

# Rethinking the Ownership of English as a Lingua Franca

Sensitisation of Contemporary English for Japanese University Students

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## Introduction

In this paper, I am concerned with reconsidering the ownership of English in the context of international communication. The idea of ownership of English as an lingua franca (henceforth, ELF) should respect not only the varieties of English categorised by their countries, but also all the speakers of English individually. Based on this view, my proposed revisions of teaching ELF should be developed to promote a humanistic English education, not the formalised, mechanistic English training, which occurs in today's English Language Teaching (ELT).

## The Development of ELF

English has been positioned as an international language due to 'the combination of political influence and technological superiority' (Brumfit 1982). This means that English is not only the language for native speakers in countries such as the U. K. or U.S.A, but also a lingua franca to communicate with people from all over the world. The number of non-native speakers of English is far more than that of native speakers (Brutt-Griffler 2002, Graddol 1999, Honna 1999, Seidlhofer 2002, Jenkins 2009). This also verifies the fact that English has become an international language for communication among people whose mother tongues are varied, and tends strongly to suggest that the role of ELF has become more significant than as a mother tongue.

The reason why English has become an international language derives from globalization. Globalization is 'the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa' (Giddens 1990: 64 [cited in Block and Cameron 2002: 1]). People increasingly tend to perceive themselves within a global perspective rather than only as members of narrowly defined localities. In consequence, the world is becoming smaller and smaller in accordance with the increase in connections between people from all over the world. Following this, globalization has also intensified 'the need

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for members of global networks to develop competence in one or more additional languages, and/or to master new ways of using languages they know already' (Block and Cameron 2002: 1-2). This development is the offspring of globalization, and the acquisition of multiple languages has become indispensable for 'members of global networks'. This also means that as members of the global community, the adoption of a common language is becoming a *sine qua non* for maintaining a fluent multicultural discourse. As a result of this need, and for historical, political and economical reasons, English has become one of the strongest common languages for international communication.

### The Differentiation between Native and Non-native Speakers of English in Japanese ELT

Although English has been considered as an international language in the world, it seems that Japanese ELT still differentiates English as a native language (ENL) from English as a second language (ESL) and an ELF. For example, English textbooks published in Japan for senior high schools show this distinction. Here is an extract from one of the textbooks.

Do you think English is the language only of people in the United States, Britain, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand? Wrong! Actually, many other people use English all over the world every day.

(English 21 1997: 6, my emphasis)

This extract contrasts the functions of English in terms of its different contexts. Firstly, English is a language for native speakers' intranational communication. Secondly, it is an international lingua franca for members of the global community. In the latter case, interestingly, the verb 'use' is applied. This means that ELF is conceptualised as a tool for a particular purpose, needs and advantage.

What is the problem when English is conceptualised as a tool? An implication can be emerged from the extract below;

English is spoken by two billion people, and only three hundred million of them speak it as their native language. Over one billion non-native speakers use English as a second language in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, the Philippines, Nigeria, Kenya, and so on. About seven hundred million people in China, Japan, Germany, Norway, Italy . . . in fact, too many to list . . . use it for communication with the outside world. Millions more are studying it.

(English 21 1997: 6, my emphasis)

Whilst in the previous extract, the verb 'use' is applied to describe ELF, in this extract, 'use' describes two different conceptualisations of English: ESL, and ELF. Moreover, there is another verb to describe English: 'speak', indicating ENL. The verb 'speak' highlights one aspect of English as a language to talk about, say, and express own ideas, opinions minds and feelings. Herein is a remarkable differentiation between ENL and others. While ENL is a language to express ideas and minds, ESL and ELF are tools to utilise effectively for intra and international communication. We can use two expressions to manifest how they are differentiated: native and non-native. These verbs clearly identify the idea that a native speaker's English is a language, whereas a non-native speaker's English is a tool for specific occasions.

This differentiation between native and non-native speakers' English is problematic due to several reasons. Firstly, this completely ignores the fact that ESL has become the representation of peoples' identities in postcolonial countries like Singapore and India intranationally and internationally. Kachru (2005, 1996) introduced two kinds of nativeness: genetic and functional. Genetic nativeness is acquired as the first language whereas functional nativeness is acquired not as the first language, but as the language spoken freely in any social domain and rooted in the society (cited in Onohara 2004: 35). This means that people from ESL countries can be categorised as functional native speakers.

In addition to the ambiguity in the definitions of native and non-native speakers of English, there emerges the inequality between English varieties. If we are convinced by the rationale which dictates that only ENL is *the* authentic English, which conquers and authorises its use to the world, non-native speakers can never become free from the implicit ENL myth; namely, native speakers are *the real speakers* of English whilst non-native speakers are *its users and borrowers*.

According to Lasagabaster and Sierra (2002: 136), 'the NST [native speaker teachers] versus NNST [non-native speaker teachers] debate is still a very hot issue, even though the ever more global use of English is making the use of the term "native competence" increasingly problematic'. This term means that even though there is 'an inescapable fact' that '80% of the world's English language teachers are NNSTs, many still consider that foreign languages should be taught by native speakers of the language' (Canagarajah 1999, cited in Lasagabaster and Sierra 2002: 132). Furthermore, this 'native competence' is already 'becoming old-fashioned and even nonsensical' (ibid: 136). This also supports that ELT should not merely focus on the difference between native and non-native speakers.

Despite the fact, Japanese ELT still holds an idea that ENL is the language to be taught while ESL and ELF are the imitated tools from ENL. This inequality leads to an inferiority and lack of confidence for non-native speakers. They cannot be confident with their communication in English because it is not their language. As long as there is such an inequality in Japanese ELT, it is unable to grow the ownership of English for actively

participating in international communication in English.

### Problems Underlying in Japanese ELT

The current Japanese ELT holds an idea that ENL is a legitimate language whilst non-native speakers' English is merely a tool borrowed from ENL. This influences the aim and goal of Japanese ELT; that it aims for skill-and-strategy-acquisition for effective use of English, and that people learning English are motivated by their own perceived goals, such as higher education and promotion.

When English is regarded just as a tool, the aim of ELT is to acquire the skill and strategy for using English effectively. Hiraga (1994) critiques and warns against this emphasis within skill-based ELT in Japan.

Briefly speaking, when we learn English as a tool, English will lose its humane aspect and highlight the skillfulness, effectiveness and competitiveness of language. For instance, the idea of 'English for examination' or 'English for employment' represents the problem of the conceptualisation of language as a tool. Is it possible to do humane communication only to acquire English as a weapon for the examination war or the employment war? It might be difficult to grow the genuine internationalized person when the concept of foreign language education is to utilize foreign language effectively as a tool.

(Hiraga 1994: 263-4, my translation)

In the case of Japan, for example, people tend to learn English for a specific purpose such as for examinations, especially for university entrance. The senior high school students study English as a 'weapon' in order to gain the special skill and strategy to triumph in the 'examination war'<sup>i)</sup>. The other aim of English learning is for job-hunting. Almost all companies in Japan require a TOEIC<sup>ii)</sup> score with an applicant's CV. These companies also determine the employers' promotion by their TOEIC scores. Whereas English is delivered as a tool within an educational context, the aim of ELT is to highlight a skill-based acquisition.

This skill-based Japanese ELT also affects the very idea of what English (or, language on the whole) education is essentially; i.e. that English education is training. Therefore, ELT aims to teach correct English usage by following a behaviourist approach akin to training an animal, is based on exercises for preparation of international communication, and regulates students to a certain prescribed direction. This conceptualisation of English education as training only highlights the mechanistic practice of English learning

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<sup>i)</sup> There exists the term 'examination war' in Japanese: Juken Sensou.

<sup>ii)</sup> TOEIC is a special test to evaluate English competence in business contexts.

as if English education were automated repetition. Hiraga (1986: 330) points out that 'English education equates to the training to master the knowledge and skill of English like a machine' (my translation). This implies that English education is training for acquiring the skill and strategy of English as a tool (or, more specifically, a weapon). In this way, the conceptualisation of English education as training interrelates with skill- and strategy-based ELT and implies the idea that the goal of English learning is to acquire English skill to utilise efficiently.

It is doubtful whether people who have learnt how to use English in this way can be the members of a global community in a real sense. If the tool is borrowed from native speakers, the person is simply imitating a native speaker of English. ELT does not aim to manufacture such imitators of native speakers, as this tends to promote English imperialism and ENL authority. English education (and by extension language education on the whole) should not ignore the aim to broaden students' familiarity and view towards multilingual and multicultural situations, to sensitise their linguistic and cultural awareness of the world. Otherwise, they cannot communicate with people in the global community even though they are, superficially, fluent users of English. This skill-centred ELT completely neglects one aspect of language education: enlightenment of today's English in the context of plurilingualism.

Moreover, such a skill-based ELT leads to motivating Japanese students to learn English only for specific purposes, particularly higher education and promotion. One female university student talked about her motivation for learning English:

Extract 1 (my translation from Japanese into English)

(While discussing what the English classroom at university is like, she started talking about her experience.)

S1) Well . . . English class at university . . . I feel that I don't study so much since I entered the university.

I) Compared with the time at senior high school?

S1) I hardly studied when I was a first- and second-year student. I finally started studying when I became a third year student. Therefore, the third year was special.

I) Why were you not motivated to study in first two years of a senior high school?

S1) Well, as a third-year student, I had nothing to do except studying, so I did. But there were many other things to interest me as the first- and second-year, then, I didn't. Now the situation is the same as the first- and second-year of my senior high school, I think. I feel that I have come back to the normal life.

I) So, do you think you are going to study when you become a fourth year university student?

S1) I don't know . . . Maybe it's too late, isn't it?

I) Did you have a goal of studying when you were a third-year student at senior high school?

S1) Not really, I think. Well, I studied not to fail the entrance examination if possible.

The interviewee was not motivated to study English when she was a first- and second-year student because at that time she was not pressurised by the university entrance examination. Another interesting remark in this interview is that she felt that she had returned to the normal (i.e. not to study English at all) from the peculiar situation (i.e. to study English for her exam). This means that her only motivation to study English was to pass the examination.

Another male interviewee was talking about the relationship between English proficiency and job-hunting and promotion.

Extract 2 (my translation)

I) Do you think English has become more important than before in Japan?

S2) Yes, I think so.

I) Why do you think so?

S2) Since I became a second-year university student, I have started thinking about job-hunting. I am often advised that I must put TOEIC score on my CV. Then, I went to a bookshop to take a look at one book about the job-hunting. There is criteria of choosing people like 'XXX Company, TOEIC score level . . .', When I found it, I thought 'I cannot enter a company unless I am good at English even though I am Japanese'.

I) Interesting. Does it happen in various companies in Japan?

S2) I think it does. I don't know so much in detail, but I've heard that TOEIC score affects the speed of promotion.

I) Then, do you think it necessary for you to get the TOEIC score before looking for a job?

S2) Yes. I would like to.

This interviewee answered that English has become an important language in Japan because a high TOEIC score is required for job-hunting. This means that English competence is perceived as equating to a high TOEIC score; if a person has a high TOEIC score, s/he is proven to have a degree of ability in English. At the end, he showed his willingness to take the TOEIC test before he started looking for a job in order to ensure success in job-hunting as well as promotion after entering the company.

Both extracts manifest the aim and motivation of English learning: for benefit, advantage and privilege. Similar way improving his chances for promoting English learning has taken place in colonised countries to enforce the concept that English confers prestige and elitism. This idea has evolved to the image of English 'as a gatekeeper to positions of prestige in society' (Pennycook 2001: 81), and has spread all over the world. Thus, people are motivated to learn English because English is the

language for 'further education, employment, or social positions' (ibid).

If people pursue only their advantages for specific purposes like tests, it is doubtful whether they can actually communicate with others in their acquired English. Test scores cannot prove a person's communication skill because communication is created through the interaction between human beings, not through a mechanistic 'information exchange' or through multiple-choice tests. The communication surely fails when a person knows English grammar almost perfectly but does not understand (and even tries not to understand) the interlocutor. Japanese ELT for benefits, therefore, prevents people from perceiving English as a language for communication.

### **The Ownership of English as an International Lingua Franca**

It is absolutely necessary to reconsider the aim and goal of the current Japanese ELT as long as English is an international language for the global community. People should consider English as their language to represent their identity. English is not merely a tool, but embodies us. English is not a tool to use or borrow from ENL. English is not a weapon to use effectively for defeating others in the examination war. English is not a tool to gain privilege in business situation. English is the language owned by everybody in the world to express what is in one's heart.

This notion of English owners is based on the idea that there is no boundary between native and non-native speakers in international communication. Rather, as members of the global community, people should be taught to respect the plurilingual Englishes of the world. This is the real meaning of 'international language'; people can share a topic in one language by their own ways. Nobody should be assimilated and acculturated; rather, they can broaden their minds through such a multilingual and multicultural communication in English. When people respect the diversity of English, international communication will be more nourishing.

As people accept the fact that difference between the varieties of English does not necessarily equate to mistake, they also recognise the fact that comprehensibility of English is much more important. People need not be afraid of expressing themselves in English as long as their speaking is comprehensible. Also, they need to make the effort to understand one another. There is no hierarchy between ENL, ESL and EIL in the context of international communication, therefore we all need to respect the plurilingual Englishes as we do peoples' distinctive personalities.

The idea of ELF ownership for everyone in the world also encourages Japanese English teachers to teach English in their own English based on the goal of ELT: international communication. There is the fact that most of Japanese English teachers teach English in Japanese by following textbooks regulated by the Ministry of Education. Although many want to try to make their classrooms more communication-based, they cannot due to a tight schedule and their lack of confidence in their English ability

(Shibata, 2009). When they reconceptualise English not as a tool borrowed from ENL but as their own language, they will be more confident with their English. They will not only instruct certain rules of English grammar in Japanese, but also share the time to communicate with their students in terms of various topics in English.

Rethinking the ownership of ELF also affects the direction of Japanese ELT; because it presupposes international communication, Japanese ELT cannot be limited by skill-acquisition. In other words, English teaching should improve students' comprehensibility of English from all over the world. For example in listening-based activities, the students should not listen only to ENL; rather, they need to touch the diversity of English. In terms of speaking, the students should not pay too much attention to grammatical mistakes and difficult pronunciations (for example, Japanese people tend to mix the pronunciations of 'l' and 'r' because of the idiosyncrasies of their mother tongue). Rather, the students need to consider how to make their English comprehensible in communication. The means of evaluation also should be changed from accuracy to comprehensibility, though this field needs to be analysed more<sup>1)</sup>.

Once the idea of ownership of English changes, English learning no longer equates to language training, but enlightens the students: informing the world to enlarge students' views, motivating their curiosities about the diversity of English, giving them many experiences and incentives to enjoy expressing what is in their minds in English, and even becoming interested in other foreign languages.

Of course, it is an undeniable fact that we need to practice communicative competence in English as a learner; otherwise, it is impossible to express ourselves in English especially at the beginner's level. However, focusing on only the competence acquisition is not enough to cultivate the students' positive attitudes towards English as their language. Unfortunately, the enlightenment aspect of English education is ignored in today's Japanese ELT.

### **Sensitisation of Contemporary English for Japanese University Students**

In this section, I am going to propose a sensitisation programme of the diversity of English based on the idea of Language Awareness (henceforth, LA). The main purpose of LA is 'to light fires of curiosity about the central human characteristic of language which will blaze throughout our pupils' lives' (Hawkins 1984: 6). LA also aims to 'arm our pupils against fear of the unknown which breeds prejudice and antagonism. Above all we want to make our pupils' contacts with language, both their own and that of their neighbours, richer, more interesting, simply more fun' (ibid). In short, LA enlightens the pupils to be aware of what is language and what surrounds language. Therefore, LA-based language

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<sup>1)</sup> There are sociolinguistic researches about comprehensibility (Smith, 1987), and corpus research of English as a lingua franca (Seidlhofer, 2002). TEIL needs to investigate the original evaluation system based on such researches.



education prevents ELT from skill-centred training; rather, it enlarges the possibilities to awaken the pupils' interests towards language.

My LA-based English awareness programme is based on Hawkins (1984), Van Lier (1995) and Young and Helot (2003). According to Hawkins (1984: 4), LA bridges 'the "space between" the different aspects of language education (English/foreign language/ethnic minority mother tongues/English as second language/Latin) with at present are pursued in isolation, with no meeting place for the different teachers, no common vocabulary for discussing language'. In my programme, students will have many opportunities to broaden their minds towards English and English education by looking at various aspects of contemporary English in both social and educational contexts.

Van Lier's (1995) definition of LA emphasises an awareness of power and control in society and includes the relationship between language and culture;

. . . an understanding of the human faculty of language and its role in thinking, learning and social life. It includes an awareness of power and control through language, and of the intricate relationships between language and culture.

(Van Lier 1995: xi, cited in Davies, 2000: 120)

Focusing on the sociocultural perspective of language is important for Japanese university students in order to understand the power relations between language and society.

Young and Helot (2003) use LA for multilingual and multicultural consciousness. I found it helpful to apply this idea of LA to my programme making because it is based on the diversity of English in a plurilingual context. Students need to see the diversity of English in the context of international communication. It is also important to recognize the fact that English is not *the only* international language in the world.

Young and Helot (2003: 239) also define LA by a focus on 'contacting with languages' rather than 'learning the languages'. This means that LA should be based on how to experience languages subjectively, not on how to learn the languages objectively. Their idea of LA relates to the sensitisation of language. This term is used in NCIE (The National Council for Language in Education): that is, 'Language Awareness is a person's sensitivity to and conscious awareness of the nature of language and its role in human life' (Donmall 1985: 7, cited in James and Garrett 1991: 4). The term, 'sensitivity' involves the process of experiencing language through the pupils' senses.

This experience-based sensitisation of language is vital for Japanese university students in order to contact the diversity of English. When they can sensitise English through experience, English will become a part of them and they can understand various English varieties and cultures with an open-minded perspective. The problems such as linguistic hierarchy, English imperialism and the exaltation of native speakers of English

can be solved by this sensitisation of language in multilingual and multicultural way.

Having a chance to be aware of what is going on with respect to the diversity of English and its culture in the world, students will in this way open their eyes to see English as an international lingua franca, to be open-minded to the diversity of English and to be confident with owning English as their language.

### **The Contents of Programme**

The course which I suggest in this section focuses on what is English not only in linguistic way, but also in sociocultural perspective. Because English education in Japan tend to emphasise teaching methodology and the structure of English, not to identify English in sociopolitical context, this course should be added in order for Japanese university students to reflect upon what is hidden in the conceptualisation of English and English education in wider context. Therefore, this course tries to identify the power relationship between the varieties of English and between English and other languages, the cross-cultural issue concerning English, and the connection between language and identity. The course consists of three sections: English in the multilingual world, English in the multicultural world, and English in the multidimensional identities. The list below is the content of the course.

Course Title: Contemporary English as an International Lingua Franca

Section 1: English in the Multilingual World

1. Diachronic View: History of English Spread
2. Synchronic View: The Diversity of English in the World
3. English in Japanese Society

Section 2: English in the Multicultural World

1. Cultures Contextualising English
2. Cultures of English in Japanese Society

Section 3: English in the Multidimensional Identities

1. What is Identity?
2. What is the Relationship Between Language and Identity?
3. Who are English-Owners?

The first section proposed in this course covers diachronic and synchronic views of today's English and the roles of English in Japanese society. In the diachronic view, students will learn how English has spread and become an international lingua franca in the world historically, for political, economical and technological reasons. It contains the theories of English imperialism (Phillipson 1992, Pennycook 1994) and World Englishes (Honna 2003, Jenkins 2009, Kachru 2005) in order to show how English has spread with imperial power and how it is localised in the postcolonial countries. Understanding the

spread of English from the diachronic point of view is important, in order to realise the two different facts as a result of the spread of English; that English is not the neutral language but the powerful language in the world on the one hand, and that English has become 'Englishes' as the language for the people in the ESL countries as the official language to express themselves in daily life on the other.

The synchronic view of English shows students what is English in a practical way. Firstly, three Circles of English-speaking countries are introduced as the framework of World Englishes: the Inner, Outer and Expanding Circles, defined by Kachru (1996) and three Englishes, ENL, ESL and ELF, belonging to these circles (Smith 2004, Honna 1999, among others). Students not only recognise English in the multilingual world, but also have a chance to touch the real data of World Englishes in order to sensitise the plurilingual phenomena of English in the world.

As the final part of section 1, students need to identify the roles of English in Japanese society. The purpose of understanding English in Japan is for them to realise the ongoing incidents concerning English and English education in Japan, and to rethink what should be English for Japanese people living in Japanese society. Firstly, Tsuda's (1998) definitions of *Gakkou Eigo* (school English), *Juken Eigo* (English for examinations), *Shikaku Eigo* (English as a qualification), *Homba Eigo* (authentic English) and *Eikaiwa* (English conversation) will be introduced as separated functions of English according to the purposes of learning English. Secondly, an aesthetic function of English particularly in the Japanese media context will be identified. These conceptualisations of English are not connected with the idea of English as a language for international communication; rather, they may distract the students from considering English as their own language.

Section 2 deals with various cultures contextualizing English as an international lingua franca. The aim of this section is to sensitise students towards the fact that ENL cultures are not only cultures of English: ESL cultures and ELF cultures should be included as long as they are now represented in English. After introducing multicultural situation of English in the world, students need to reconsider the culture of English in Japanese society. English is indispensable, for example, in J-pop as English expressions and names frequently appear in the middle of Japanese lyrics (Moody, 2009).

Section 3 gives students an opportunity to reflect upon their personal relations with English. At the beginning of this section, they are asked to consider what identity is before considering the relationship between English and themselves. Three characteristics of identity will be exhibited: identity as unification, identity as diversity and multidimensional identities in a person. Secondly, the relationship between English and identity will be discussed. If a language is a medium to express people's identities, how can we represent our multidimensional identities in English? Finally, as the final part of this programme, students must rethink the ownership of English as an international lingua franca: is English only for native speakers?

Through the whole course, it is important to develop an awareness of the fact that

differences in the varieties of English are not mistakes to Japanese university students. In other words, they should realise the significance of comprehensibility of what the speaker says because this is the basis of communication. This helps them be confident with their English as owners when participating in international communication in English. Also this helps to dispel the myth that only native speakers are genuine English speakers and others are just English-users.

## Conclusion

This paper tries to reconsider the ownership of English as a lingua franca and a sensitisation programme of contemporary English in the context of international communication. Because it is novel and challenging, broader researches are needed to contribute the development of Japanese ELT.

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