

- MENU
- PRINTABLE VERSION
- HELP & FAQs

Non-Center English Teachers in Japan: A Case Study

Ayako Shibuya

**Soka University, Toyo Eiwa University,
Temple University Japan**

This study investigates opinions and attitudes of and towards non-Center English teachers (two Indian and one Brazilian) and their Japanese students. Survey and interview data show that the majority of student participants do not seem to have any strong opinion about non-Center teachers, and very few students show negative attitudes towards them. On the other hand, many student participants display positive attitudes towards learning English from these non-

Center teachers, and perceive them as successful role models, sources of exposure to varieties of Englishes, and informants about varieties of different cultural points of view. Interview data reveal non-Center teacher participants have both negative and positive experiences teaching at Japanese schools. Based on these results, more acknowledgement and respect for non-Center teachers is needed, and a call for teacher diversity in Japan is suggested that may create better understandings of the world for Japanese students.

本論文は、non-Center出身（ここでは2人のインド人と1人のブラジル人）の英語教師と彼らに対する日本人学生の意見や態度について研究したものである。アンケートとインタビューの結果から、大多数の学生は教員に対して特に強い意見を持っておらず、また否定的な態度を示した学生は非常に少なかった。一方で、多くの学生がnon-Center教員を学習者の模範的存在として、諸英語に触れる機会として、また世界の文化や観点を知る情報源として肯定的な態度を示した。Non-Center教員のインタビューからは、日本の学校で教鞭を執る中で、彼らが否定的、肯定的両方の経験をしていることが明らかとなった。これらの結果をもとに、筆者は日本の英語教育において、non-Center教員に対する一層の尊重が必要だとし、日本人学生の世界に対する理解を深めるためにも教員の多様性が必要だと論じている。

Introduction

English is currently used by almost 2 billion people around the world and is indisputably gaining a status of an international language (e.g., Jenkins, 2000). Among those, 300 million people use English as their mother tongue (MT), 1 billion as an official language, and 700 million as

foreign language (Crystal, 1997; Honna, 1999; 2002). In the field of English language teaching (ELT), more than 80% of the present world ELT professionals are nonnative English speaking teachers (NNEST) (Canagarajah, 1999a), and roles and collaborations of native English speaking teachers (NEST) and NNEST have been widely discussed in the field, especially in the U.S. (e.g., Amin, 1997; Bailey, 2002; Braine, 1999; Cook, 1999; Lee, 2000; Liu, 1999; Medgyes, 1992; 1994). Such NNEST often have varied backgrounds, and sometimes it is difficult or even inappropriate to define their MT and L1 (e.g., Jenkins, 2000; Yano 2001). Kachru's (1985) traditional three circles therefore have received a call for modification (Yano, 2001), owing to the current diversity of users of Englishes in the world.

At the same time, notions of *Center* and *Periphery*, originally taken from Galtung's (1980) political-economic notion, are also discussed. The Center includes powerful Western countries, and the Periphery the less developed countries; therefore, Center Speakers of English are primarily from the communities from North America, Britain, Australia, and New Zealand (*i.e.*, Kachru's (1985; 1992) inner circle), and Periphery Speakers of English are users of English with possible display of sound multilingual competence, including the Center's standard as well as indigenized variants (Canagarajah, 1999a; 1999b; Phillipson, 1992). My purpose in this paper is not to discuss the definition of English speakers such as native/nonnative and Center/Periphery; however, considering the teacher participants' background, I will use *non-Center English teacher* to refer to them throughout this paper.

Based on the current status of Englishes in the world, scholars (e.g., Honna, 1999; 2002; Suzuki, 1999; 2001) have written that Japanese students will have more opportunities to use English not only with Center speakers such as American and British people, but also with non-Center speakers such as Asian people, mainly because of Japan's geographical location and the rapid globalization of the world.

However, the current Japanese ELT context does not seem to hold enough professionals who reflect the current status of English speakers in the world. For example, 68 % of the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) program participants were from the U.S.A. or the U.K. from 1987-2001 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2002). The target English language seems only Anglo-American English (Nakayama, 1989), and NEST almost always refers to American and British teachers. Interestingly, NNEST almost always refers to Japanese teachers (Suzuki, 1999; 2001; Tsuda, 2000). This current Japanese ELT situation does not raise pedagogical awareness of varieties of Englishes in the world for students, as "unfamiliar varieties are likely to be seen as 'wrong' by [Japanese] students" (Goddard, 2001).

The purpose of the paper is to explore Japanese students' viewpoints on having non-Center teachers, rarities at present in Japanese ELT, and such teachers' experiences. Therefore my research questions are as follows:

- 1) How do students of non-Center teachers feel about having these English teachers?
- 2) How do non-Center English teachers in Japan perceive themselves as ELT professionals? What are their experiences like?

Methods

Participants

Non-Center Teacher Participants

Two female Indian teachers at a private university and one male Brazilian teacher at a private junior high school participated in this study. All participants' schools are located in the western part of Tokyo (see Table 1 for the demographics of the teacher

participants). Participant A was born and raised in India. She explained that her most competent language was English, while stating her MT was Tamil. She obtained her MA in TESOL from an American graduate school. Participant B was born and raised in India and had lived in New Zealand and Thailand. Her MA in TESOL is also from an American graduate school. She elucidated that, in her case, it was difficult to define her MT and L1, admitting both Hindi and English could be considered her MT and L1. Participant C was born and raised in Brazil, therefore both MT and L1 are Portuguese. His MA is also in TESOL from an American graduate school.

Participants

Student Participants

Participants included 248 Japanese students (150 second-year junior high school and 98 university) who completed the questionnaires, and 5 university students (2 female freshman and 3 male sophomore) who participated in the student interview.

Table 1: Demographics of the Non-Center Teacher Participants

| Participants (home country) | School Type | MT | L1 | Other Languages | Education | MA | Years of Teaching in Japan |
|-----------------------------|----------------------------|---------------|------------|-----------------|--------------------------|-------------|----------------------------|
| A (India) | University | Tamil | English | Hindi | India, USA | TESOL (USA) | 1.5 years |
| B (India) | University | Hindi/English | | | India, NZ, Thailand, USA | TESOL (USA) | 1.5 years |
| C (Brazil) | Jr. High (some university) | Portuguese | Portuguese | English | Brazil, USA | TESOL (USA) | 1.5 years |

Table 2: Student Participants Information for Survey

| School Type | N | % |
|-------------|-----|------|
| University | 98 | 40% |
| Junior High | 150 | 60% |
| Total | 248 | 100% |

Materials

Survey

A set of questionnaires with mainly open-ended questions (e.g., *Do you find any general differences in Indian/Brazilian teacher's English from the Englishes of your past teachers? If you do, what is your opinion about them?*) in Japanese language was prepared (see Appendix A). Students took about 15-20 minutes to complete the questionnaires, mainly in the beginning of a class period.

Interviews

Semi-structured group or individual interviews were conducted with teacher participants and their students (see Appendix B). For the two Indian teachers, the initial interviews were conducted in spring 2001, and the follow-up interviews were conducted in July 2002. Questionnaire items were used for student interviews. Interviews were conducted in English with teacher participants and in Japanese with student participants. Each lasted 20-40 minutes and was recorded with the participants' written consent.

Analysis

Student Survey

Frequencies and percentages were calculated for 3 items: the participants' (a) past experiences with non-Japanese teachers, (b) assumption of non-Center teacher's mother tongue, and (c) attitudes towards non-Center teacher's English. Mahalanobis distances were checked with the Regression procedure in SPSS for Windows, and no multivariate outliers were found.

Interviews

Recorded interviews, both student and teacher interviews, were transcribed and translated. Back translations and member checking were also done to increase credibility (Brown, 2001).

Results and Discussion

Students' Experiences and Perceptions

Table 3: Students' Past Teacher Experiences

| | N | % |
|--------------------------|-----|-------|
| Center Teacher Only | 216 | 87.1% |
| Some non-Center Teachers | 32 | 12.9% |
| Total | 248 | 100% |

As table 3 shows, 87.1% of the student participants had only Center teachers in the past. About 13% had non-Center teachers

before, and most such teachers were from private English schools that the students attended outside of the formal school system.

Table 4 shows that only about 30% of the student participants guessed right for their non-Center teachers' mother tongues, while 69 % of them guessed incorrectly, and 26% guessed it was English.

Table 4: Students' Presumption of Non-Center Teacher's Mother Tongue

| | N | % |
|-------------------------|-----|-------|
| Incorrect (Not English) | 107 | 43.1% |
| Incorrect (English) | 65 | 26.2% |
| Correct | 76 | 30.6% |
| Total | 248 | 100% |

As shown in table 5, 4% of the student participants expressed negative opinions about non-Center teachers' Englishes. The majority of them (about 63%) mentioned that they could not detect any differences between their non-Center teacher and the other teachers' Englishes. However, 33% said that they could tell the differences, but added that either it did not matter to them as learners or having such teachers was actually positive for them. Details will be explained below.

Open-ended questions about non-Center teachers' Englishes, benefits and shortcomings of having non-Center teachers, and student interviews show more details of the student participants' attitudes and opinions about non-Center teachers. Table 6 shows the summary.

Example quotes of negative attitudes towards having non-Center teachers are: "He has a slight accent, so sometimes I

Table 5: Attitudes towards non-Center Teacher's Englishes

| | N | % |
|--------------------------|-----|-------|
| Negative | 10 | 4.0% |
| Positive/Does not matter | 82 | 33.1% |
| No differences | 156 | 62.9% |
| Total | 248 | 100% |

have trouble understanding" (junior high, from survey) and "His English is not real. I cannot learn 'real' pronunciation" (junior high, survey). All such negative comments were made by junior high school students, and such comments were mainly about pronunciation. These negative attitudes may due to the student participants' immaturity. "I can easily imagine 14-year old students picking up on teachers' subtle differences of pronunciation by comparing with other teachers." University students who are more mature, however, expressed no negative attitudes towards non-Center teachers.

Secondly, a majority of the student participants stated that they could not tell any differences in their non-Center teachers' Englishes. Example comments are: "Is English spoken in India different from other countries' English? I cannot tell [the difference] so much. It may not matter much to us, because of our [low] English proficiency" (university student, from interview). One student participant mentioned that she thought the non-Center teacher was from the U.S., until I gave out the questionnaire in her class. As long as the teacher is a non-Japanese, the Japanese student may not even imagine that the teacher is from countries other than Center.

Table 6: Students' Attitudes towards Non-Center Teachers

| Negative | Does not matter | Positive |
|---|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pronunciation • Not “real” English | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cannot tell the difference | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Role model • Awareness of varieties of English • Awareness of non-Center cultures |

Thirdly, many students showed positive attitudes towards non-Center teachers. Students see non-Center teachers as a role model of successful L2 learners by saying, “His mother tongue is not English, but he speaks it very well, which makes me want to study English hard” (junior high, survey), and “I feel that she knows what we the learners have trouble understanding because her mother tongue is not English” (university, interview).

Also, many students expressed their increased awareness of varieties of Englishes in the world as follows: “Thanks to her, I’ve become aware that English is the world’s official language” (university, survey). Another student also wrote: “I think American English is not the only English, so it is a good opportunity for me to have exposure with other types of English” (university, survey). By knowing these real users of varieties of Englishes, the students seemed to deepen their understandings of the current status of Englishes in the world.

Students also expressed their increased awareness of non-Center countries and the cultures thanks to such teachers. One student stated: “I was a little biased about India before. But thanks to her, I was able to learn Indian cultures which I did not know before. Now I feel that I want to know more about the country” (university, survey). Asked her opinion about having non-Center English teachers at school, one student explained:

I think it is good [to have non-Center teachers]. It’s because American and British teachers tend to teach the similar things, in terms of their cultures. Um, people talk about cross-cultural understandings and so on, but I think it is meaningless to learn only American and British cultures. So, learning about India and other things when I am a high school or university student gives me a really good influence (university, interview).

Another student also elucidated the benefit he could gain by having non-Center teachers as follows:

I can learn non-Western points of view—not only those of the English-speaking countries. I think Japanese tend to stick to the Western views. But I can think globally [in her class], and it’s interesting. Well, I think it’s because I want to be an internationally active person in the future, though. I like learning dialects and ways of saying certain things by talking with people from different countries. So, I even prefer having such teachers [who are from non-Western countries] (university, interview).

Many Japanese students, especially more mature university students, seem to enjoy and appreciate the advantages they receive from the non-Center teachers.

Non-Center Teachers' Experiences

Below are brief descriptions of non-Center teachers' experiences in Japanese ELT. They seem to have both negative and positive experiences with colleagues. One participant mentioned other faculty member's bias toward varieties of English as follows:

This was about another professor when I first got here...I remember him asking me, "Where are you from," and I said, "India." And, something something, we talked. And he said, "Oh, but you speak Indian English." Kind of like, looking down. So, I was like, "Yeah." You know?...I remember thinking, "Hmm. That was funny. Why should it bother him that I'm from India?" You know. (Interview)

Another participant, on the other hand, mentioned the positive reaction of the school principal who welcomes teacher diversity, as quoted below:

In fact I felt really good the other day, when I was having dinner with Japanese teachers. We talked about Brazil, they asked me questions, and we discussed. And the principal said, "You know, it's really good to have someone who is not American this time." Like, "Someone who can bring something different." And I thought, that's really cool. (Interview)

Non-Center teachers seem to have different kinds of experiences depending on other people's attitudes towards having teacher diversity in the field.

Conclusion

Bailey (2002), who has worked in a university in Hong Kong where there were diversified teachers, writes:

The students themselves must understand the importance of having good language learning role models...and of hearing a range of international accents and different varieties of English...in many contexts, the presence of speakers of several varieties of English can be a great asset to the learners as well. (p. 5)

Having teacher diversity can actually reflect diverse users of Englishes in the world whom our students eventually encounter in their futures. This will also help create better understandings of the world for Japanese students. As ELT professionals who speak varieties of Englishes are becoming acknowledged worldwide (*e.g.*, Braine, 1999), ELT professionals in Japan also need to respect and acknowledge the roles that non-Center teachers can and do play in today's ELT environment.

References

- Amin, N. (1997). Race and identity of the non-native ESL teacher. *TESOL Quarterly*, 31(3), 580-583.
- Bailey, K. (2002). Declarative knowledge, procedural knowledge, and the varieties of English we teach. *NNEST Newsletter*, 4(2), 1-5.
- Braine, G. (Ed.). (1999). *Non-native educators in English language teaching*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Brown, J. D. (2001). *Using surveys in language programs*. Cambridge: Cambridge University.
- Canagarajah, A. S. (1999a). Interrogating the “native speaker fallacy”: Non-linguistic roots, non-pedagogical results. In G. Braine (Ed.), *Non-native educators in English language teaching* (pp. 77-92). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Canagarajah, A. S. (1999b). *Resisting linguistic imperialism in English teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Cook, V. (1999). Going beyond the native speaker in language teaching. *TESOL Quarterly*, 33(2), 185-210.
- Crystal, D. (1997). *English as a global language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Galtung, J. (1980). *The true worlds: A transnational perspective*. New York: The Free Press.
- Goddard, J. (2001). Which varieties of English do you teach at your Jr./Sr. high school? *The Language Teacher*, 25(8), 21-24.
- Honna, N. (1999). *Ajia wo tsunageru eigo*. [English connects Asia]. Tokyo: Alc.
- Honna, N. (2002) (Ed.). *Ajia eigo jiten*. [Dictionary of Asian Englishes]. Tokyo: Sanseido.
- Jenkins, J. (2000). *The phonology of English as an international language*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kachru, B. B. (1985). Standards, codification and sociolinguistic realism: The English language in the outer circle. In R. Quirk & H. G. Widdowson (Eds.), *English in the world: Teaching and learning the language and literatures* (pp. 11-30). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kachru, B. B. (1992). *The alchemy of English*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Lee, I. (2000). Can a nonnative English speaker be a good English teacher? *TESOL Matters*, 10(1), 19.
- Liu, J. (1999). Nonnative-English-speaking-professionals. *TESOL Quarterly*, 33(1), 85-102.
- Medgyes, P. (1992). Native or nonnative: Who’s worth more? *ELT Journal*, 46(4), 340-349.
- Medgyes, P. (1994). *The non-native teacher*. London : Macmillan Publishers.
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan. (2002). *The number of JET participants from 1987 to 2001*. Retrieved September 22, 2002, from <www.mofa.go.jp/j_info/visit/jet/participants.html>.
- Nakayama, Y. (1989). Some suggestions for multinational Englishes: A sociolinguistic view of the language. *JALT Journal*, 11(1), 26-35.
- Phillipson, R. (1992). *Linguistic imperialism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Suzuki, T. (1999). *Nihonjin ha naze eigo ga dekinai* [Why Japanese are poor at English]. Tokyo: Iwanami Press.
- Suzuki, Y. (2001). *Eigo ha iranai?* [We do not need English?]. Tokyo: PHP.
- Tsuda, Y. (2000). *Eigo beta no susume*. [Advice to be poor at English]. Tokyo: KK Best Sellers.
- Yano, Y. (2001). World Englishes in 2000 and beyond. *World Englishes*, 20(2), 119-131.

Appendix A

English Translation of the Student Survey

Your teachers' information

Your teacher's name: ()

Name of the class: ()

About you and your opinions

1. Where are the home countries of your past non-Japanese English teachers?

| Schools | Number of non-Japanese teachers | Their home countries |
|---------|---------------------------------|----------------------|
|---------|---------------------------------|----------------------|

Elementary: _____

Jr. High: _____

Senior High: _____

Others: _____

2. What do you think your teacher's mother tongue is?
3. Do you find any general differences in the Indian/Brazilian teacher's English from the Englishes of your past teachers? If you do, what is your opinion about them?

4. Do you think there is any unique benefit of having an Indian/Brazilian teacher? Is there any shortcoming of having an Indian/Brazilian English teacher? Please explain in detail.

Benefits (e.g., *I can learn Indian/Brazilian culture*):

Shortcomings (e.g., *I cannot learn American culture*):

Appendix B

Interview Guidelines for Non-Center Teachers

1. In the beginning of the year 2001, we discussed how Japanese students "admire American culture," "want to speak American English," "want to study in America," and how it may cause you anxiety in teaching. Do those anxieties remain the same or have they changed in some ways? If changed, can you describe how and to what extent they have changed?
2. Do you think you have any advantages/disadvantages as a non-Center teacher?
3. What do you think your contributions are as a non-Center teacher in a Japanese university?
4. What do you think other teachers think about having a non-Center teacher?