

English as a Global Language and its role in Japan

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Assignment SO 0505

The following quotations may be seen as representing a range of opinion in a debate about the role of English as an international language:

i) 'English is neutral'

...since no cultural requirements are tied to the learning of English, you can learn it and use it without having to subscribe to another set of values[...]

English is the least localized of all the languages in the world today. Spoken almost everywhere in the world to some degree, and tied to no particular social, political, economic or religious system, or to a specific racial or cultural group, English belongs to everyone or to no one, or at least is quite often regarded as having this property.

Ronald Wardaugh (1987)

Languages in Competition: Dominance, diversity and decline. Blackwell

ii) 'English is imperialist'

What is at stake when English spreads is not merely the substitution or displacement of one language by another but the imposition of new 'mental structures' through English. This is in fact an intrinsic part of 'modernization' and 'nation building', a logical consequence of ELT. Yet the implications of this have scarcely penetrated into ELT research or teaching methodology. Cross-cultural studies have never formed part of the core of ELT as an academic discipline, nor even any principled consideration of what educational implications might follow from an awareness of this aspect of English linguistic imperialism.

Robert Phillipson (1992)

Linguistic Imperialism. OUP

iii) 'English is democratic'

There have been comments made about other structural aspects, too, such as the absence in English grammar of a system of coding social class differences, which make the language appear more 'democratic' to those who speak a language (e.g. Javanese) that does express an intricate system of class relationships.

David Crystal (1997)

English as a Global Language. CUP

What is your opinion? Discuss, with references to the roles played by language in the development and maintenance of 'society' and of 'culture'. You may refer to any non-English speaking society with which you are familiar, in order to exemplify your points.

Assignment SO/ 0505

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Introduction / English as a global language.

In Japan, English is largely neutral and its popularity along with its importance is more the result of economic factors as opposed to imperialistic or democratic motives. English is now spoken by about 1 billion people all over the planet which encourages more people in Japan to learn English as a tool for international communication. The interest in studying the English language is growing in Japan. I can respect the opinions stated by Wardaugh, Phillipson and Crystal; however, I would like to state from my perspective that English in Japan has economic benefits. English has been described as anything from an imperialistic language by Phillipson that is forcing other languages to disappear to even being a neutral language as described by Wardaugh in which it belongs to no specific political, cultural or religious group. In my view, English has become the language of opportunity in Japan. For many Japanese people, knowing English has opened the doors to many job opportunities from high tech industries to working at luxury hotels among other economic gains. In terms of Crystal's statement of English as democratic, I find it to be rather complicated. There are aspects of the English grammar system that show different moods of politeness in relationships that do not make English democratic.

Please look at **Table 1** as I compare the authors' viewpoints on the globalization of English to my personal opinion. On the negative argument, Phillipson claims that the imperialism of English is hurting other languages. Although Rogers also has a negative claim on the globalization of English, I still remain optimistic on the widespread use of English in Japan in particular for economic and even social reasons. Even though I find English to be largely neutral in Japan, I still feel that English belongs to its native speakers.

There are two different underlying values in the evaluation of English:	Positive arguments	Negative arguments	My view in regards to my chosen context

Moral	<u>Democratic</u> (Crystal views English as democratic)	<u>Imperialist</u> (Phillipson's viewpoint)	English is more economically or industrially related in Japan.
pragmatic	Represents economic opportunity in some societies(i.e Malaysia,Nigeria)	Represents repression and poverty.(Rogers writes of this)	English provides job opportunities for Japanese citizens along with a more active social life for some Japanese citizens.
neutrality	Wardaugh	Wardaugh	English is largely neutral in Japan but it still belongs to native speakers from particular countries and regions.

Throughout this assignment, I will discuss the above mentioned viewpoints in the following way: In section one **1**, I will discuss about Japan and English and its relationship to neutrality, imperialism and democracy. In section **2**, I will explain about English in Japan and its development and maintenance of society. Finally, in section **3**, I will clarify how English in Japan has affected and is affecting the development and maintenance of culture.

1.1 Japan and English: neutral, imperialistic, or democratic?

In this section, I will discuss about the economic gains of English for Japan as well as how Japanese society deals with the widespread use of English to its own society's benefit. Kennedy(2004:70) writes about objectives of English language planning, and lists "to enable trade/technology exchange" as a reason for a country such as Japan to study English and he mentions "to communicate with contacts world-wide"(ibid) as a language policy objective for Japan.

Holland writes "I tend to think like Phillipson (1992) that the spread of global English is linked – perhaps inextricably to that of global capitalism"(2002:8). This statement certainly relates to how I view the use of English in Japan as a popular language resulting from economic factors; however, English is not necessarily making other languages

obsolete. A Japanese business professional may speak to his clients from foreign countries in English but he uses Japanese at home and within Japanese society.

Although much of Japan is learning English for international communication, business and trade, Kennedy mentions about Rogers' viewpoint as he describes Rogers as someone who "would like to see more resources put into mother-tongue teaching and a more planned provision of English"(2004: 106). Kennedy further describes Rogers' argument that "learning of English contributes to economic misery of many people"(2004:107).

Despite Roger's claim, I still believe that English has given many opportunities for Japan. Kaplan refers to the spread of English as a "relatively modern phenomenon" (Kaplan:138). Kaplan also mentions how the spread of English in the Pacific Rim has occurred since World War II and that although English is widely spoken throughout the Pacific Rim "it is not in most instances the language of the home and the family"(ibid). Kaplan further discusses the use of English in Asia as the "language of science and technology , of international business and transportation"(ibid). This quote from Kaplan reinforces my personal viewpoint as how English is not only largely neutral in Japan but that English is not being used for imperialistic motives. Although knowledge of English provides economic opportunities to Japanese business professionals , most Japanese people speak Japanese at home and with their families. In reality, even with the large amount of English language instruction in Japan, Kaplan insists that English is not "used for any practical purpose in the **society**"(ibid:142). From what Kaplan writes, I cannot label English as imperialistic the same way that Phillipson does. Moreover, I tend to think more of my argument of the popularity of English stemming from economic factors when Kaplan writes that English is "serving as a means to support industrialization and modernization – economic survival"(ibid:146). If English is considered a means of economic survival then of course concerned Japanese parents would want their children to learn English in the public schools. What makes Japan a Japanese society is that every Japanese citizen speaks Japanese while English is what is used for helping Japanese society to succeed economically.

1.2 Possible imperialism or possible opportunity?

In this section, I will discuss about how English is viewed as imperialistic but I will also clarify my view that there are positive reasons for using English in Japan unrelated to imperialism.

The bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki not only brought tragedy to Japan but also a grim introduction of English vocabulary that was introduced to the English language. McCrum, MacNeil and Cran write about such words as *countdown*, *test site*, *fireball*, *chain reaction* and even *atomic holocaust* as words being added into the English language from these bombings(2002:24). Following World War II, the average Japanese citizen was exposed to American company names such as Kodak and Coca-Cola. McCrum, MacNeil and McCran(2002) refer to this historical period as a time of linguistic change for Japan. They write of this time as “a process of commercial infiltration that was christened *Coca-colonialism*” (ibid:24). This could relate to Phillipson’s quote in the question for this assignment when he writes “when English spreads”(1992). It is also a fact that Japan’s dependence on American technology and finance has “introduced some 20,000 English words into regular use in Japan”(McCrum,MacNeil and McCran 2002:22). Phillipson also mentions in his quote about new ‘mental structures’ through English that are imposed from the spread of English. I can understand why Phillipson labels English as imperialistic but I do not agree with mental structures being completely changed from the spread of English. (refer to sections 1.3 and 1.4)

On another note some words from Japanese have been introduced into English such as typhoon, tsunami , sushi and even honcho. Honcho means squad leader in Japanese and “dates from the American occupation of Japan”(ibid:22). From these examples, I can conclude how Japanese has made its influence on the English language.

An example of learning English for economic opportunity can be from Siaka Stevens, the late president of Sierra Leone when he explained that “If you want to earn your daily bread, the best thing to do is to learn English. That is the source from which most of the jobs come”(ibid: 41). More relevant to Japan, learning English relates to how Japan is using it for economic opportunities.

1.3Mental Structures in Japanese and English

At this point I would like to enforce how the people of Japan can still maintain their own linguistic identity while English is still widely used on this island country. I will also make clear in this section how the people of Japan still have their own linguistic way of thought.

Despite the infiltration of over 20,000 words from English into the Japanese language, has the Japanese language disappeared? Has the grammatical structure or pronunciation of Japanese changed dramatically since World War II? Schwarz and Ezawa introduce the Japanese language to foreigners as they demonstrate Japanese culture to Westerners when they write “what is a **mikoshi**?” They further write that “even if we say that it is a “portable shrine,” you cannot fully understand what it is until you can visualize it”(Schwarz/Ezawa1989: V). There are thousands of words and concepts in the Japanese language that cannot be translated into English. Many mental concepts that a Japanese child grows up with cannot always be translated into another language. There are words in Japanese that can only mentally be understood in Japanese. In Phillipson’s (1992) quote for this assignment, “the substitution or displacement of one language by another” is mentioned but I don’t see Japanese words such as “sumo” or “typhoon” being displaced.

Moreover, Goodwin writes of human cognition that it resides in two places “the human brain and the linguistic system”(2004:475). Goodwin also mentions how speakers of a particular language can identify specific scopes such as colors. Furthermore, Goodwin also refers to the organization of language as “basic units being samples are human

languages such as English, **Japanese**, or Tzeltal”(ibid). In reality, even if more people in Japan choose to study English, the human cognition that they are raised with most likely will not disappear. I feel English is difficult to be labeled as “democratic” or “imperialistic” in Japan because people still have their own mentality in which to form their own linguistic perceptions.

Wardhaugh writes of different ways Japanese and American children are conditioned in their societies ,”in contrast to the American encouragement of individual assertiveness the Japanese favor developing social awareness and ‘harmony’”(2002:250).

Wardhaugh may consider it harmony but it has been researched that there is more social pressure among Japanese to maintain mutual security within the social group. Yamagishi even refers to the role of “mutual monitoring and sanctioning in the Japanese society as a deterrent of free riding” (1988:540). As far as learning English in Japan is concerned, this mutual monitoring among the youth is not changed from learning English.

Regardless of how many people study English, I believe that this type of social pressure in Japan will most likely continue to be a part of Japanese thinking.

Although English is widely taught to school children in Japan, there is “no way three or four hours of exposure to English in a formal school situation could possibly compete with, let alone threaten to supplant, the non-stop process of acquiring competence in the mother tongue”(Bisong 1995:125). The mother tongue is definitely the tongue that children will remember the most. I do not find the Japanese language to be threatened if people continue to speak it as their native tongue.

1.4 Linguistic Relativity in Japanese and English

The people of Japan have used their own language to mold their perception of the environment around them and how they view other languages. Language definitely influences perceptions and most sociolinguists accept this. Holmes refers to the concept of “linguistic relativity” in which “categories provided by a language may make it easier to draw certain conceptual conclusions” (Holmes 2001:325).

Have mental structures changed in the Japanese language ever since Japanese children have been required to learn English? Most Japanese parents want their children to have a certain proficiency in English in order to obtain work but they also want their children to know Japanese for their own cultural identity.

In **Table 2**, counting in English and Japanese is compared.

Table 2

English	Japanese
one	ichi
two	ni
three	san
four	shi
five	go
six	roku
ten	juu
eleven	juu-ichi
twelve	juu-ni
thirteen	juu-san
fourteen	jun-shi
fifteen	juu-go
sixteen	?

This chart has been borrowed from Homes (2001:325). By making perceptual conclusions from the chart, one could conclude that the Japanese word for sixteen is juu-roku. Holmes describes these conceptual distinctions as **linguistic relativity**. This numerical example of English to Japanese shows that there are some similar perceptions between the two languages. With some similar perceptions in mind, it is highly unlikely that a native speaker of Japanese would have to change his/her mental structure to learn English.

Holmes also mentions that “linguistic distinctions between styles within a language are more clear-cut in some languages such as Javanese, Korean and Japanese, than in others, such as Tasmanian English”(2001:251-252). Holmes writes that Japanese is “one of a number of languages with a special set of grammatical contrasts for expressing politeness and respect”(2001:242).

Please take a look at the following examples:

(a) Yamada-ga watashi ni repooto o kaite kureta

(b) Yamada senpai ga watashi ni repooto o kaite kuremashita

Sentence (a) means “Yamada wrote a report for me.”

Sentence (b) means “Mr. Yamada wrote a report for me.”

In sentence (b) not only is the word **senpai** added to show more respect and deference but the verb to write has been changed from plain past form **kaite kureta** to a formal/polite past form to **kaite kuremashita**. Japanese also has ways of expressing informality. For example *watashi*, which means I, can be used with a less formal word, *boku* or even the least formal for I, *ore*.

1.5 Levels of politeness in English.

English has different ways of addressing people depending on relationship, situation and levels of politeness; moreover, it is still too complicated to classify English as less formal than Japanese. Coulthard mentions of Brown and Levinson’s analysis of informal situations as he writes “in informal situations speakers can use items like ‘mate’, ‘luv’, ‘chief’ to claim a familiarity”(2001:48). Knowledge of these words for informal situations is sensible knowledge to a second language learner of English and it also exemplifies the informality in English speaking societies. Leech writes, “this is how the sentence gets more polite, the more words you use” (1989:366). Take a look at the following examples:

- a. Can you take my luggage to my hotel room?
- b. Can you take my luggage to my hotel room, please?
- c. Would you mind taking my luggage to my hotel room, please?
- d. I wonder if you’d mind taking my luggage to my hotel room, please?

Example a is polite but b, c, and d get more polite as the sentences use more words. Moreover, Leech also writes “the ‘super polite’ request forms you hear in Britain are often felt to be too polite in the USA”(1989:366). From this statement, it is clear that there are some differences in using English in different English speaking countries.

Although Wardaugh(1987) mentions that “no cultural requirements are tied to learning English” in the quote of this assignment question, I feel that the set of examples mentioned above display the cultural ties to the English language. Montgomery mentions that “particular groups will tend to have characteristic ways of using the language”(2004:64).

Both Japanese and English have specific ways of expressing politeness and formality. Language is a reflection of society. If both languages have formalities and informalities, than it would be too complicated to label English as democratic. Politeness in a language does not have to be uniquely Japanese and informalities of a language do not have to be uniquely English.

2.1 Japan and English: development and maintenance of society

In Japan, English is being learned to further develop society. Students in Japan have historically been required to learn English form the seventh grade. However, recently there has been introduction of teaching English to Japanese children in the early elementary grades. Nakamura writes that “more that half of the nation’s 23,400 public elementary schools now provide activities in English”(The Japan Times). Nakamura also writes as to how learning English among elementary school children is a “part of cross cultural understanding”(ibid).

Schmitt and McCarthy write about vocabulary learning and goals in relation to how a second language learner of English learns English and why he/she wants to learn English(1997:17). They write about a general service list (GSL) of about 2000 words that an average learner of English would need to know but they mention of a higher level of vocabulary known as the University Word List (UWL) They also mention that if an English language student , “intends to go to academic study in upper high school or at university, then there is a clear need for general academic vocabulary”(ibid:17).

Most Japanese people attend college after graduating high school and if they intend to learn English at a higher level for career advancement than of course a higher frequency vocabulary is needed.

A young Japanese student comments in an English teaching newsletter that the future “will be more globalized than now”(cited in Cates 2004: 9). This shows how cross-cultural studies has an effect on English language students in Japan. Although Phillipson writes that cross-cultural studies have never formed part of English language teaching research in the quote for this assignment, cross cultural learning for English teachers in Japan in recent years is forming a valuable aspect of English teaching in Japan. This is supported when Cates describes about an international youth forum in Asia as a place to “discuss language, culture, global issues and international understanding through the medium of English-as-an-Asian language” (ibid 2004:9).

2.2 The different circles of English language teaching.

Kennedy(2001) writes of different circles of influence in regards to Kachru’s summaries of “three concentric circles of English use, the inner circle, the outer circle and the expanding circle” (cited in Kennedy 2001:101). The inner circle of English involves the countries where English is the native language, such as the USA and the UK. The outer circle is composed of the countries that use English as an additional language such as Nigeria and Malaysia. Finally, there is the third circle of English, the expanding circle of English to countries needing English for international communication. An example of this is Japan, where English is an increasingly important second language.

On an interesting note, Kennedy also mentions of how English teachers from Denmark were hired by the Turkish Ministry of Education. Kennedy mentions that in this situation that the teachers did not carry “the cultural baggage attached to inner-circle native speakers”(ibid:103).

This example in Turkey might support Wardaugh’s view on neutrality of the English language; however, Kennedy also mentions about the former JET and now AET project “in Japan as a large programme recruiting assistant English teachers mainly from Britain and USA” (ibid:103). In this situation, English is not neutral and preference is given to English teachers from the inner circle in Japan. This can also relate to my views in the introduction of this assignment when I list that English “still belongs to native speakers from particular countries and regions”(Table 1).

3.1 Japan and English: development and maintenance of culture

Aside from maintenance of culture, I would like to discuss how English has enhanced the social life in Japan in this part of the assignment. Long states about his research of NSs(native speakers) of Japanese and the effect of NNSs (non-native speakers) when he describes female NSs as those who “spoke longer and expressed a greater desire to work and develop a relationship with Western NNSs” (www.meijigakuin.ac.jp/~acsj/:2004). In other words, Japanese people are interested in interacting with English speakers for social opportunities. This could even be considered as a moment of liberation for Japanese women when Long mentions “women ,but not men, were more interested in interacting with Western NNSs”(ibid). Long further details that women “may prefer conversing with Westerners as a means of raising their status”(ibid). This reinforces about what I mentioned in the beginning of this assignment about the importance and **popularity** of English in Japan.

Miller writes that when a foreigner in Japan speaks fluent Japanese that it is considered an “invasion of sociolinguistic territorial interests”(1977:82). Miller further mentions that a Japanese person speaking in Japanese to a foreigner is “to admit defeat in this battle over territorial invasion”(ibid:82). However, when a Japanese person speaks English to a native speaker of English in Japan this does not have to be a way for a Japanese person to defend his/her sociolinguistic interests but it could be an opportunity to enhance his/her social life by interacting with people who speak a different language. Enhancing the social life also contributes to maintaining the culture.

3.2 The benefits of neutrality

It is not unusual for a Japanese business professional to give a phone call to a client in Korea or Taiwan and speak in English. This would be an example of two parties who do not speak English as their native tongue but are using English in the neutral sense with a business related purpose. Holland describes Wardaugh’ view on neutrality as “GE(global English) enthusiastic”(2002:7). Moreover Holland also mentions that “GlobalEnglish is sociopolitically neutral for societies using English, it is a means to achieving **their own**

ends”(2002:6). Moreover, a Japanese teenager can converse with a Korean teenager about cross-cultural issues and use English as a neutral language to discuss ways of solving the world’s problems.

English can be neutral in previous mentioned situations but when an individual from North America or the United Kingdom speaks in English, his/her accent is immediately recognized. English belongs to people from regions. My view on this is supported when Holmes writes “if the person has a distinctive regional accent, then their regional origins will be evident even from a short utterance”(2001:123).

3.3 Bilingual awareness and the future of Japan

Being bi-lingual in Japan can give great appreciation as to what is seen in Japanese society and even enrich the Japanese language. I once saw a restaurant sign in Japan with a big picture of a pig and next to the picture was the name of the restaurant, COUNTRY BUU. When Japanese children learn the sounds that animals make, they are taught that a pig says “buu-buu” while in English speaking countries children are taught that a pig says “oink-oink”. From the “country buu” example, the use of the English word “country” is in reference to a rural setting while “buu” is in reference to the sound a pig makes, at least how Japanese perceive what a pig sounds like. Bisong questions “Why settle for monolingualism in a society that is constantly in a state of flux?”(1995:125). Bisong further writes how learning another language can contribute to “an expanding consciousness”(1995:125).

Murray writes of several loanwords from English in the Japanese language that have contributed to the “wild creativity of Made-in-Japan English”(1999:132). An example of this is the Japanese word “kao-pasu”, meaning face pass. The word “pasu” has clearly been borrowed from the English word, pass; however, only a Japanese person would know that a “kao-pass” really means “able to enter clubs free because of being well known”(ibid:132). Japanese has borrowed words from English and has created

completely different meanings in Japanese. The wide usage of English in Japan can actually contribute to creating a unique Japanese linguistic identity in the future.

Conclusion

Largely neutral, English has clearly made its mark in popularity and opportunity in Japan. Major corporations of Japan are making huge profits from exporting automobiles, computers, calculators and other various high-tech products to English speaking countries. Japanese companies need to have assembly lines to carry out their exports. On the other hand there is a large industry from English speaking countries that does not need an assembly line. It is the English language. In fact, McCrum mentions that “the English language is now one of Britain’s most reliable exports”(2002:32). Because English is something that belongs to the English speaking countries, it can be exported from these countries to Japan. English language education and academic programs are “worth hundreds of millions of pounds or dollars”(ibid:32). When I was at the Linguapax Asia conference in June, 2005 in Tokyo, I saw a quote on the front page of the conference program from Goethe “Those who know nothing of foreign languages know nothing of their own.” Perhaps more people in Japan can develop more knowledge of their own language from studying English and have another language to compare structures with. I proudly conclude that English is largely neutral in Japan stemming from economic reasons and that English can also help enrich Japanese society in the future.

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