

Language Standards, Dialect Preferences, and Privilege

言語基準、方言選択、特権意識

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“To what extent has English as a foreign language (EFL) had an impact on the secondary school students in Japan since it was officially selected as a core subject of the requirement for the entrance examination? What do you think about the issue as a native English speaker?” These straightforward questions were asked by one of my senior colleagues at the time of the job interview with native English speakers at the interview room about fifteen years ago when I started my career as a novice language teacher. This job interview prompted me to think about exactly what native English speakers means because the classified advertisement said, “Native speakers of English from the UK and the US are highly wanted for full-time positions.” A relationship between my past experience hiring native speakers and Celce-Murcia’s research (2014) reminded me of the fact that there are three types of World Englishes prevailing on the current English: the inner circle where English is the native language of the majority, the outer circle where local L2 varieties have developed and become codified through extensive use, and the expanding circle where English is a dominant foreign language used in limited domains. In addition, my encounter with the native speakers at the interview and the concept of World Englishes has been greatly influenced by McKay’s study (2002), stating that Japan is situated in the expanding circle where English does not have an official role, and that its use should be norm-dependent since there is no regular internal use of the language.

My own teaching experience in Japan for over fifteen years drives me to realize that there has been little chance to take some of the issues into account: the distinction between native English speakers and non-native speakers in terms of raising awareness of ‘standard’ English, English language testing, and English teachers’ recruitment practices. In fact, these viewpoints are derived from the empirical research conducted by Galloway and Rose (2015). This research is designed to investigate those issues separately by answering their controversial discussion questions (p.196).

The first question is “Why do you think many students expect to be taught by a native English-speaking teacher when they go to study abroad?” To this question, it would be reasonable to reply that there are two key words for this: high-stakes tests and the dominant use of English language teaching (ELT) textbooks. First, some large-scale tests, such as International English Language Testing System (IELTS), Test of English as a Foreign Language, and Test of English for International Communication have all had a great influence on Japanese EFL students’ attitudes towards native English teachers from the inner circle. According to the website of IELTS, for

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example, the number of the test-takers grew to a record of 3.5 million in 2018. Consisting of four different parts like listening, reading, writing and speaking, the test assesses them separately by using a band grading system. Some students have had complaints about this test by saying, “Listening and speaking parts of the IELTS test are equally hardest ones because we have little chance to listen to and speak English on a face-to-face basis in a classroom or even out of the classroom. In this school learning context, we, as EFL students, have huge disadvantages of improving both skills in preparation for taking the IELTS.” Furthermore, the criteria of Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) offered by Council of Europe (2001) has affected the students’ attitudes towards learning English. From my teaching experience, this current trend and the students’ view of English language learning have attracted their attention to native-like proficiency as norms for assessing non-native speakers of English. For Japanese secondary students who want to go abroad to learn English, especially in English-speaking countries like the UK and the US, such tests have been regarded as the gatekeepers that function as key roles in screening some qualified students out of many international applicants. Under this circumstance, they are likely to consider learning either British English or American English to be only a prestigious Standard English despite the fact that there are many other varieties of World Englishes spoken in the globe. It seems that they tend to think of two types of Englishes as authentic English standards that they are eager to devote themselves to learning.

Second, EFL students’ preferences for particular dialects of English have shed light on the cultural content in ELT textbooks. According to Shin et al. (2011), analyses of internationally distributed ELT textbooks have revealed that the materials were dominated by American and British viewpoints. They also presented us with the other researchers’ study, stating that locally produced English textbooks contained more American and British cultures and values than globally oriented materials did. In reality, any English textbooks officially approved by the Ministry of Education are now influenced by Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) that focuses mainly on communicative interactions between native English speakers from the UK or the US and Japanese secondary students. The content of the English culture is mostly based on the cultural backgrounds of the UK and the US. Japanese EFL teachers often have no choice but to use the officially approved textbooks as one of the most important teaching resources within the classroom under the strict national language policy. In addition to the prescribed textbooks, most of the private secondary schools have used other supplementary teaching materials published by Oxford University Press or Cambridge University Press that encourage EFL students to learn more about British English-based oral expressions. Those teaching resources have drawn both EFL teachers and their students’ attentions to some popular topics involved in the inner circle. Having been influenced by the main notion of integrating four language skills into one lesson, EFL teachers tend to ask for native speakers from the inner circles, especially from the UK, to work together as a team-teaching in a classroom. The aim of the team-teaching has been to engage the students in the CLT-driven learning activities in a pair or in a group. In this situation, Japanese EFL teacher as a non-native English speaker (NNES) and a native English speaker (NES) have played an important part as a role model by demonstrating the communicative interaction between NNES and NES right before the students started communicating each other in English. From the pedagogical perspective on the close relationship between CLT and the collaboration with a native speaker, ELT textbooks has had an enormous impact on the way of teaching English as a foreign language. Canagarajah’s research

(2012) also reminds us of how EFL teachers should reflect autoethnographically on their English lessons with their colleagues. He contends that “autoethnography is a valuable form of knowledge construction in his fields, as TESOL professionals in diverse communities can use this genre to represent their professional experiences and knowledge in a relatively less threatening academic manner.”

From the students’ learning perspective, there is a huge correlation between the high-stakes tests and the use of English course textbooks because they have been so familiar with the standard spoken English ever since they started learning English at the beginning of an elementary school. The link between the large-scale tests and the authoritative textbooks with CLT-based teaching approach involved is an influential factor in thinking about why EFL students expect to be taught by native speakers. At the same time, it is crucial to take this relationship into consideration on the EFL classroom basis since the results of the tests are regarded as an outcome of the language teaching and the use of the leading textbooks are as an input resource of the language learning.

The second question is “What are the most important qualities for an English teacher? If you were the manager of a language institution, what type of teacher would you employ?” It would be plausible to say that native English speakers from the inner circle such as the UK, the US, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand are eligible applicants for some private schools. However, some of my senior colleagues who started their teaching career before the year 2000 are likely to hire the native speakers from the UK and the US only. Although there is no officially prescribed written policy in hiring Assistant Language Teacher (ALT), such senior language teachers have had some persistent bias against native speakers other than the UK and the US and non-native speakers of English, such as Indian English, Singapore English, and Philippine English. Therefore, they have had a strict working policy toward hiring ALTs compared to other languages teachers. Historically speaking, as stated above, Japan has long been predominantly influenced by some authoritative global textbooks with the CLT-based language teaching involved. There is clearly a strong argument for saying that the close tie with the use of the course books and the teaching approach has underpinned the senior teachers’ preferences for British English and American English that function as a reliable yardstick.

However, Galloway and Rose’s study (2015) directs my attention to the current controversial issues on teacher recruitment practices. They describe that “hiring native English speakers is often driven by economic factors and thus, as long as learners demand native English speakers, practices are unlikely to change as native English speakers attract business in the commercial ELT market.” Their statement about the job market, to some extent, holds true for private language schools where I have worked for. All of the language schools post some florid advertisements on their homepage or even on the wall of the train carriage to attract school students or business persons through the profile of their teaching staff. Nowadays, a wider variety of schools are releasing some extra qualifications such as CELTA holders, MA degree in TESOL, and experienced IELTS teaching careers at either in the ESL or EFL contexts. Moreover, there exist some university-like language schools in Japan that deal with English as a Lingua Franca, World Englishes, and English for Specific Purposes, along with high-stakes tests. In fact, some leading language schools are seeking for the high-spec qualified teachers from the inner circle with more than one year’s experience. As for this tendency to hire such competent native speakers, it is worth to point out the fact that there are some economic and political-driven factors that force Japanese EFL learners to look at the linguistic diversity prevailing in Japan. ‘English for tourism’, for example, can be one of the many

attractive ESP courses provided by the private language schools. It seems that international sport events like Rugby World Cup in 2019 and the Tokyo Olympic Games in 2020 have huge influential economic-sociopolitical powers that can drastically change Japanese EFL market forces into a more multifaceted EFL society with the help of native speakers. In this sense, Galloway and Rose's viewpoint of teacher recruitment practices hold true for the current Japanese EFL contexts. In preparation for the international sport events, the government officials aim to train many tour guides that help foreigners head for their destinations. They tend to regard learning a native English as an authentic Standard English as well as a codified norm English.

From another different perspective on the recruitment, it is essential to examine the concept of English as an International Language (EIL). Matsuda and Friedrich (2012) insist that students should be aware of English varieties in EIL curriculums, and that an interaction with others on various internet communities and social network services is a source of exposure to multiple varieties of English and users of Englishes. Geeslin (2014) also supports their research by stating that "to include a variety of Englishes in a second language classroom will foster learners' ability to comprehend a wide range of speakers, and that it will encourage the view of language variation as something natural and inherent in language." In terms of the relationship between language contact and language change, McKay (2014) suggests that the various languages used within the language contact context may undergo phonological, lexical, and grammatical changes as bilingual individuals make use of two or more languages on a regular basis. Hyland (2016), on the other hand, critically investigates the issues of language bias to see if the dominance of English in an academic publishing has had an impact on the 'linguistic injustice' against author's non-standard languages. All of the research is worth discussing more in the future because everything they described in their research is just a starting point. All we can do is to keep our eyes on what is happening in the field of the EIL and the other-related area.

All in all, discussing some issues related to language standards, dialect preferences, and its privileges encourages EFL teachers to consider that there are so many complicated factors with respect to language school hiring practices. As stated in this study, it can reasonably be argued that language schools or private schools tend to prefer hiring native English speakers to non-native speakers for some plausible reasons. However, Japanese EFL context can be changeable with the passage of time, so it would be ideal for EFL teachers to be flexible enough to deal with several sociolinguistic issues and to meet their students' needs for learning English.

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