economic situation. One of these is Växjö Katedralskola, in which my son was enrolled during our stay in Sweden in 2002-2003; there were no additional tuition costs for the IB program beyond what my wife and I paid indirectly in Swedish taxes.

University education

Until recently, English was rarely used in Japan as a medium to teach academic content, except as related to English language (EFL) courses. Nevertheless, recent initiatives—particularly the Global 30 Project (http://www.uni.international.mext.go.jp/global30/) for designation of internationalized universities—have promoted English-medium university degrees. Global 30 was designed for participation by 30 major universities, which would then be expected to hire large numbers of Japanese and non-Japanese faculty capable of teaching a variety of courses in English. The motivation behind this initiative appears to be mostly to recruit foreign students to study at Japanese universities, but Japanese students can enroll in the degree programs as well. At present, however, only 13 institutions have been designated as Global 30 universities.

Meanwhile, other Japanese institutions have developed English-medium programs on their own, including Miyazaki International College (a small private liberal arts college in Kyushu) and Akita International University (a small public institution in the Tohoku region). A few private colleges, such as International Christian University in Tokyo, Sophia University in Tokyo (which is also a member of Global 30), and Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University in Kyushu, have long touted their bilingual credentials, offering courses in English as well as Japanese, and recruiting international as well as Japanese students. Nevertheless, truly "internationalized" institutions remain rare in Japan. While Japanese higher education does appear to be moving toward offering somewhat more academic learning in English, it lags considerably behind most countries in Europe and some in Asia.

In contrast, English-medium courses within Swedish universities were well established at the time of my stay ten years ago. Berg, Hult and King (2001), in a study of English use at the highly competitive Stockholm School of Economics, found that during the 1999-2000 academic year, 43% of the courses were taught in English. Moreover, even for courses conducted in Swedish, it was quite common for the required course books to be written in English. Berg et al. (2001) also surveyed the language choice of doctoral dissertations in various disciplines at Stockholm University at intervals during 1978-1998. They found that 100% of the dissertations in biology and chemistry had been written in English, and roughly half of those in psychology, linguistics, and philosophy; these numbers were fairly steady over the period of study.

Berg et al.'s research focused on universities in Stockholm, the largest and capital city of Sweden, where one might expect an international presence. However, an examination of the current website of nearly any college or university in Sweden, even those outside of the major cities, will show a wide range of English-medium course offerings and degree programs, especially at the graduate level. For example, Linnaeus University (http://www.lnu.se), an institution of approximately 34,000 students (15,000 of them full-time) located in Växjö and Kalmar, offers hundreds of courses in English. It also offers English-based degree programs in seven fields, including Business and Economics, Computer Science, and Natural Sciences. As in Japan, the need to appeal to international students is a major impetus behind such courses, but many Swedish students also take advantage of them. In addition, English-medium programs allow for more possibilities of hiring international specialists in various fields.

2.3 Business and Industry

Since Japanese is the dominant language of nearly all Japanese people who have been raised in

Japan, it is unlikely that Japanese employees would use English to communicate among themselves. In other words, the use of English in international companies is most likely limited to reading foreign documents in English and to occasionally communicating with people from other countries. It is interesting, therefore, that some younger Japanese companies, notably apparel maker Uniqlo and internet services provider Rakuten have declared English the "official language" of the company and prescribed that all business, including internal meetings and preparation of documents, be carried out in English from 2012 (Maeda, 2010). While the motivation behind this policy may be laudable—to promote globalization of the companies—it is often criticized as little more than a symbolic gesture since Japan does not currently have a large enough base of proficient English users to make it truly workable. Nevertheless, it remains an interesting initiative, even if it is too early to speculate on whether it will have any long-term effects on the use of English or English learning in Japan.

In some Swedish companies, English is reportedly used among Swedish employees, especially in written communication, often in a code-switching relationship with the Swedish language (Berg et al., 2001; Larsson, 2003). In other words, even if the function of English within the company is allegedly an "international" one—to communicate with affiliates or companies abroad—English appears to have seeped into the local business culture on the "intranational" level as well. And this happens without specific policies declaring that English as an official language.

2.4 Emblematic domains

Written English is often used symbolically in Japan to convey a particular mood—especially one of westernness or modernity—even if there is no clear referential meaning in a given message. The use of English song lyrics within the frame of otherwise Japanese-language songs, as discussed in an earlier section, illustrates one such context for emblematic English use. In addition, because English and other European languages (especially French) are sometimes seen as *kakko ii* ("cool"), they are used widely in commercials, for shop and building names, on T-shirts and sweatshirts, and on numerous other products (Hyde, 2002; Stanlaw, 2004). While Japanese may appreciate the mood conveyed by English words in these emblematic contexts, the message itself is often lost; though the "strange Japanese English" expressions often do serve as a source of amusement for foreigners visiting Japan.

The emblematic use of English seems to be present in Sweden to some extent as well, but much less prominently than in Japan. Even in Swedish popular songs, where it is ubiquitous, the English is much closer to what one would expect to hear in Inner Circle environments. It is likely that, due to the multilingual exposure that Swedes have from an early age, foreign languages are viewed more as vehicles to carry meaning than as symbolic concepts (cf. Seargeant, 2009).

Table 2 summarizes the above discussion comparing the uses of English in Japan and Sweden.

Table 2. Domains for English language use in: Summary

Domain	Japan	Sweden
1. Media		
Popular music	Traditionally limited to isolated words and phrases within Japanese superstructure. Sometimes used creatively to complement Japanese lyrics (Moody's "code ambiguity"). More artists are beginning to compose in English (e.g., Love Psychedelico, Ellegarden).	Many, if not most, popular songs are in English alone, such that Swedish singers are difficult to identify as non-native speakers. Swedish bands such as ABBA have achieved international popularity by performing in English.
TV	English programming is generally dubbed into Japanese, though many foreign programs are offered bilingually with appropriate TV.	A significant percentage of TV programs are from foreign countries (especially the US and Britain), and are shown with Swedish subtitles. Dubbing is usually limited to programs for young children.
Movies	English-language movies are popular, but not dominant. They tend to be shown in original English with Japanese subtitles. A Japanese- dubbed version may play simultaneously with the English-language version.	English-language movies dominate, and are normally shown in English with Swedish subtitles. A dubbed Swedish version may be available for children's movies.
Gaming and computer software	English versions of games and software programs are seldom used, as most are available in Japanese.	Electronic games and computer software are often used in English versions, even by children, as they may be unavailable in Swedish.
2. Education		
Elementary and secondary school	English-medium programs, such as International Baccalaureate (IB), are rare, but increasing. As of May, 2012, there were 23 IB schools (a small number considering the total Japanese population).	IB programs are found throughout the country, even in smaller cities. As of May, 2012, there were 40 IB schools (a relatively large number population adjusted).
University education	English-medium programs are rare but increasing, partially as a result of the Global 30 Project for internationalizing universities. But in general, English is seldom used outside of EFL classes.	Universities teach numerous courses through English, and offer a wide range of English-medium degree programs. English textbooks are often used, even in Swedish-medium classes.
3.Business and Industry	Probably little internal use of English within Japanese companies, though some companies (Uniqlo, Rakuten) have designated English as the official language for internal business from 2012.	English, or English-Swedish code-switching, is reportedly used among Swedish employees in some companies, especially for written communication.
4.Emblematic domains	The use of English in commercials, restaurant and building names, and for other "emblematic" purposes is widely reported and documented.	Exist to some extent, but not prominent.

3. CONTEXTS FOR ENGLISH LEARNING

Languages are acquired in both formal and informal contexts. In this section, we will consider both, with an eye toward possible connections between the contexts.

3.1 Formal School Learning

Age of instruction

Since 1947 English has been established in Japan as a required subject from the first year of junior high school (age 12). However, over the past few decades, due to a growing perception that Japan's internationalization has fallen behind that of other countries as a result of low English proficiency, there have been many calls for English learning to begin earlier. These calls have led to the recent introduction of English in elementary schools. English was first adopted as an optional subject in public elementary schools in 2002, and was introduced as a compulsory subject (called "English Activity") in the fifth and sixth grades from 2011. There remain many problems to be solved, however: For example, there is only one English lesson per week (32 hours per year), there are too few Japanese homeroom teachers with a high level of English ability (hence many oppose having to teach these lessons), and there is no clear connection between English Activity and the more academic junior high school English classes.

In Sweden, English has been a school subject since the 1940s, which is similar to Japan, but taught at a much earlier age. It became a compulsory subject from the fourth grade of elementary school in 1962, with the implementation of the first Swedish curriculum (Tollstern, 2003, citing SÖ, 1990). Nowadays there is some variation in when English education begins, with individual schools treating it differently. In most schools, formal instruction begins in the third or fourth grade but sometimes it starts as early as first grade. English classes generally meet four hours per week, though this number may be less if the school begins the English curriculum at an early grade. In any case, each school must meet a minimum number of total required hours before the end of elementary school. Moreover, the elementary-school English lessons are generally taught by the Swedish homeroom teachers, without help from foreign assistants (as is often the case in Japan).

Teaching methods

Despite various waves in English learning in Japan since the nineteenth century (see Fujimoto-Adamson, 2006), English teaching in regular school settings has remained remarkably traditional, with preparation for non-communicative high school and university entrance exams being the main motivation for study for a large proportion of students, and grammar-translation being retained as the primary teaching method in most junior and senior high school classrooms (LoCastro, 1996; Stewart, 2009). This is despite the hiring of large numbers of native and near-native assistant English teachers in the JET (Japan Exchange and Teaching Program) beginning in 1987 (over 6,000 in the peak year of 2002); and the introduction of three curricular revisions by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT)—in 1989, 2003, and 2013—designed to promote the practical, communicative teaching of English. In other words, although "communication" is a part of the official language acquisition policy, in actual practice it is neglected due to conflicts with tradition as well as the perceived needs of the students related to entrance exam preparation. The most recent curricular revision, which will take effect in 2013, is based on the concept of *gengo ryoku* (language ability across the curriculum), but also specifies that high school English should be taught *in English*, rather than in Japanese. As noted by Stewart (2009, p. 12), "Whether it translates into effective change in the system will require a fundamental shift of thinking about both teaching and learning." But based on the failure of past revisions to fulfill their promise, it is likely that—in the foreseeable future at least—students who wish to learn English for communication will continue to have to enroll in classes, often for high fees, at private *eikaiwa* (English conversation) schools.

While English teaching would seem to be more oriented toward communication in Sweden than in Japan, it is perhaps less so than one would expect considering the high level of communicative ability that many Swedes attain. In fact, many of my advisee students at Växjö University in 2002-2003 related that their past experience as English learners had been, they felt, too much within the teacher-centered, grammar-translation tradition and not enough toward practical communication. Similarly, Swedes from three generations whom Tollstern (2003) interviewed for her senior thesis—the oldest having studied English in the 1950s and 1960s, and the youngest a 10-year-old elementary school pupil at the time of her research—echoed similar sentiments; that is, they thought there should be more of an emphasis on communication in the classroom. Nevertheless, Tollstern (2003, citing Tornberg, 2000) notes that the official prescription for English language teaching in Sweden has been for teaching language as communication at least since the major curriculum revision of 1980, which emphasized what one could *do* with language, rather than the grammar or vocabulary. In a further, 1994, revision, the emphasis was placed even more strongly on ability to use the spoken language. Tollstern (2003) reflects on her own experience learning English under each of these curricula. As a traditional student studying under the 1980 curriculum she felt little encouragement to use the language in class; but years later, when she returned to school as an adult student after 1994, she found that the atmosphere had changed markedly toward one where everyone felt comfortable using English in the classroom. Tollstern's experience, and that of others whom I taught in Sweden, while largely anecdotal, does suggest that the classroom situation in Sweden, at least until the 1990s, may in fact have a lot in common with that of Japan. In both countries, it seems that there has been (and perhaps still is) a gap between the official goal of "communication" and the actual teaching practices. But significantly, Sweden does not have a major industry for teaching communicative English outside of regular school, comparable to Japan's *eikaiwa* industry. Students' eventual proficiency in English normally comes exclusively from their experience in school plus whatever English they acquire informally.

3.2 Informal Learning

Media learning

For Japanese children, as discussed earlier, television watching, movie viewing, and electronic game playing are activities that occur almost exclusively using the Japanese language rather than English or other foreign languages. For some older children—those who have begun English study at school and have a particular interest in the subject—learning from media may provide a useful supplement to school studies. However, as exams remain the main motivator of English study for most students, various forms of media are unlikely to play more than a peripheral role in their language development.

For Swedish children, media appear to contribute to some extent—and possibly a major extent—to the early acquisition of English. While I know of no studies that have investigated this issue formally, I have heard many Swedes attributing early media exposure to their eventual attainment of a high level of English proficiency. Similarly, it is frequently mentioned that children seem to comprehend a good deal of English even before they begin formal English study in elementary school. In addition to television, they appear to learn English vocabulary from video games and computer games, or by reading the instructions to those games, which may not be available in their native language. For instance, one of my adult students at Växjö University reported that her son, due to his experience with English games, sometimes showed knowledge of difficult English words that she herself did not know; an interesting example of this being the word "carnage." One can easily appreciate how the desire to advance to a higher level in the game can serve as motivation for language learning. In fact, gaming is increasingly moving outside of the realm of the informal, and being recognized as a legitimate component of foreign language classrooms, as discussed by Gee (2012), at a recent international symposium on digital technology and language learning at Kyoto University.

Communication with outsiders

Finally, some mention should be made of the context that is generally recognized as the most useful one for informal learning of a language: that is, actual communication in the language, either with native speakers, or by using the language as a lingua franca with other non-native speakers. For Japanese, opportunities to use English with non-Japanese people are severely limited. For most learners, these will consist of brief interactions with assistant English teachers in secondary school, or sometimes foreign instructors at university. Regular travel to English-speaking countries is not an option for most Japanese, due to Japan's relative isolation as an island nation in Asia and the consequent high cost of foreign travel. Even when Japanese have the chance to go abroad, it is most commonly done in school groups or tour groups, where individuals have little need to interact with persons outside of the group and thus little necessity to use English for practical purposes.

Swedish children, on the one hand, may be less likely than Japanese to interact with foreign English teachers prior to university, since Sweden has no program equivalent to Japan's JET program, and hence fewer native-speaker teachers. But on the other hand, it is relatively easy to travel from Sweden to other countries in Europe; which will necessitate the use of English as the most common lingua franca. Families as well as individuals often take advantage of the long summer vacations (normally a month for adults, and at least two months for children) to travel abroad, and thus both children and adults are given opportunities to interact in English.

Table 3, below, summarizes the above discussion of formal and informal learning of English.

Table 3. Contexts for English Learning: Summary

Context of Learning	Japan	Sweden
1. Formal Learning		
Age of instruction	English traditionally required from first year of junior high school (age 12). English education introduced as a mandatory subject from 5th grade of elementary school in 2011, but with only 32 class hours per year. English-speaking assistant teachers often aid Japanese teachers.	Formal instruction normally begins in 3rd or 4th grade of elementary school, but sometimes as early as 1st grade, with up to four hours per week. Nearly all elementary-school English teaching is done by Swedish homeroom teachers.
Teaching methods	Teaching is oriented toward traditional methods such as grammar-translation, with preparation for entrance exams being the main goal. Communicative teaching has been a prescribed as a part of the curriculum since 1989, but is limited in actual practice.	Communicative teaching has been the prescription at all levels since the 1980s, and is used today; but traditional teaching methods appear to be used to some extent as well.
2. Informal Learning		
Media learning	Media likely to have little influence on English learning in the early stages, as Japanese-language media are used. English media may serve as a supplement to classroom learning later on.	Children appear to acquire listening skills from TV, and to acquire vocabulary from electronic games, such that they may have some receptive knowledge of English before beginning school study.
Communication with outsiders	Uncommon for the average Japanese child. Most likely to occur on a limited basis with non-Japanese assistant language teachers in secondary schools. Foreign travel is usually done in tour groups, making English use unnecessary.	Travel across national borders, individually or with families/groups during long vacations necessitates the use of English as the main lingua franca.

4. CONCLUSION: IMPLICATIONS FOR LANGUAGE ACQUISITION POLICY

Returning once more to Kachru's Circles-of-Englishes model, our discussion would suggest that Japan is a typical Expanding Circle country, in that English use (or lack thereof) is geared almost entirely toward communication with foreign countries, and English is learned by most Japanese as a foreign, rather than a second, language. Sweden, on the other hand, like many other countries of northern Europe, is problematic for the Kachruvian model. Unlike in Japan, English in Sweden has acquired a range of intranational functions—in media, in education, and to some extent in business—that are more characteristic of Outer Circle countries. Berg et al. (2001) have even speculated that the increasing use of English in the so-called "elite domains" of academia and business may be setting the stage for a future language shift from Swedish to English in the society as a whole.

But whatever the future may hold for Sweden, the way that English functions in contemporary Swedish society would seem to provide valuable clues for language acquisition policy in Expanding

Circle countries such as Japan, where English education has been less successful. Certainly the linguistic distance—the fact that Swedish is a close relative of English, while Japanese is unrelated—would give Swedish children an advantage in acquiring English. However, this cannot be the whole story, since there are other countries that achieve a similarly high level of English proficiency even with a national language unrelated to English; Finland is a good example of this.

What insights, then, might be gleaned from Sweden for the development of language acquisition policy in Japan?

First, let us consider the matter of early informal language exposure. Anecdotal evidence would suggest that the large amount of early exposure to English media by Swedish children may interact in a positive way with later school learning. As a future research project, it would be interesting to measure empirically the amount of English actually comprehended by Swedish children at the onset of formal English study (with the implication that this has been acquired through informal channels), and try to judge its effects on school learning.

Not only does English education begin earlier in Swedish schools, but the hours are more intensive, and the curriculum is more goal-oriented from the start, than in Japan. Swedish pupils will have experienced four hours of English each week for three or more years of elementary school, compared with the one hour per week of the still experimental "English Activity" of Japanese fifth and sixth grades. The number of hours of English studied in Swedish elementary school alone is roughly the same as Japanese students will experience through junior high school (where English classes normally meet just three times per week), even if they begin English in fifth grade. Swedish children thus have much more exposure to English, both in and out of school, prior to the so-called "critical period" (see Pinker, 1994, p. 293), which is thought to take effect around the onset of puberty, and after which foreign language learning becomes cognitively more difficult.

At least one Japanese researcher, Hato (2005), has criticized the recent educational policy of MEXT related to English education on the basis that it does not allow enough time to achieve its purported goals, thereby perpetuating a feeling of failure in both students and teachers. Hato (2005, p. 48) suggests: "Whether to lower the goals or to secure the necessary time to achieve the goals is an issue that should be addressed seriously, as is also the matter of maximizing available instructional time." While an increase in the number of hours for English in Japanese schools seems unlikely for the near future, measures can be taken to use the instructional time more efficiently. The Swedish model would suggest that an early emphasis on receptive skills, particularly listening comprehension, through large amounts of input, may be more effective over the long term than any formal textbook-based curriculum, especially given such limited classroom time. Children can be provided with early, informal exposure to English through activities that are meaningful to the children themselves—such as age-appropriate television programs, computer gaming, and other media-based activities.

A second area that should be considered in looking at the Swedish model is attitudes toward foreign language learning specifically, and foreign languages more generally. As suggested by Seargeant (2009) English in Japan functions more as a symbol of internationalism than as a living tool for communication. Moreover, anyone who has worked in Japan with Japanese students is aware of the feeling expressed by many that English and other foreign languages are impossibly difficult (*muzukashii*) to learn; that they are spoken fluently by western foreigners (*gaikokujin*) but not by the average Japanese. In contrast, the geographical position of Sweden in Europe, together with the multilingual atmosphere promoted by the media, would seem to be responsible for the more international, less insular attitude toward foreign languages. My experience in Sweden tells me that the average Swede does not think of English, or other languages, as particularly mysterious or difficult to learn; rather, English is seen as a fundamental skill that one needs in order to get along in the world. This may be similar to the view that Japanese have of arithmetic, or Japanese *kanji* writing, as basic skills.

While the geographical situation of Japan cannot be changed to match that of Sweden, more can be done to bring the outside in to Japan, in order to expose Japanese from an early age to a larger multilingual world and demystify foreign languages. The information revolution makes this increasingly possible, with foreign broadcasts of all kinds easy to bring into the classroom; and internet chatting, conferencing and gaming across cultures becoming more feasible with each passing year.

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[1] Earlier versions of this paper were presented at the Japan Association of College English Teachers (JACET) Annual Convention, Chukyo University, 2004; at the 12th Annual Conference of the International Association for World Englishes (IAWE), Chukyo University, 2006; and at the Swedish Association for Applied Linguistics (ASLA) Annual Symposium, Lunds University, 2007.

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