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Lessons from the past: Why Lifelong learners often prefer Native Speaker English (NSE) models

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In 2008, as part of an MA degree in Teaching English as a Foreign / Second Language (TEF/SL), I examined the rates of recognition and the language attitudes of 67 older Japanese learners (mean age = 65) towards Standard American English (SAE), Singaporean English and Japanese English. The results predictably indicated a high level of recognition and a correspondingly positive perception towards the native-speaker SAE variety, rather than the non-native Singaporean or Japanese English varieties.

A number of possible variables exist to help explain why older Japanese English learners prefer a native-speaker variety, but perhaps the two most common reasons relate to the learner's desire to learn what they perceive as appropriate English language use (i.e native speaker English) and to learn about their native English speaking teacher's life, lifestyle and culture. While these variables are accepted and well known, the purpose of this article is to introduce a third variable which is not; namely, the historical context between the English language and Japan from 1853 to the present day. To my knowledge, this has not been extensively researched. I also feel that this correlation is more relevant for adult and older Japanese learners', because they were present at the events within Japan from the end of the Second World War (1945), through the rise of Japan's economy, and to the present day.

Certainly, the most significant contact between English and Japan was heralded with the arrival of Commodore Perry's "Black Ships" in 1853 (Befu, 2001), and the opening of Japan that shortly followed. At this stage, records show that the (native-speaker) British Received Pronunciation (RP) English was the most accepted and taught language model within Japanese

The LLL SIG Newsletter

language academies (Smith, 1998). Generally speaking, this was a reflection of the British Empire's significant position in the world power, and specifically of the British war and merchant ships in the region. This illustrates that the Japanese had a very pragmatic approach towards an unavoidable situation.

During the Meiji Period (1868-1912), interactions between Japanese and Western cultures increased (Henshall, 1999: 118). The positive effect of this interaction upon learning English cannot be overstated. A direct result of this was Arinori Mori's (1847 - 1889) proposal in 1872 of changing Japan's official language from Japanese to a simplified form of English (Teruaki 2004). Thus, the English language appears to have been perceived as necessary for international diplomacy. In a further pragmatic move, the arrival of Captain Perry and his Black ships gave the precedent of North American English (SAE) being taught alongside RP English.

However, while some groups advocated positive moves towards internationalization, others focused on strengthening Japan by military means. Indeed, history shows that the rejection of Mori's aforementioned proposal in 1873 (and his assassination in 1889) were a strong indication not only of an official distancing, by some, from all things English, but also of an era of increased nationalism within Japan and of military actions outside Japan.

Ultimately, Japan's use of military force lead to its surrender to and occupation by American forces in 1945. According to Crystal (2004), 'social change always has a linguistic sequel' (2004: 217); thus, the post-war restructuring of virtually Japan's entire infrastructure included not only the adoption of North America's "6-3-3" educational model, but also the introduction of compulsory English education in Junior and Senior High Schools. Significantly, Smith (1988) reports a definitive shift away from the aforementioned RP variety to the now dominant SAE variety. Yet again, this shift from RP to SAE seems to have been a direct result of The U.S.A.'s powerful international standing in general and its political, military and economic influence within Japan; that is, it was once more the most pragmatic move based upon context. Moreover, this shift has

The LLL SIG Newsletter

been broadly reflected within national language policies up until the present day, such as the implementation in 1987 of the Japan Exchange and Teaching Program (JET). Although this program does not in most cases directly affect lifelong learners, the implication seems to be that for the time being at least, learners of English in Japan should continue to look towards native speakers for the most appropriate linguistic models.

Similarly, the notion of learning English from native speakers of English has been reflected within Japan's media. This is particularly evident in the employment of English in Japanese television commercials, bi-lingual television and English language newspapers. In 1986, Haarman demonstrated that English is employed within television commercials as a means of enhancing the appeal of the advertised product or service (i.e. English has prestige). Moody (2006) observes that native speaker models are the dominant models within these shows. In addition, the growth of satellite and cable television in Japan has enabled access to CNN (from the U.S.A) and the BBC (from the U.K). Finally, with regard to written English, two daily English language newspapers (*The Japan Times* and *The Daily Yomiuri*) are available throughout Japan. These newspapers have been observed to employ mixed 'standard American...[and] standard British' varieties (Tanaka, 1995: 179/80)

The findings from this brief article and the implications for English language learning in Japan are summarized below in Table 1:

Table 1: Socio-historical events related to employing native-English speaker linguistic models

Date	Event	Implication for English language learning in Japan
1853	Perry's "Black ships" enter Japanese territory and signal an opening of relations between Japan and the West.	Language academies teach English that emulates the RP linguistic model.

The LLL SIG Newsletter

1872-1873	Arinori Mori proposes that Japan adopt 'Simple English as the official language of Japan instead of Japanese, but the proposal is rejected.	Learning English for international communication is viewed as very important for diplomacy by some groups within Japan. However, nationalist groups opt to strengthen Japan using military and nationalistic ideals. English learning loses government support.
1873-1942	Japan's economic and military strength catches up with and overtakes a number of Western powers.	English language learning continues to be promoted within Japan. However, government support appears to lessen further.
1945	Japan is defeated and occupied by North America. Massive restructuring of Japan's infrastructure.	English language learning is made compulsory. SAE replaces RP as the most appropriate linguistic model.
1987	The Japan Exchange Teaching (JET) program is introduced.	Native speakers come to Japan in large numbers, which reinforces the notion of native speaker English as the ideal linguistic model.
c. 1970 →	English is employed within television and newspapers on a regular basis.	The native speaker linguistic model is further reinforced throughout Japan.

In summary, it is hoped that this paper has helped in understanding the socio-historical causal factors for LLLs' preference for native speaker varieties of English. One of the many variables for this is the long-running relationship with English speaking countries in general and with Great Britain and North America in particular.

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The LLL SIG Newsletter

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