Challenges and Approaches in Adopting EIL in a Japanese EFL:
Internal and External Factors

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Abstract

This study explores how the English education policy in Japan (external factor) and Japanese EFL learners' mindsets toward their dialects (internal factor) affect their attitudes toward Japanese English. Also, we discuss how their attitudes toward dialects influence their self-esteem and self-confidence. First, the Japanese English education policy focuses on American or British English and strongly encourages learners to speak either of the two varieties in place of Japanese English (a unique variety of English spoken in Japan from the World Englishes point of view). In other words, it prioritizes American or British English over learners' own English (Japanese English), which results in their negative attitudes toward Japanese English. Second, we review some studies showing how Japanese speakers' negative attitudes toward dialects in general influence their perception of Japanese English (internal factor) and how they eventually influence their self-esteem and self-confidence, negatively affecting L2 performance. Finally, in this paper, we propose effective ways to introduce the concepts of "English as an International Language (EIL)," "World Englishes (WE)," and "Intercultural Competence (IC)" into English education based on the pedagogical implications of previous EIL studies. By learning these new ideas, Japanese EFL learners can gain the confidence to accept and speak Japanese English, leading to greater self-esteem and confidence in using English.

Keywords: English Varieties, Japanese English, Dialect, Self-Esteem, Self-Confidence, EIL, WE, IC

1. Introduction

With globalization progressing at an unprecedented rate, English continues to play an essential role as a global language with which people from different countries can communicate worldwide. The number of English speakers is approaching 1.5 billion, with 75 percent of them being non-native speakers with diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. This increasing demand for English proficiency highlights the need for well-designed English education policies and curricula to nurture and produce global talents capable of negotiating with people from different parts of the world and addressing common issues through English communication. In Japan, it has been over 130 years since English started to be taught in schools, with students nowadays spending an average of 6 to 10 years learning the language. However, many Japanese people lack confidence in speaking English and hesitate to communicate with foreigners.

Among many approaches proposed for increasing the communicative competence of Japanese learners of English, English as an International Language (EIL), involving the paradigm shift in the way English is viewed, put forth by Smith (1976) has been considered one of the most empowering ideas for EFL learners. Smith (1976) claims "It (English) is yours (no matter who you are) as much as it is mine (no matter who I am)" (p.39). According to him, English does not belong to specific people such as Americans and British but to everyone. Whether you speak English as your first, second, or foreign language does not matter. Further, people can speak English as their own language as well as their mother tongue. Following the idea, people can obtain ownership of English, that is, they can be native speakers of their own English. It is expected that Japanese EFL learners change their negative attitudes toward Japanese English and gain confidence in using their own forms of the language through the introduction of EIL.

Despite EIL's positive effects on EFL learners attested through many studies (e.g., Ke & Suzuki, 2011; Lee et al., 2017; Saito, Heo & Perkins, 2020), there remains resistance to it among Japanese learners of English as well as in the current EFL curricula. The present study touches on some of the sources of this resistance, learner-internal as well as external factors. Then, we discuss our ideas and the pedagogical implications of EIL studies for successfully implementing EIL activities in an EFL context.

2. Standard English Myth and Cultural Impact

2.1 Impact of American and British Cultures on Japan

The influence of American and British cultures has been significant and far-reaching, particularly in the areas of media and entertainment. Especially, American movies, TV shows, music, and fashion have been popular in Japan for many decades, and have had a major influence on Japanese popular culture. The use of English loanwords in Japanese is extremely common, particularly in the areas of fashion, food, and technology. This is because these varieties are seen as prestigious and have high social status, and are therefore considered desirable to learn for the purposes of international communication and career advancement.

2.2 School English Education in Japan

The English education policy in Japan positively highlights "Standard English," such as American and British English, based on the social background described in Section 2.1 and

also the idea of native-speakerism, and has urged students (Japanese EFL learners) to emulate the American or British accent. Thus, many students blindly believe that "Standard English" is the best variety they should learn and speak. According to scholars such as Matsuda (2003) and Hanamoto (2010), many Japanese EFL learners view "Standard English" as a high-status English variety, while considering "non-standard English," including Japanese English, as a low-status English variety. Namely, Japanese EFL learners prefer "Standard English" over their own English (Japanese English) and aim to speak the variety by following the English education policy in Japan.

When viewed from a sociolinguistic perspective, achieving the goal of producing native-like English speakers in Japan is challenging and may not be a realistic expectation. Language and the speaker's culture and identity are two sides of the same coin, inseparable and mutually dependent on each other. In other words, people speak a language by reflecting their culture and identity (Niemeier, 2004). Given that, it is impossible for Japanese EFL learners to speak "Standard English" since they do not have its culture and identity to reflect in their English. Due to this unreasonable and unachievable goal of English education, many learners give up on learning English in the middle and do not have sufficient confidence to communicate in English. However, if you look at it the other way, Japanese EFL learners can be confident in English if they accept and speak Japanese English by reflecting their Japanese culture and identity. It is like empowering Japanese EFL learners with an achievable goal (Japanese English) in the course of their English study rather than complementing their "imperfect" English, saying that "you did your best although you did not quite reach the goal."

3. Dialect Use and Its Influence on Self-esteem, Self-confidence, and L2 Performance

3.1 Correlation between L1 Dialect and L2 Accent

In the previous section, the power of American and British culture in Japan and the English education policy were discussed as external factors hindering the implementation of the EIL paradigm. In this section, we address one of the learners' internal aspects that connect to this unfortunate situation. One can speculate that the negative perception of Japanese English is not only socially imposed but also arises from individual learners' experience of using dialect in general. Some scholars (Choomthong & Manowong, 2020; Matsura & Chiba, 2014) argue that speakers' dialectal backgrounds affect their mindsets toward L2 accent. In other words, people with positive or negative mindsets toward their regional L1 dialects are likely to show positive or negative attitudes toward L2 accent, respectively. Building on the implications from these studies, our previous study (Saito, 2023) hypothesized that one of the internal factors contributing to the negative perception of Japanese English is the unfavorable mindsets of Japanese EFL learners toward their own dialects. We implemented an activity in an English class at a Japanese college and investigated our students' mindsets toward their L1 dialects and attitudes toward Japanese English to examine the correlation between these two components. Through the questionnaire and reading/writing task, we analyzed the correlation. The result showed that the correlation is positive, that is, the students who are negative about their dialects tend to show negative attitudes toward Japanese English or vice versa. One of the findings here is that speakers' overall unfavorable perception of a non-prestige or non-standard variety holds them back from using the given "dialect" in certain situations.

3.2 Impacts of Learners' Attitudes Toward "Accent" on Self-esteem

Considering L1 dialect and L2 accent (Japanese English) are a part of the speaker's culture and identity, it is conceivable that being negative about their own language directly causes low self-esteem and self-confidence, which results in low motivation and performance in their English studies. Jorgensen and Pedersen (1989) declare that learners might develop a sense of inadequacy if their dialects are not recognized and respected in the educational context. Further, Romaine (2000) affirms repeatedly correcting dialects would cause learners to experience a decrease in self-esteem, which leads them to be less confident and motivated to learn English. Also, Reaser and Adger (2008) proclaim that viewing dialects as errors discourages learners from engaging in English study and potentially results in their academic underachievement. Conversely, then, if Japanese EFL learners' L2 accent (Japanese English) is accepted and respected, they will gain self-esteem, which brings more confidence in speaking English, more motivation to practice speaking English, and higher performance in speaking English.

3.3 Effect of L2 Speaking Confidence on L2 Performance

Related to this, many scholars assert that self-confidence is crucial for EFL learners to achieve high L2 performance (e.g., Cho, 2013; Clement, Dornyei, & Noels, 1994; Ortega, 2015). For instance, Cho (2013) affirms that self-confidence and L2 confidence are both interrelated to L2 performance, i.e., EFL learners with high confidence are likely to achieve high performance in speaking English. Additionally, the learners' high performance brings them 'willingness to communicate (WTC)' which connects to the high frequency of using English. Needless to say, the more learners practice speaking English, the more they can develop their English proficiency.

Given the advantages of high self-esteem and self-confidence in speaking English, EIL can be incorporated into English education to help Japanese EFL learners recognize that Japanese English is an equally valid form of English alongside American and British English, and to encourage a positive shift in their attitudes towards the language. Introducing EIL into English education can play an important role in boosting Japanese EFL learners' self-confidence which drastically influences their motivation and performance in English studies. For example, in Saito, Heo, and Perkins (2020), it was found that Japanese EFL learners' overall L2 speaking confidence was moderately increased after learning about EIL and participating in intercultural communication with participants from other expanding circle countries.

4. Introduction of EIL, WE, and IC in a Japanese EFL

4.1 Introduction of World Englishes

People reflect their cultures and identities in their English. Obviously, their cultures and identities are all different, so their Englishes are also different. This viewpoint naturally brings the concept of World Englishes (WE) (e.g., Kachru, 1985; Kirkpatric, 2007) which introduces English use reality where people all over the world speak their own English for global communication. We believe that the first step to change Japanese EFL learners' attitudes toward Japanese English is the introduction of WE at the very beginning of EFL education. During the implementation of EIL activities in our previous research (Saito, Heo & Perkins, 2020; Saito, 2023), we learned that many participants in the study did not know

the reality and misunderstood that many people would speak only two English varieties in the world: American or British English. Further, they believed that they would not be able to successfully communicate with people from different countries by speaking Japanese English due to its accent. Therefore, it is essential for Japanese EFL learners to recognize the reality by knowing about WE and Japanese English, one of the local varieties of English. Especially with the changing dynamics in the global society, a shift from the traditional American and European-centered view of the world to a more diverse and multipolar global landscape, the benefits of introducing WE will be highlighted more and more in the future. There is no better time than now to introduce WE, and it can be a good stepping stone to introducing EIL.

4.2 Introduction of EIL and Japanese English

As introduced in Section 3.1, Saito (2023) examined the relatedness between Japanese speakers' attitudes toward their own Japanese regional dialects and their ideas about Japanese English. Given the result that they are positively correlated (negative mindset toward their L1 dialects paired with a negative perception of Japanese English), it was found that whether EFL learners have negative or positive mindsets toward the L1 dialect can be a criterion for accepting and speaking Japanese English. The approaches for introducing EIL or Japanese English can then differ depending on the dialect group or the dialectal background of learners. For those who have negative perceptions of dialects, more in-depth WE or EIL materials can be provided or explained during the introduction phase, more clearly highlighting the positive impact of EIL. Without a firm belief in a teaching material/method, students often fail to achieve a goal set in a classroom. Those who are positive about dialects, on the other hand, can focus more on the actual practice of EIL, such as intercultural communication with expanding circle country speakers, without detailed introduction to EIL or the value of Japanese English, as they are the ones who can readily accept the idea of EIL and can be positive about Japanese English. The result of Saito (2023) tells us that it is important to recognize who can be negative about Japanese English and encourage them to accept the use of Japanese English to gain self-confidence in speaking English. To realize it, we expect "English as an International Language (EIL)" to change the learners' attitudes toward Japanese English and lead them to accept and speak Japanese English.

4.3 Intercultural Communicative Competence

After introducing WE and EIL, it is also important to introduce 'Intercultural Competence' (IC). Byram (2012) defines IC as the knowledge and abilities that allow individuals to communicate effectively and appropriately with people from diverse cultural backgrounds. Further, Hammer (2015) defines IC as "the capability to shift one's cultural perspective and appropriately adapt one's behavior to cultural differences and commonalities (p.483)." Based on the definition, the use of IC can facilitate genuine global communication by encouraging individuals with diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds to value and comprehend various forms of English, as well as the culture and identity of the person speaking it. Sharifian (2009) also emphasizes that intercultural competence needs to be viewed as a core element of proficiency in English for international communication. In reality, however, many Japanese EFL learners consider themselves as the ones who should understand American or British English and make themselves understood by speaking American or British English. In other words, they do not expect Americans and British to understand Japanese English. In the context of IC, this viewpoint does not describe real global communication. While it is important for Japanese people to strive to understand American and British English, they should also anticipate Americans and British to understand Japanese English. By

understanding each English variety from both sides, people can achieve real mutual understanding in English based on the concept of IC.

5. Conclusions

This study addressed some internal as well as external factors that impede the adoption of EIL or Japanese English in a Japanese EFL context. Factors such as the deep-rooted prestige of American and British culture and English in Japanese society and learner-internal factors such as their perception of "dialect" affecting their attitudes toward Japanese English were discussed. Reflecting on internal and external factors, we affirmed the importance of the introduction of EIL, WE, and IC and suggested how we can effectively introduce these concepts to a Japanese EFL context. By incorporating these three components into English education, learners can realize the reality, recognize numerous local English varieties, and use Japanese English. Once their own English including their culture and identity is accepted and respected through English education, it is expected that they will gain self-esteem and self-confidence that promote their high motivation and performance in English studies. Given these advantages, we will continue to work on the introduction of EIL in an EFL classroom and design concrete activities to further examine our EIL-driven methodologies.

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