

# **"Japanese English": A Descriptive Grammar of Educated Written English in Japan**

Kolawole Olagboyega (Yamanashi Gakuin University, Japan)

Arguments rejecting the pedagogic notion of "Standard English" or "correctness", and suggesting that all forms of English are equal, have resulted in the proliferation of terms such as "Indian English", "Singapore English", "Filipino English", "Nigerian English" etc., which are claimed to be on precisely the same equal footing with "American English", "British English", "Australian English" (Coleman 1987:13; Kachru 1986a, 2005; Kortmann, *et. al.*, 2012).

The term "Japanese English" has also gained currency amongst many linguists, anthropologists, sociologists, cognitive scientists and ordinary people both inside and outside of Japan (Iwasaki 1994, Morrow 1995, Hayashi *et. al.* 1995, Bolton 2003, Stanlaw 1987b, 1988, 1992c, 1992d, 1996b, 2004, D'Angelo 2005).

Kachru (2005), identifies six aspects of Japanese English from the "historical", "functional", "formal", "attitudinal", "pragmatic", and "acquisitional" perspectives. However, the most comprehensive study on the subject of "Japanese English" was conducted by James Stanlaw (2004). In his seminal study done from 'an anthropological linguistic perspective', Stanlaw describes "Japanese English" as 'a created-in-Japan variety for use by Japanese in Japan regardless of how they may appear to native English speakers'. In other words, the Japanese do not aspire to approximate the native norm. He claims that in the larger context of 'world Englishes', "Japanese English" is so entrenched that English has become '... a Japanese language'. This is an extreme position which few scholars share with Stanlaw.

Meanwhile, the tendency among researchers on the subject of English in Japan has largely been to provide glossaries of coinages and other lexical modifications, and the listing of isolated examples of divergence, and present them as "the features" of "Japanese English" (cf. Stanlaw 2004). Caught helplessly in this controversy especially in a country such as Japan, where English language is chiefly acquired through formal education, is the classroom teacher, who needs to know what form of English to teach, and which reference books to use.

This study does not select isolated examples of forms to corroborate or falsify any theoretical position or construct, which has been the general trend of research in the field. Instead, it seeks to provide a descriptive grammar of aspects of educated written English in Japan, on which those concerned with teaching English in Japan particularly at junior high, high school and university can draw; it seeks to demonstrate that across the range of forms which are regularly identified as "errors" in the English written by educated Japanese, there are some environments which regularly reflect "Standard English practice" and others where "divergent forms" are manifested with some degrees of frequency. The discrimination between the different types of environment gives some idea of the possible reasons for this variation and how to set about correcting it in the classroom.

As an attempt to conflate the existing pedagogical concept of "Standard English" and the emerging theoretical notion of "standard non-native varieties of English" (Milroy and Milroy 1987; Quirk 1989), this study looks at the stability of the

claimed "characteristic" forms of "Japanese English" and shows the statistical likelihood of their occurrence in particular syntactic and semantic environments. This particular study focuses on the realization of the grammatical categories that are typically associated with the constituents of the noun phrase (NP).

This approach is both pedagogically and theoretically interesting inasmuch as it identifies the divergent forms. The classroom teacher, for example, may know what to "correct" and the textbook writer what to highlight. The theoretical linguist who argues for the existence of non-native standard varieties of English (cf. Todd and Hancock 1986; Williams 1987) has also got ready evidence on which to draw; evidence that can also validate the concept of "fossilization" (cf. Selinker 1972), which seeks to account for the adult non-native speaker's grammatical variability.

The corpus consists of material that appears in the four Japanese national English-language newspapers, *Asahi Evening News*, *Japan Times*, *Mainichi Daily News*, and *The Daily Yomiuri* which comprises the editorials, articles, advertisements, letters to the editor, etc.; government publications, such as those of the Japanese Ministry of Education (MEXT). The data used covered a period of 15 years (2000 to 2015). The corpus also includes articles published in English by Japanese University professors. Statistical information is given in the text itself. Because we are interested in the language produced by a people or group of speakers rather than the individual variability within the group, the database is cross-sectional rather than longitudinal.

The newspapers have been selected for this study for several reasons. Published daily (Monday to Sunday), they are the most widely circulated national English-language newspapers in Japan read by the whole public, whose proficiency in English ranges from the lowest to the highest (native-like). The newspapers constitute what might be called the Japanese quality press.

Since the corpus also includes data collected from the articles published in English by the Japanese university professors, and data collected from MEXT publications as well as the English of Japanese newspapers, we are associating these with "educated English" (call it the "acrolectal") in this study. These are the highest levels at which we are readily able to find a corpus from the daily communicative experience of the people, large enough to be well representative of the major forms, and quite convenient for detailed examination. Other bases, such as students' writing collected at various levels, will show tendencies that are generally associated with early and middle learners (the "basilect" and the "mesolect" speakers). It is necessary to emphasize tendencies in relation to a database because there seems to be no objective way of dividing the cline of bilingualism. In sociolinguistic terms (Kirkpatrick 2005; Bolinger and Sears 1981; Magura 1985), the levels of proficiency are group into those broad stages of the acquisition process, each of which is associated with a variety of the language.

The data for this study was collected manually, and was therefore very laborious. Each detected divergent form is then manually fed into the Word document, which serves as the computerized "tool" and corpus for the study.

As we are interested in the description of data rather than the explanation of a theory or process, the approach is more inductive than deductive. The realization of the grammatical categories that are typically associated with the constituents of the noun phrase (NP), are examined in the English of the newspapers, in the writings of university professors, the government publications and the writings of

university students. The environments where persistent patterns and tendencies emerge are described and tabulated with a view to determining the extent to which the patterns may be said to represent stabilized usage based on a specifically Japanese syntax and semantics as opposed to (American) Standard English practice.

For example, our corpus suggests that Japanese writers of English tend to omit the definite article in an NP where its presence is described as being customary - i.e., the head of such an NP is said to be customarily preceded by the definite article. Such nouns include names of: local, national and international bodies, public facilities - hotels, hospitals, restaurants, cinemas, etc.; certain countries, universities and schools, newspapers, etc. (cf. Quirk et al 1985:289, 296). Out of 1080 such NPs counted in our corpus, the article was omitted in 650 (60% of) cases:

- (1) Mr. X ... has flown to *United States* to undertake a management development course ....
- (2) The national baseball competition ... enters its third day today with matches at *University of Tokyo* ... .
- (3) Also on the plane is Mr. X, senior staff writer, who will cover the match for *Daily Yomiuri*.
- (4) *Daily Yomiuri* has not reported the news.
- (5) He described the conditions at *Akita University Teaching Hospital* as appalling.

In the discrimination between different types of syntactic environment, our pedagogical aims will take precedence, and we shall be suggesting one grammatical approach or another. The main purpose, however, is not to prescribe any particular approach but to furnish the teacher-trainer, textbook writer and curriculum designer with an eclectic mixture of methodological frameworks which will be useful in approaching a particular problem.

The relations between the standard forms and the divergent forms, and their percentages of co-occurrence will provide helpful insights into various theoretical issues. For example, the corpus shows no grammatical categories that regularly occur divergently only and never standardly. If we accept the general view that there is a distinctive Japanese English usage that can be clearly distinguished from standard practice in terms of such tendencies as "omission of articles, pluralization of non-count nouns, etc.", then we must allow for a great deal of overlap between "Japanese English usage" and standard practice in the language produced by educated Japanese. It will be demonstrated that educated Japanese, for instance, do not consciously omit articles in every context where standard practice would require them, nor are non-count nouns consistently made to take the regular plural morph whenever they are expected to have semantically plural interpretations.

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