

Japanese Tertiary-level Students' Cognition of World Englishes

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Estimates vary widely as to the number of people who study English globally, from Kachru and Nelson's (2006)⁽¹⁾ estimate of 700 million, to Beare's (2019)⁽²⁾ figure of over 1.5 billion. However, these statistics are somewhat misleading as English is not a single entity, but rather a multitude of different dialects of the language (e.g., American English, British English), more accurately described as *World Englishes* (WE). The current study investigated the cognition of WE among 473 Japanese university students, revealing that while a majority of the participants knew that different varieties of English existed ($n = 366$; 77.4%), they could not describe in detail what those differences were ($n = 351$; 74.2%). Among those who could name some differences, pronunciation was cited the most often ($n = 99$; 81.1%), followed by a small number noting grammatical differences ($n = 2$; 1.6%), and none suggesting syntax or pragmatic factors such as appropriateness as being different among varieties of WE. When asked their preference of English instructor, citizens of *inner circle countries* (e.g., the USA, UK, Australia, or Canada) were rated the highest ($M = 3.48$), followed closely by Japanese English teachers ($M = 3.42$). Theoretical rationale and pedagogical implications are discussed.

Key Words : World Englishes, native speaker, nonnative speaker, language learning attitudes

1. Introduction

Since the latter half of the twentieth century, the English language has served as a tool for international communication, and as a result has become the most widely spoken language in the world (Kachru & Nelson, 2006)⁽¹⁾. Although estimates are difficult to calculate, it has been reported that almost a third of the world's population uses English as a means of communication, and of this figure more than 70 percent are nonnative speakers (NNS) of English (Graddol, 2006)⁽³⁾. With regards to the Asian context, it is estimated that there are more than 800 million NNS, a figure that greatly outnumbers the combined population of native English-speaking countries (Bolton, Graddol, & Meierkord, 2011)⁽⁴⁾. Under such circumstances, it can be anticipated that the chances of interacting with an NNS are far greater than that of a native speaker (NS). It is this observation that has led to a plethora of recent research into the topic of *World Englishes* (WE) and what this means for English education. Given the wide diversity of English speakers, some linguists question whether the traditional framework of English as a foreign language (EFL), which holds 'native' English as the golden standard for testing and evaluation, accurately reflects the dynamic way English is used in today's globalized world (Jenkins, 2015⁽⁵⁾; Fang & Ren, 2018⁽⁶⁾).

With regards to English education in Japan, the majority of textbooks approved by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (often referred to as MEXT) have been found to only introduce examples of American or British standards of English (Matsuda, 2003)⁽⁷⁾. Moreover, the inclusion of other varieties of English, especially those from NNS countries, are almost non-existent in the current curriculum. The present study seeks to explore Japanese tertiary-level students' opinions about WE, and hopes to answer two main research questions:

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- ① To what degree are students aware that differences between Englishes exist?
- ② How do students value English teachers from various contexts?

At present, research suggests that Japanese students may have a preference for the American standard due to familiarity and the rise of Western pop culture (Kawanami & Kawanami, 2009)⁽⁸⁾. However, quantitative research in this area seems to be rather limited, and this provides the rationale for the present study.

2. Review of the Literature

2.1 Background

The idea of multiple English languages was first introduced to the literature by Kachru (1990)⁽⁹⁾ who described three concentric circles of English speaker: those from the *inner circle*, the *outer circle*, and the *expanding circle*. Speakers from the inner circle use English as their first language (L1) and include countries such as the U.K., the U.S.A. and Australia. The outer circle refers to speakers from post-colonial countries who use English as a second language. Countries in this circle typically have English as an official language in addition to their L1. These include countries such as India, Malaysia and the Philippines. Speakers from the expanding circle learn English as a foreign language, and include countries such as China, Saudi Arabia, and Japan. Kachru's work on world Englishes stemmed from a dissatisfaction with the view that there are only two varieties of English Language, that being American and British. He advocated that this binary view did not represent the linguistic reality of how the English language was being used on a global scale, and that acceptance of cultural diversity within the English language should be recognized.

2.2 World English and EFL Teaching

The debate as to whether world English should be taught to learners remains a topic of contention. Some argue that it is imperative to maintain and teach a uniform standard, after all how can variations of grammatical usage and pronunciation be understood without first understanding the rules of grammar and pronunciation? In addition, the acceptance of multiple norms could potentially lead to a fragmentation of the English language, resulting in a breakdown in communication across cultures. Contrary to this, is the view that by just focusing on inner circle varieties of English, EFL teaching does not prepare learners for real-world interactions. With English speakers from the outer and expanding circles rapidly increasing, learners need to be exposed to other varieties of English outside of the inner circle. Moreover, EFL should also encourage learners to recognize that they have "rights to their own pronunciation" (Berns, 2008, p. 328)⁽¹⁰⁾, in which they are not beholden to a particular native standard.

Despite a lack of consensus regarding EFL and world English, overall there seems to be a lack of inclusion of English varieties in the teaching curriculum, and "to a large extent, many language practitioners and learners perceive 'native English' as a golden rule that should be strictly followed" (Fang & Ren, 2018, p. 1)⁽⁶⁾.

2.3 World English in Japan

With regards to the Japanese context, the majority of textbooks in Japanese schools exclusively focus on the American or British standard of English (Matsuda, 2003)⁽⁷⁾, in which they are rarely exposed to varieties from the outer and expanding circles. Moreover, with the popularity of American TV shows and music, Japanese students are regularly exposed to examples of American English outside of the classroom environment. Frequent exposure and familiarity with the American (and to some extent British) variety may cause Japanese students to prefer inner circle varieties of English, and thus value inner circle English teachers more when compared to teachers from other English-speaking countries.

In addition, research shows a bias towards inner circle varieties, suggesting that "among Japanese people, including many academics, such as university faculty and students... American English is best" (Morrison & White, 2005, p. 362)⁽¹¹⁾. This was a finding also reported by Okumura (2005)⁽¹²⁾ who found that primary school students showed more positive attitudes

towards American English compared to other varieties including their own, suggesting that these preferences develop from an early age. More recently, Tokumoto and Shibata (2011)⁽¹³⁾ investigated Japanese, South Korean, and Malaysian attitudes toward native English and their own English variety. They reported that all the participants showed a preference for inner circle English varieties. They also found that the Japanese participants tended to display more negative attitudes towards their own variety compared to the South Korean and Malaysian participants, emphasizing that Japanese learners may have insecurities regarding their own English pronunciation.

In order to understand the reasons behind such preferences, consider the work of Levis (2005)⁽¹⁴⁾ who described two contradictory orientations: the *nativeness principle* and the *intelligibility principle*. While the former posits that native-like pronunciation in a foreign language is both achievable and desirable, the latter posits that “learners simply need to be understandable” (Levis, 2005, p. 370)⁽¹⁴⁾. Research suggests that for many Japanese learners the nativeness principle is more influential, and therefore many have a positive bias towards inner circle varieties of English. This is supported by Takeshita (2000)⁽¹⁵⁾ who found that Japanese learners believe that there is a correct way to speak and therefore feel ashamed if they deviate from this standard. In addition, Kawanami and Kawanami’s (2009)⁽⁸⁾ qualitative study on world Englishes provides further insight related to the Japanese context. Through discourse analysis of student conversations they found that many Japanese learners equated native varieties of English with “prestige and legitimacy”, while expressing negative feelings towards speakers from outer and expanding circles, possibly due to their lack of exposure and “limited understanding of existence of varieties of English as well as respect toward them” (Kawanami & Kawanami, 2009, pp. 53-54)⁽⁸⁾.

It should be noted that there are multiple English varieties within inner circle countries. For example, a Received Pronunciation English accent differs tremendously both in terms of pronunciation and grammatical usage when compared to a Mancunian accent from North Western England. Therefore, one must be careful when generalizing about inner circle English varieties as there is much diversity when one considers the age, region, ethnic background, and social class of a native speaker. It is unclear whether Japanese students, when hearing inner circle English accents, are aware that such differences exist, or whether they can differentiate between inner circle countries, for example the difference between an American and Australian accent.

Despite a rapidly changing dynamic in how the English language is used around the world, our understanding of Japanese learners’ opinions about world Englishes remains somewhat limited. This paper hopes to contribute to this topic by providing quantitative data that will enhance our knowledge in this growing area.

3. Study Design

3.1 Participants

The current study was conducted at a small, private university located in a rural region of Japan. As the possibility for bias depending on the region of residency must be considered, this biographical information was collected of all participants. Recruitment efforts resulted in $N = 501$ respondents, however $n = 28$ students who were determined to be foreign nationals were excluded from the study, resulting in a population pool of $N = 473$. As can be seen in Table 1 below, a large majority of the students were from Fukui and the surrounding prefectures that make up the Chubu region of central Japan. The second largest region represented was Kansai, comprising approximately 12% ($n = 56$) of the participants.

Participants were predominantly male ($M = 93\%$, $F = 7\%$). However, there is no prior research which has indicated a gender bias towards perceptions of WE, and this factor was not used in any of the data analyses. Students were between 19 and 22 years of age and came from all academic major courses offered at the university. It should be noted that this university does not have English language as a major, but all students must pass mandatory English courses throughout their enrollment in order to be eligible for graduation. As such, the English courses the university provides are either oral communication-based or standardized test preparation (i.e., TOEIC). With an average TOEIC score of 346 (Nyugaku et al., 2017)⁽¹⁶⁾, participants drawn from this pool could be classified as being of elementary proficiency.

Table 1

Biographical Data of Participants (Region of Residence)

Region	Prefecture	<i>n</i>	Subtotal	Region	Prefecture	<i>n</i>	Subtotal
Hokkaido	Hokkaido	2	2	Kansai	Mie	3	56
						Shiga	
Tohoku	Aomori	-			Kyoto	13	
	Iwate	-			Osaka	5	
	Miyagi	-			Hyogo	10	
	Akita	-			Nara	1	
	Yamagata	-			Wakayama	4	
	Fukushima	-					
			0	Chugoku	Tottori	1	
Kanto	Ibaraki	1			Shimane	1	
	Tochigi	-			Okayama	-	
	Gunma	2			Hiroshima	1	
	Saitama	-			Yamaguchi	-	
	Chiba	-					
	Tokyo	-			Shikoku	Tokushima	-
	Kanagawa	1				Kagawa	1
			4		Ehime	1	
Chubu	Niigata	5			Kochi	1	3
	Toyama	35					
	Ishikawa	35		Kyushu	Fukuoka	4	10
	Fukui	291			Saga	-	
	Yamanashi	-			Nagasaki	3	
	Nagano	8			Kumamoto	-	
	Gifu	9			Oita	-	
	Shizuoka	4			Miyazaki	-	
	Aichi	8			Kagoshima	-	
			395		Okinawa	3	

3.2 Materials and Methodology

An original survey was created on Google Docs, which served as the primary method of data collection (see Appendix for an English translation). The link to the survey was converted into a QR code that could be easily shown to participants, from which they could access the survey via their personal smartphones. Several copies of the survey were also prepared in paper form for students who either did not have a smartphone or did not want to use them for our study. We also believed that providing students the choice to respond digitally or by paper would eliminate the potential for bias originating from economic status or technical ability (i.e., by not limiting our data collection to only students who could afford a smartphone).

The survey was created in Japanese, the L1 of the participants, for several reasons. First, due to the nature of data collection, it was believed that students who could not quickly and easily comprehend the survey questions would lose interest and not properly engage or respond in a truthful manner. Also, as the topic of our study may have been unfamiliar to many, it was thought that

participants may not have fully understood the nuances of the linguistic terms needed (e.g., inner circle, expanding circle, etc.) if they had been written in English. Responses were also collected in Japanese for similar reasons. It was considered that forcing students to answer in English (their L2) would not result in the desired complexity and nuanced discourse that we were hoping to elicit.

The survey items were created over a series of discussions by both researchers. All attempts were made to address some common criticisms of past WE cognition research by composing questions which would elucidate the source of any biases by the participants. In addition to the question regarding the participants' permanent domicile, students were asked to report any experience they might have had overseas, including the location and duration of stay. In order to further ascertain the participants' state-of-mind, they were also asked to report the country that they were most interested in visiting, as both of these factors can potentially influence the variety of English that the students are interested in learning. The main portion of the survey asked participants to report how they would feel if their English teachers were members of the various circles of Kachru's (1990)⁽⁹⁾ model on a 5-point Likert scale (e.g., 1 = I would be upset; 5 = That would be ideal for me). In addition to this semantic differential scale, participants were asked to qualify their ratings in the form of a free-response section following each scaled item. The results are outlined in the following section.

4. Results

A summary of the responses to Q2 on the survey is reported below in Table 2. This question, inquiring about students' knowledge of the existence of varieties of English, appears to show that a large majority of students were aware that dialects of English are spoken across the world. However, when asked if they were able to iterate what some differences might be (see Table 3), most of the participants were not able to do so.

Table 2

Responses to Q2: Are you aware of the fact that there are several varieties of English in existence?

	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Relative Frequency</u>
Yes, I know.	366	77.4%
No, this is the first time I'm hearing it.	107	22.6%

Table 3

Responses to Q3: Can you say what differences exist between varieties of English? (ex. American vs. British?)

	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Relative Frequency</u>
Yes, I can.	122	25.8%
No, I can't.	351	74.2%

Of the participants who answered in the affirmative to Q3, a follow-up question then asked them to report examples of what is different. As a qualitative item, the lead researcher coded the responses given into categories depending on the language feature that was referenced. The results are reported in Table 4.

Table 4

Responses to Q3a: For example, what are some differences?

	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Relative Frequency</u>
Pronunciation	99	81.1%
Spelling	18	14.8%
Vocabulary	17	13.9%
Expressions / Phrases	11	9.0%
Aesthetics	5	4.1%
Grammar	2	1.6%

Note. Some participants gave multiple responses, resulting in frequencies which total more than 100% ($n = 122$).

As it was necessary to gather information on the participants' experience abroad to understand any potential sources of bias, Q4 asked how many times, if any, they had travelled overseas (Table 5). For those who answered in the affirmative, a follow-up item asked which destination they have visited, and for what duration (see Table 6). In addition, participants were asked what foreign country they most wanted to travel to in the future. The data from this question is presented in Table 7.

Table 5

Responses to Q4: Have you ever travelled overseas?

	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Relative Frequency</u>
Yes, one time.	95	20.1%
Yes, two times or more.	43	9.1%
No.	335	70.8%

Table 6

Responses to Q5: Where did you travel to, and how long did you stay?

<u>Category</u>	<u>Country</u>	<u>Frequency</u>
Inner Circle	U.S.A. (incl. Hawaii & Guam)	42
	Australia	37
	Other	13
Outer Circle	Singapore	10
	Other	12
Expanding Circle	Korea	16
	Thailand*	10
	Other	19
Duration of Stay	< 1 week	69
	1 week ~ 1 month	84
	> 1 month	1
	Not reported	5

Note. Some participants reported multiple travel experiences, resulting in totals greater than 100% ($n = 138$).

Only individual countries with $n > 10$ respondents are reported.

* indicates a country not named in Kachru (1990), but where English is spoken by less than 50% of the population.

Table 7

Responses to Q6: What foreign country do you most want to travel to?

<u>Category</u>	<u>Country</u>	<u>Frequency</u>
Inner Circle	U.S.A. (incl. Hawaii)	186
	U.K.	36
	Australia	29
	Other	26
Outer Circle	Germany*	20
	Other	46
Expanding Circle	France**	38
	Spain**	22
	Other	70

Note. Only individual countries with $n > 20$ respondents are reported.

Responses to Q7 ~ Q11 were recoded into a numerical Likert scale, e.g., *I would be upset* = “1”; *That’d ideal for me* = “5”, etc. As a result, a score of “3” would reflect a neutral position. Means, standard deviations, 95% confidence intervals, and standard error of the means are reported in Table 8. The reasons that participants gave for their responses (Q7a ~ Q11a) will be discussed in the following section (Discussion) due to their qualitative nature.

Table 8

Descriptive Statistics for Q7 ~ Q11

<u>Group</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>95% CI</u>	<u>SEM</u>
IC	3.48	.81	[3.41, 3.55]	.04
OC	3.23	.77	[3.16, 3.30]	.04
XC	3.05	.73	[2.98, 3.11]	.03
JP	3.42	.93	[3.33, 3.50]	.04
NNS	2.77	.87	[2.69, 2.85]	.04

Note. IC = inner circle; OC = outer circle; XC = expanding circle; JP = Japanese professor; NNS = nonnative speaker

5. Discussion

The results of this investigation, while largely falling in line with our expectations, resulted in some interesting and unexpected findings. The initial finding that a majority of the participants were at least cognitively aware that different varieties of English existed was expected, as the university where this study was conducted not only has faculty from various inner and outer circle countries, but also foreign students from expanding circle countries. In addition, coursebooks from American and British publishers are also employed in our curriculum, which exposes students to WE in some degree via spelling and audio samples from both countries. However, the inability of students to identify differences in WE in more detail reveals the need for instructors to incorporate these discussions more explicitly into the course contents.

The investigation into RQ2, *(h)ow do students value English teachers from various contexts?* provided more nuanced results. As reported in Table 8, English teacher from IC countries were scored as the most desirable ($M = 3.48$), which is generally in-line with other researchers' findings (e.g., Matsuura et al., 1994⁽¹⁷⁾; Chiba et al., 1995⁽¹⁸⁾; Fraser, 2006⁽¹⁹⁾; Matsuura, 2012⁽²⁰⁾). However, the ranking of Japanese professors as the second most desirable English teachers ($M = 3.42$) was unexpected, as previous research has shown that Japanese students typically rate Japanese varieties of English strongly negative (e.g., Fraser, 2006⁽¹⁹⁾; McKenzie, 2008; Tokumoto, & Shibata, 2011⁽²¹⁾). It appears that the participants who

responded favorably to the idea of having a Japanese instructor are focused heavily on the process of learning, rather than the outcome or the product of learning itself. As these participants are of elementary English proficiency (see Section 3.1) it is conceivable that their preference could evolve over time as they progress in their language development and gain more confidence. We would like to encourage other researchers who pursue this line of investigation to therefore include measures of English proficiency when describing participants to enable further comparison and generalizability between studies.

6. Limitations and Further Research

Participants were representative of each of the eight academic disciplines taught at the university. However, as this institution focuses heavily on industrial sciences, it should be noted that the potential for bias exists. It may be possible that participants of similar age and from the same geographic regions, but with different academic interests, could have different ideas about WE and their ideal instructors. It would greatly add to the interpretation of our results if this study could be replicated on a larger scale, or under different contexts. As most of the participants noted self-consciousness/social anxiety as reasons that their ideal instructor would be a Japanese national, it is also highly possible that this age group (e.g., late teenager/young adult) is particularly sensitive to issues of identity, self, and saving face. Examining the cognition of different age groups (e.g., primary school pupils, middle-aged adults) would also be highly informative.

In order to gather quantitative data, the current study made use of a questionnaire with predetermined choices, followed by free response sections for participants to add explanation for their responses. While this allowed for convenient sampling of close to 500 participants, it should be noted that this method funnels participants into choosing among the provided options. Individual face-to-face interviews, conducted on a much smaller scale, would allow for more freedom of choice and may lead to insights which this questionnaire failed to reveal. For example, the questionnaire asked students to report their reaction to the idea of being taught by, “a native speaker (from countries such as: the U.S.A., the U.K., Australia, etc.)”. While this represents the classic “inner circle” according to Kachru (1990)⁽⁹⁾, it would be elucidating to modify this description in the following way: “a native speaker (from countries such as: the U.S.A., the U.K., Australia, etc.) *who is fluent in Japanese*”. It is hypothesized that an instructor who met both of those conditions would be rated as the most ideal for this group of participants, as both inner-circle membership and Japanese fluency were the most desired features reported in the current study. In fact, a Japanese-American is also a possibility under the parameters of our survey, though this most likely did not occur to most participants. Regardless, this points to the need of updating/expanding the idea of the “three circles” (Kachru, 1990)⁽⁹⁾, now over 30 years old. Future research needs to allow for the possibility of mixed-race, multiethnic, or multilingual individuals, which would reflect reality more closely, and especially the make-up of the English-teaching community in Japan.

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8. Appendices

(Translated from the original Japanese)

World Englishes

Thank you for your participation in our research project. Please answer the following questions truthfully. There are no “right” or “wrong” answers; please tell us your honest feelings. – Professors Lee & Bailey

1. Your student ID#

1a. Class name

1b. Where is your permanent domicile?

2. Are you aware of the fact that there are several varieties of English in existence?

a. Yes, I know.

b. No, this is the first I'm hearing of it.

3. Can you say what differences exist between varieties of English? (ex. American vs. British?)

a. Yes, I can.

b. No, I can't.

3a. (If you answered “yes” to Q3) For example, what are some differences?

4. Have you ever travelled overseas?

a. Yes, 1 time.

b. Yes, 2 times or more.

c. No.

d. I am a foreign national.

5. (If you answered “yes” to Q4) Where did you travel to, and how long did you stay?

6. What foreign country do you most want to travel to?

7. How would you feel if the following person was your English teacher?

A native speaker (from countries such as: the U.S.A., the U.K., Australia, etc.)

a. That's ideal for me.

b. I would be slightly interested.

c. Neutral

d. I would be slightly concerned

e. I would be upset

7a. What is the reason?

8. How would you feel if the following person was your English teacher?

A native speaker (from countries such as: the Philippines, Africa, Malaysia, etc.)

a. That's ideal for me.

b. I would be slightly interested.

c. Neutral

d. I would be slightly concerned

e. I would be upset

8a. What is the reason?

9. How would you feel if the following person was your English teacher?

A Japanese person who is very good at English.

- a. That's ideal for me.
- b. I would be slightly interested.
- c. Neutral
- d. I would be slightly concerned
- e. I would be upset

9a. What is the reason?

10. How would you feel if the following person was your English teacher?

A non-native speaker who is very good at English (from countries such as: China, Taiwan, Korea, etc.)

- a. That's ideal for me.
- b. I would be slightly interested.
- c. Neutral
- d. I would be slightly concerned
- e. I would be upset

10a. What is the reason?

11. How would you feel if the following person was your English teacher?

Someone who can't speak English perfectly, but at least better than myself.

- a. That's ideal for me.
- b. I would be slightly interested.
- c. Neutral
- d. I would be slightly concerned
- e. I would be upset

11a. What is the reason?

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