Nurturing global listeners: increasing familiarity and appreciation for world Englishes

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ABSTRACT: The acknowledgment of world Englishes highlights the need for engendering greater linguistic flexibility among students and educators. Pertaining to listening, such flexibility can be addressed partially through materials and experiences providing increased familiarity with varieties of world Englishes. Examples of world Englishes should be provided while maintaining their integrity. Publishers overlook opportunities for increasing familiarity with world Englishes when materials are created that do not depict the Englishes from the regions they are attempting to portray. In addition, institutions often overlook the resources available in their own environment, focusing learner attention on Englishes provided by members of the Inner Circle, and ignoring the rich bounty they have within their own environment. Increased exposure to English varieties is one step. Global listeners must also be reminded to recognize the validity of varieties of English. In particular, they must be reminded to acknowledge and accept the validity of their own. This paper describes the methods used in Chukyo University’s Department of World Englishes for developing familiarity and acceptance of English varieties, including students’ own.

INTRODUCTION

Chukyo University in Nagoya, Japan, has a new Department of World Englishes. And for teachers and administrators, our exposure to “world Englishes” and our experiences related to teaching in this field are relatively new. This paper is to share with the reader our process of learning about the teaching and administering of the listening component of our foundational English classes in respect to world Englishes. Our initial exposure to views of the world Englishes perspective in the classroom came from our good fortune of having Professor Paroo Nihalani as a visiting scholar with us in 2002. Largely through his guidance, encouragement, and his work with our department, our “Workshop on World Englishes in the Classroom” took place in December 2003. Since that time, we have attempted to find, create, evaluate, and employ materials and resources for our students that increase familiarity with varieties of world Englishes. At the end of last year’s conference we were still grappling with the question of how learner familiarity with and appreciation for world Englishes could be fostered in an EFL situation such as exists in Japan.

We need to begin by describing the challenges of promoting the concept of world Englishes in Japan, specifically at a private institution, dependent on having a continuous supply of new students each year in a society where the number of graduating high school students is declining each year. Many students presently studying English at Chukyo University, as is often the case, hold a dream of using English in their future. Our students are considered English majors, world Englishes majors. Some want to communicate with
English speakers from around the world that come to Japan for various reasons, some want to travel, and some are considering graduate study.

In the first two years of study, students concentrate on what are called “Foundation Classes.” These classes focus on raising the English language skills of our Japanese students. They include a department-wide vocabulary component, an extensive reading program, an extensive speaking program, simultaneous repetition, introduction to presentation skills, writing, computer skills, and of course, speaking and listening. In addition, students are required to travel to Singapore in their first year and to Australia, England, or the United States in their second year on three-week study tours. Through these required study abroad programs, we believe success is being met on a variety of levels. One relevant complaint is that people in Singapore speak English with an accent. This concern is easily answered by asking our students if people in Singapore might think that they too have an accent. Traveling to Singapore is a first step in exposing our students to other Asian varieties of English, including their own.

But not all people at our university agree. A teacher from outside our department commented to a world Englishes student that studying in Singapore and Sydney is a waste of time. It is mentioned here because there is a general belief among Japanese people, including many university faculty and students, that American English is best. A second year student who had decided to travel to Boston, instead of Sydney or London, said that he wanted to experience “real English.” So while we are trying to provide a quality product that appeals to students and that serves them well, there are contradictions and compromises that we live with as we improve our department. And in our former Department of English Language and Literature, a prevailing view was that Japanese could not be hired as English language teachers because the students would be disappointed. Remnants of that type of thinking still remain.

During the new department’s first year, Dr Paroo Nihalani pointed out that Japanese teachers in our department were not teaching English language skills classes. Only teachers from the Inner Circles held the responsibility of teaching English language skills. However, progress is being made. Over the past decades, Dean Sanzo Sakai has led the way so that at the present day, we now have English language classes being taught by people from not only Japan, but also India, the Philippines, Singapore, Zambia, and French speaking Canada.

While we continue to deepen our understanding of what our working environment is, we are also trying to engender confidence in our students, and pride and recognition of their own varieties of English.

**JAPANESE VARIETIES**

Helping students assert their ownership of English, their Japanese varieties of English, is one of the initial steps the Department of World Englishes has taken in order to foster an appreciation for world Englishes. The idea, to engender confidence, pride and recognition of their own varieties of English, while exposing them to a multitude of other varieties, perhaps stems from a need we perceive, to promote ownership of English among Japanese students. This was illustrated in the findings from a survey conducted on first and second year high school students in Japan, South Korea, and China in 2003 (Yamasaki, 2004). The survey posed 30 questions focusing on what kind of situations students had used English in in their daily lives outside school. The results showed that in most cases, more
South Korean respondents had tried each activity than their Japanese counterparts. In particular, the questions revealed that far fewer Japanese high school students had tried making telephone calls, exchanging e-mails, or giving directions in English. In addition, the survey asked another 22 questions inviting the examinees to assess their own English language skills, and then compared the results from these self-assessments with their Global Test of English Communication (GTEC) scores. The analysis showed that South Korean students tended to feel more confident about tackling higher-level learning activities even if their scores were lower. In the article, Professor Kensaku Yoshida of Sophia University hypothesized that the higher level of confidence among Korean students was due to the Korean students having more opportunities to use English outside the classroom.

The Department of World Englishes has taken steps to bolster students’ confidence in their English language abilities by increasing the amount of language work completed outside the classroom. The majority of this work focuses on fluency. For example, all first and second year students are required to complete a minimum of ten minutes per week of conversation outside of class with one of their classmates. These conversations are recorded using portable cassette recorders so that students may listen and perform some critical analysis. These outside of class conversations, referred to as “Extensive Speaking,” are a standard component of one of their classes (White, 2003).

In addition to the confidence students might gain through the additional listening and speaking practice outside of class, it is believed that the activity may also facilitate the realization among students of the value of interaction in English with other non-native speakers. Although they share the same first language, they are able to see that they can gain valuable English speaking and listening practice from each other.

Once students make these recordings, the cassettes become valuable resources for further listening practice. The students complete various worksheets which require them to listen to their conversations and conduct various forms of analysis on them, such as transcribing segments, identifying code-switching, breakdowns in communication, etc. This encourages students to notice aspects of their own pronunciation and linguistic performance, as well as those of their partners. Furthermore, teachers encourage students to exchange their own cassettes with other classmates, once again emphasizing the contributions that listening to the English of their peers can make. In the future, we hope to create a library or resource bank of these recordings, perhaps utilizing MP3 files and the Internet, so that students and institutions can share samples of their own English varieties with interested parties.

**BUILDING ENGLISH LANGUAGE COMMUNITY**

In nurturing global listeners, it is also important to allow learners opportunities to experience spontaneous use of English and the exposure to English that students in ESL environments are provided. Students in Japan, as EFL learners, currently cannot expect to go to a café and hear people speaking English. They cannot overhear an English conversation and chime in with their own contribution to the subject. To the knowledge of the authors, researchers have yet to identify the contribution this peripheral listening exposure makes to a language learner’s language skills. Nonetheless, at Chukyo, an environment for such experiences has been created, in what is called The English Learning Support Wing.

In addition to housing open cubicle style offices for the Dean of the department and part-time teachers, the Wing provides students access to computers, the Internet, and various forms of technology (Sakai, 1999). In doing so, it has become the epicenter for
English interaction and group identity among world Englishes majors and their teachers on the campus. On a daily basis, learners have the opportunity to initiate or engage in conversations with their teachers or peers, to overhear English discussions or interactions, and to interject if they so wish.

To increase the amount of language use and peripheral listening opportunities for students, the Wing is restricted to English language use only on even days of the month. For educators teaching in ESL contexts, perhaps it is hard to imagine the need for designated speaking areas or times. For some, the idea may appear to be a form of linguistic imperialism. However, administrators and teachers are aware that the goal here is to create opportunities for language use and to facilitate student pride in their variety of English. And our students are becoming increasingly aware of the need to actively increase their own exposure to and use of English.

Experiments with English-only days at our English Learning Support Wing have had extremely positive results. The understanding is that this practice encourages English learners to push themselves to use their English linguistic resources, as well as practice for future interactions with other English speakers who do not share the same L1, meaning that code-switching, while appropriate with members of the same L1, will not always be an option. Allowing use of students’ L1 or other languages on odd days promotes pride in being bilingual (or multilingual). However, this system has been underway for less than a year and there have been some students who have suggested that English speaking days should be in effect every day. Regardless of the outcome, it has been our experience that at Japanese institutions lacking such designated English speaking areas, students report that it is uncomfortable for them to engage in English conversation outside the classroom. Those institutions unable to find an entire room to designate to English might start with a bench designated for English conversations; however, one cannot overemphasize the role the Learning Support Wing plays in creating a group identity. Students who may not otherwise be in contact with each other form socio-linguistic connections, and are aware of the other members of the English speaking community at Chukyo. They hear each other’s English voices. They model English use for each other. They interact with teachers and visitors in spontaneous conversation and ask for assistance with assignments. All the time, they are becoming more aware that they and their peers do possess ownership of English.

Moving beyond the doors of our classes to the larger school community and the general public is another way in which students are able to see their varieties of English in action. Over the past few years, this has been accomplished through English presentations conducted by third year students in their oral communication courses, another required component within the Department of World Englishes (White, 2002). These presentations are open to all students, with invitations sent out to all classes in advance in order to encourage attendance. Some teachers of first and second year students have brought their classes to these events, in many cases requiring them to report on the presentations they listened to when they returned to their own classes. Participation by the members of the entire department helps foster group identity among our students as English speakers. In Japan, this may be a crucial factor, as many universities arrange classes into student groups which move from one course to the next as a unit, and there may be little or no interaction between the students in different groups entering the same year, and much less with their junior and senior classmates.

In addition, in 2003, Associate Professor D’Angelo added to the development of an English speaking community by bringing students from his open college classes. Open
college classes are offered to non-matriculated learners. Students were presenting and fielding questions from various students as well as members of the community at large as described here by another associate professor of our department, Misa Okumura:

I was very much impressed with the way the students presented their opinions and materials. It must have taken them many hours for research and preparation for this event. What impressed me most was the encounter of Oral Communication 5 students and open college students. The title of the presentation was “the Women’s Place after Marriage”. Five elderly students from D’Angelo sensei’s class were listening and after the presentation, they asked many questions to the students. They had very interesting and heated discussion in English! I was also glad that some students from my seminar and American History classes asked me to listen to their presentations. Usually, I am the one who speaks and they are the ones who listen. But this time, they were the ones who spoke and I was the one who listened and the point is that they loved it so much!

The presentations, originally conducted with posters as visuals, have developed into PowerPoint presentations, and we hope the audience for the ones conducted in December 2004 will include potential employers from various companies. Students field questions in English from their audiences and listen to each other’s presentations. English is being used for actual communication beyond the confines of the classroom.

We believe the opening of our campus to the community is an integral part of building a community of global listeners. It also supports the aims set out in 2002 by the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), as summarized by Kachru (2003), which formulated a “Strategic Plan to Cultivate ‘Japanese with English Abilities’.” The general goals of the Action Plan state, “Through instruction, basic and practical communication abilities will be acquired so that the entire public can conduct daily conversation and exchange information in English.”

PRIDE AND RECOGNITION

In one of our first year oral communication courses, we are currently using the book Nice Talking with You (Kenny and Woo, 2004), a text that includes a CD in the back. Since we are focusing on nurturing global listeners, let us take a moment here to praise those publishers who have adopted the practice of including the audio CD in the back of the book, thus helping to make listening practice more accessible to learners and engendering student autonomy. Providing CDs within the textbooks is considered a necessary feature for textbooks we select. This textbook was also chosen because the recordings on the student CD are of conversations between Japanese students. We hope that this will emphasize the value we place on Japanese students’ own variety of English, and that students will increase their appreciation of near peer role models and recognition of Japanese English as an acceptable variety of English.

EXPOSURE TO OTHER VARIETIES OF WORLD ENGLISHES

So far, we have discussed our beginning efforts to develop familiarity with and appreciation for Japanese Englishes. Now, we would like to discuss fostering awareness, familiarity, and appreciation for the wealth of other varieties of Englishes.
In a recent article, Morrow (2004) suggests, “The WE approach stresses that rather than selecting a single variety as the one to emulate and teach, the important thing is to expose learners to as many varieties as possible so as to prepare them to encounter English as it is actually used in the world . . .” Jenkins (2000) notes that with the rapid increase in the number of different varieties of English in the world, the key is not necessarily attempting to provide exposure to every variety, but encouraging flexibility. She explains how exposure to a wide range of varieties of accent will help learners develop the ability to interpret other pronunciations than those of their teachers and co-L1 speakers.

At Chukyo, we agree that exposure to more varieties of Englishes can be a major catalyst for flexibility, and thus exposure to many varieties is definitely at the heart of our efforts. We are asking ourselves how else we can expose our learners to a greater variety.

Probably the most obvious step is to put together a teaching staff that embodies this philosophy. Hiring teachers from diverse backgrounds is one way to literally bring this message to the forefront of the classroom. Chukyo currently has teachers from Inner Circle countries such as Australia, Canada, England, and the United States, as well as teachers from French speaking Canada, India, the Philippines, Singapore, Zambia, and Japan. It should be noted that in Japan a person from an Outer Circle country will sometimes be invited to teach at a university, but it does not seem to happen often that more than one person from an Outer Circle is invited. We hope to continue to increase the varieties of English represented by our teachers. It is a conscious effort that is being made.

**TRIPS OVERSEAS**

Our Department of World Englishes has established as part of its curriculum a class that includes a three-week study tour at the Language Teaching Institute (LTI) at the Regional Language Center (RELC) in Singapore. It is required of all students. Following a term-long class at Chukyo, groups of students travel to Singapore during school breaks in August, February or March. Singapore was selected for the following reasons: Japan is a part of Asia. It is an ideal place to introduce Chukyo students to the idea of studying and learning abroad while being exposed to varieties of English. Students have opportunities to observe the Englishes of Singaporean and Chinese students, hotel staff, as well as members of the diverse general population. Students also meet with a concentration of Singaporean teachers. When this program began, the majority of teachers at LTI were from Inner Circle countries. But now, at our urging, the majority of teachers are from Singapore. And lastly, because we live in Japan, being close to the same time zone is also an attractive feature (Morrison and Foo, 2002).

The following academic year, all second year students are required to participate in a three-week course in one of the following destinations: Surrey, England; Boston, Massachusetts; or Sydney, Australia. Dean Sakai also has an internship program in which students co-teach at primary schools in Los Angeles or work in the town hall in Kankakee, Illinois. This is another aspect of our curriculum that we hope to expand upon.

We are currently developing projects for students to conduct their own research while participating in these trips to Singapore and other locations, such as collecting their own samples of spoken English, and keeping audio and photo journals of their experiences, etc. All students can record samples from individuals they interact with and create a bank of linguistic resources to be reported on and shared with other learners.
TEXTBOOKS

When selecting textbooks, special care needs to be taken to ensure that the accompanying audio materials make legitimate representations of the accents or varieties they claim to represent. During the text selection process, we have actively sought texts that provide many varieties of English. However, when we have listened to the audio materials accompanying them, we have thought the actors were from the Inner Circles. From letters sent out to publishers, we found many of our assumptions to be true:

- *English Firsthand*, by Mark Helgesen, (Longman, 2004) – Mark Helgesen expressed both delight and agreement. Delight that we are using the books (there are different levels), and agreement that learners need to hear non-native speakers using English. At first, we found it interesting that he was only “pretty sure [that] all the speakers are from the countries they represent.” We learned a little bit about the publishing of a language textbook in our exchanges. Professor Helgesen checked with his editor Mike Rost, who had supervised the recording sessions, to confirm that the speakers were from the countries they supposedly were from. His response was, “Yes . . . the speakers are all from the countries they represent. We were trying to find people who spoke with very high comprehensibility and a comfort level in the recording booth.” He closed by saying that he was glad that Chukyo University’s Department of World Englishes liked having non-natives on the recording: “We think it is important, both because students will be hearing non-native speakers of English and as a model of successful language learning it says to the student, ‘They did it. You can too.’”
- *Englishe of the World*, by Judy Yoneoka and Jun Arimoto (Sanshusha, 1999) – speakers are all from the countries they represent.
- *Select Readings* by Linda Lee and Erik Gundersen (Oxford University Press, 2002) – even though this is a reading text, we were still concerned with the audio versions of the readings. For example, in chapter 2, there is a unit entitled “Mika’s Homestay in London.” The reading is by and about a college student from Japan. In the recording that accompanies the text, the speaker does not sound at all Japanese. When we contacted the publisher, we were told that all the people on the recording were American actors, with one from Britain. There are other main characters that are Japanese, and non-Japanese also play them. The instructors who are currently using this book may decide to continue using this text, and because it is not conducive to promoting a Japanese variety of English, it will become necessary to identify teachers willing to make new audio versions if we want to continue with the audio aspect and the publisher will not redo them.

In Japan, sales representatives make regular visits to the offices of university instructors. We have found that publishers are open to suggestions, such as including CDs in textbooks, so we now tell them that we will only consider using a text if the audio recordings include authentic varieties of world Englishes.

EXTENSIVE LISTENING

Adding audiocassettes of graded readers to our library is another avenue for nurturing global listeners. We have notified publishers of our need for narrators who embody varieties of Englishes. Because the books are already graded according to lexical and grammatical complexity, along with overall length, students can gradually increase their comfort levels with listening texts. Students may choose to listen without looking at the
books, read along while listening to the texts, or listen to the cassettes after reading the books (Brown and Waring, 2003) and be exposed to the varieties of world Englishes at the same time.

**FILM**

Professor Nihalani suggests the potential benefit of exposing learners to many varieties of pronunciation, both native and non-native, in order to enrich their repertoires, but emphasizes that exposure should be systematically incorporated. Chukyo is attempting to accomplish this partially through its required movie-viewing program. Students watch segments of movies outside of class for approximately 30 minutes each week. Dividing the films into segments and having the students watch the films over several weeks allows students to digest more, and become accustomed to the varieties of accents provided by the actors. The students also complete worksheets, which are designed with the aim of assisting comprehension. In class, time is allotted for discussing the films (Morrison, 1997). Watching the films outside of class provides learners with additional exposure to varieties of English and time spent on listening activities. The final segment of the movie viewing usually involves a cloze exercise from a segment already viewed for general comprehension. The selected scene is usually shown three times, and students can elect to watch this section again. This allows learner attention to focus on aspects of pronunciation.

Now, one of the challenges is to create a bank of films that are comprehensible and enjoyable for the students while providing exposure to as many varieties of English as possible. Attempts are being made within our department to select such films. Perhaps this is one of the ways in which various individuals, organizations, and institutions can assist each other, as local knowledge of such movies can be shared among communities around the world, and some ratings can be provided as to levels of story complexity and linguistic difficulty.

**THE INTERNET**

The Internet offers a multitude of possibilities (actually daunting) for exposure to varieties of English from around the world. The following are sites we have found useful for listening to varieties of Englishes.

George Mason University’s “Speech Accent Archive” is excellent. It examines the accented speech of speakers from many different language backgrounds reading the same sample paragraph. At the time of writing, there were 351 speech samples. Such an archive provides a fantastic introduction to varieties of Englishes. A very simple but fun activity can be to play the linguistic specialist from My Fair Lady, select a sample from a region and see if a partner can guess where it’s from. People traveling to various regions could benefit from this experiential insight into phonological generalizations (the jargon may be confusing, but the samples “speak for themselves”).

Teachers preparing their students for a particular variety of English to be watched in a film, such as when our students were about to watch *My Big Fat Greek Wedding*, can make use of the archive to introduce that particular variety of English. Teachers might ask students to complete a dictation, and then discuss those areas that were unintelligible.

The international corpus of English http://www.ucl.ac.uk/english-usage/ice/soundaus.htm provided by University College, London is another site offering sound files that can assist in familiarizing teachers and learners with regional varieties.
However, these sites are probably more attractive to linguists than undergraduate students, as the content of what the speakers say does not change. And while teachers of English have found the site extremely enjoyable to explore, students will most likely be interested in sites offering more content-based materials. Perhaps for our students at Chukyo, resources like http://www.engtap.greatnow.com provide better types of opportunities to listen to and develop familiarity with varieties of world Englishes. Students can listen to MP3 files of interviews conducted with speakers from a wide variety of backgrounds. Todd Beuckens, the designer of the site, began it as part of his MA project at Temple University in Tokyo. He intends to continue increasing the sound files available, with a goal of two sound files for every day of the year. Todd grants permission to download to teachers and students for educational purposes. He suggests using the site with the following steps: First, listen with pictures. Second, listen and take a quiz. Third, listen to and read the transcript. Fourth, listen to spoken questions and then reply.

One teacher at Chukyo has already made listening to the recordings on this site a routine homework requirement, with students selecting the topic/speaker and then reflecting on their experiences. All students were given a pre-listening test at the beginning of the academic year and will receive a post-listening test at the end of the same academic year. The following are comments from students after visiting these sites:

By the way, this is a first time for me to listen to Indian’s English. I felt it was a little difficult to listen to clearly. I want to talk to people from various countries. I think it will be an interesting experience. I enjoyed listening to these interviews. I want to do more this type of activities.

I listened to English conversation. First, without looking at questions. I took memo during listening it. Then, I answered five questions. I missed two questions out of the five. I think that the post office in Hong Kong don’t differ from that of Japanese. I enjoyed listening to English very [much] with foreign people of various countries.

A wide variety of world Englishes can also be heard through regional radio stations that can be heard over the Internet. Listening journals can be assigned. These may require students to complete a certain amount of time on listening to English resources of their choice, with teachers acting as facilitators to make the students’ use of this time as effective as possible.

In his presentation at Chukyo, Hino (2003) discussed his nationwide “English for Millions” radio program, on which, in 1989 and 1990, he invited non-native speakers of English from various countries for discussions. Academic institutions would do well to follow Hino’s example by broadcasting interviews with visiting lecturers, exchange students, and their own faculty and students over their PA systems at lunch and making recordings of these interviews a part of their world Englishes audio library.

IN CLOSING

Many of the members of the World Englishes teaching community at Chukyo are part-time and only teach a few classes there each week. While they are naturally a part of world Englishes, they may not feel confident in teaching about world Englishes. “It may be difficult for many teachers to see beyond the assumptions that they make about language learning and teaching, and about language itself unless we are engaged in questioning what we are doing professionally to enable learners to learn a language... So my hypothesis is that dialogue is necessary to enable teachers to move beyond their own assumptions...” (Barfield, 2004).
Perhaps we teacher-administrators can provide a catalyst by collecting resources to create a greater understanding of the concept of world Englishes among teachers that can then be passed on to students. Morrow (2004) recommends the book, *The Story of English* (McCrum, Cran and MacNeil, 1986), and video series (McCrum, Cran, MacNeil, and Pett, 1986), which portrays the history and spread of English along with variations and varieties. Also, a few teachers have been discussing what types of materials we could utilize in creating texts related more directly to our curriculum.

Administrators could (if time would allow) facilitate discussion among teachers within their institution to encourage reflection and deepen understanding of the philosophy of world Englishes and its implications for the program. Such discussions, naturally, should also be encouraged among practitioners throughout the world Englishes community.

To assist institutions in connecting at the institution level and being able to provide a plethora of resources for their teachers, Larry Smith (2004) suggests providing institutions with a discount for memberships for associations and journals to aid in the process of connecting to English Language Teaching (ELT) from an Asian Englishes perspective. It is important to have such journals as the *Asian English Studies* from the Japanese Association of Asian Englishes and make them accessible to our teachers in order to increase their understanding of what world Englishes means.

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