

**The complex and rapidly changing sociolinguistic position of the English language  
in Japan: A summary of English language contact and use**

**Abstract:** This paper investigates the role of English in Japan, outlining its current status and use. The paper begins with a critical review of the World Englishes model as it relates to the categorization of Japan within the expanding circle of English use and continues with a brief history of English language contact with the country. It then examines the changing role of English in the Japanese education system and media. This is followed by a discussion of the influence of English on the Japanese language as well as the role which the English language plays within the discourses of *nihonjinron* and *kokusaika*. The paper concludes with a call for empirical research to be conducted investigating the spread, acquisition and attitudes towards English in Japan.

**Keywords:** English in Japan, World Englishes, language attitudes, sociolinguistics, *nihonjinron*, *kokusaika*

**Introduction: World Englishes and English in Japan**

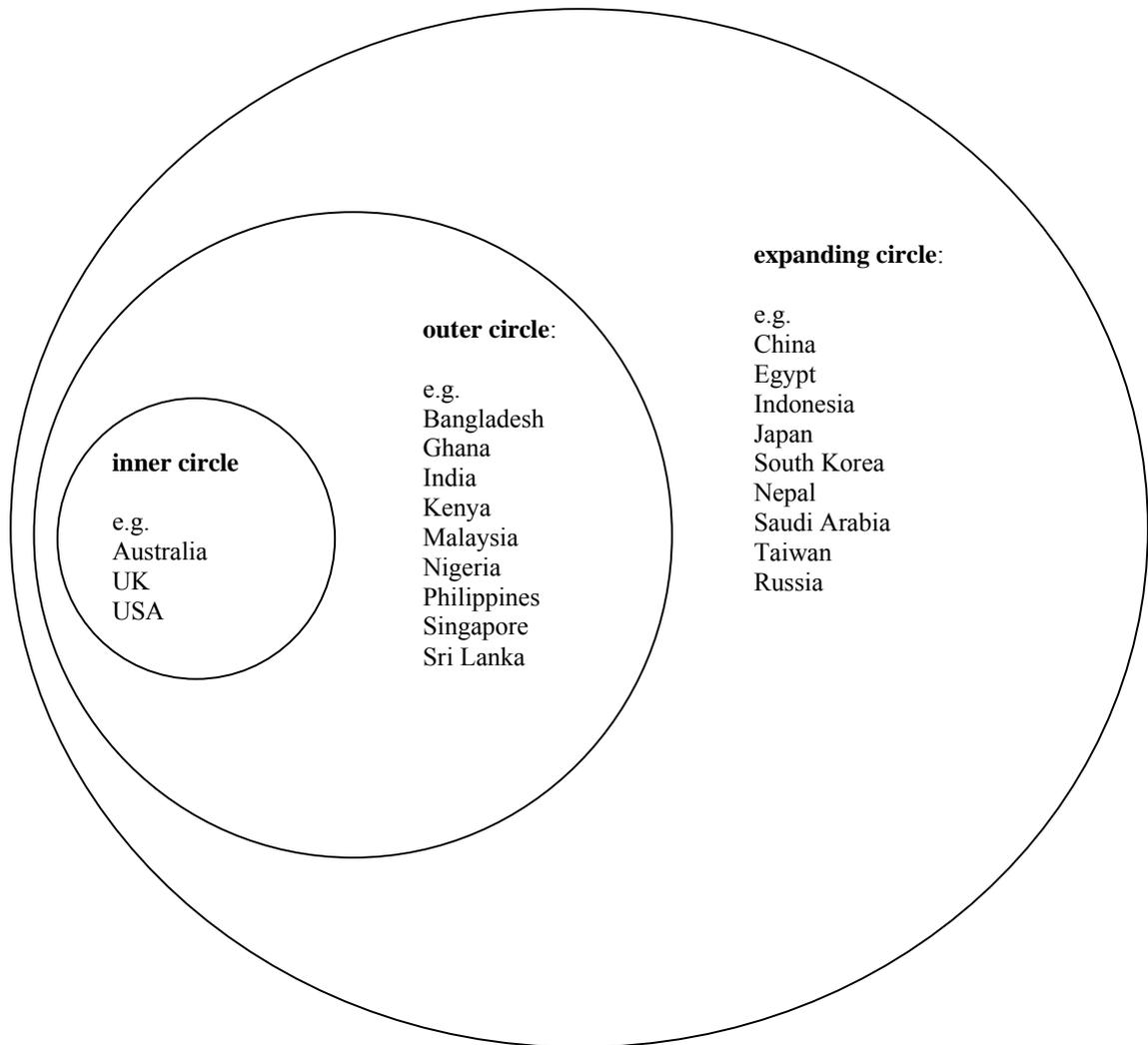
The global spread of English during the course of the last fifty years has been rapid and unprecedented (Crystal 2003: 29-71; Seidlhofer 2004: 209-210; Dornyei *et al.* 2006: 6-9). Kachru (1985, 1992) has provided an important and influential model of the worldwide spread of the language. The World Englishes model is comprised of three

concentric circles of English usage: the inner circle; the outer circle; and the expanding circle (see Figure 1). Each of the three circles represents different types of spread, patterns of acquisition and functions of English in a diversity of cultural contexts. The *inner circle* consists of countries where English is spoken as a native language (ENL) for a substantial (and often monolingual) majority, such as the UK, the USA, Australia and Canada. The English spoken in the inner circle is multifunctional, used in all domains and often *endonormative*, that is, in terms of appropriateness and correctness inner circle Englishes provide norms and these are propagated through language education and language planning. The *outer circle*, in contrast, consists of ‘post-colonial’ countries, such as India, The Philippines, Nigeria and Malaysia, where English is spoken as a second language (ESL) and is employed for a range of educational and administrative purposes. The varieties of English spoken in the outer circle are often described as ‘norm-developing’ (e.g., Jenkins 2003: 16) in that they are currently undergoing the development of their own standards. However, ‘these Englishes continue to be affected by conflict between linguistic norms and linguistic behaviour, with widespread perceptions among users that Anglo-American norms are somehow superior and that their own variants are therefore deficient’ (Bruthiaux 2003: 160). The *expanding circle* comprises countries where English is learned as a foreign language (EFL) and is used for international communication, such as in business, diplomacy and tourism. Given the prevalence of English language use throughout the world in the twenty-first century, the expanding circle presumably comprises every nation not included in the inner circle or the outer circle. English tends to be *exonormative* in the expanding circle, in that

educators, policy-makers and speakers themselves have traditionally looked towards inner circle models (mainly from the UK or the US) for linguistic norms.

Although Kachru's model continues to provide 'a useful shorthand for classifying contexts of English world-wide' (Bruthiaux 2003: 172), a problem exists in that much of the investigation into World Englishes has focussed solely upon descriptions of or distinctions between inner circle English and outer circle English. This has led Berns (2005: 85-86) to conclude that although extensive research into English in the inner and outer circles has provided a great deal of information and insight into the spread, functions and status of English in these zones, less is known with regard to English in the expanding circle. Berns recommends that more in-depth studies are required, focussing on the spread, development and acquisition of and attitudes towards English in the expanding circle, in order to address this gap in the World Englishes literature and to provide a broader appreciation of English world-wide. This is broadly compatible with the view of Canagarajah (2006: 33), who maintains that research should be undertaken into the increasing intranational use of English in the expanding circle.

Figure 1 Kachru's concentric circles of English (adapted from 1996: 2)



As detailed above, according to Kachru's model, English in Japan is categorised within the expanding circle, where the language does not have status of an official language, does not function as a lingua franca and is not a relic of colonisation. Despite its restricted range of functions, English is taught extensively as a foreign language in the

education system in Japan and is increasingly employed in international trade, overseas travel and academic research. English, spoken and written, is also increasingly prevalent in the media in Japan and is a major influence on both the Japanese language and Japanese society. In the course of this paper, these issues are discussed in more detail. Although in previous years there have been a number of articles published in journals detailing the role of English in Japan (e.g., Ike 1995; Koike and Tanaka 1995; Honna 1995; Kubota 1998), there is a clear need for a detailed account of the current sociolinguistic position of the English language in Japan given the increased demand for English as well as recent policy initiatives by the Ministry of Education,. Moreover, whilst there is clearly considerable variation between expanding circle Englishes, by focussing specifically on the status and use of English in Japan, it is hoped that the resultant discussion will help broaden understanding of English in the expanding circle more generally.

### **History of Japanese contact with the English language**

Since its earliest inception, Japan has been greatly influenced by its neighbours, China and Korea. In historical terms, the most pervasive language contact with Japan has been with the Chinese, often through Korea as an intermediary (Loveday 1996: 27). In particular, the importation of Chinese characters (kanji) from the seventh century onwards to represent in writing the Japanese language had a profound effect, leading in fact to the development of the Japanese writing system. The first contact with Europeans came with the arrival of the Spanish and the Portuguese in the latter part of the sixteenth century. However, due to the restrictive policies of the Tokugawa Government at that

time, contact with the Spanish lasted for only thirty-two years (1592 to 1624) and with the Portuguese for less than a century (1542 to 1639) (Loveday 1996: 50-51). Following the establishment in 1609 of a small Dutch trading post on the island of Dejima, the Dutch became the dominant European contact with Japan for the following 200 years and Dutch the only European language studied (by an elite group of scholars). Contact with the Dutch language was very important for the later spread of English in Japan because the groundwork for the study of ‘the west’ was established by those Japanese scholars who studied and translated Dutch: it is clear that the history of English in Japan would be markedly different if it had not been for the presence of the Dutch (Stanlaw 2004: 47).

The first major contact with English can be traced back to 1853 with the arrival of the American mission to Japan under the charge of Commodore Perry. The aim of the mission was to gain trading concessions for the USA and to bring Japan into the world of ‘civilised nations’, which was accomplished with the subsequent signing of The Kanagawa Treaty of 1854. The linguistic landscape of Japan also changed, with scholars shifting from the study of Dutch to English to learn about the west. This shift accelerated with the establishment of the new government in 1868 where the general modernisation of Japan included an influx of English-speaking foreigners and the widespread study of English in private language academies. It is interesting to note that despite the prevalence of Americans in Japan at this time, the model of English taught in these academies was generally based on Received Pronunciation (RP), and indeed, an approximation to this model was employed by Japanese both in business and for scholarly purposes (Stanlaw 2004: 61). This is borne out by the alleged reaction of Harold E. Palmer, who was invited to Japan in 1922 by the Ministry of Education and is said to have been surprised that

American teachers of English in Japan tended to speak RP in the classroom and to see this as 'good pronunciation' (Smith 2004: 151-152). The high status of English is reflected by a proposal by Arinori Mori in 1872 to abolish the Japanese language and, instead, adopt English as the national language of Japan. There appear to be four reasons for his proposal: Mori's perception of spoken Japanese as impoverished compared to European languages; the complexity of the kanji, hiragana and katakana systems of Japanese writing; the fact that Japanese was not an international language; and his view that written Japanese itself is but a corrupted relic of Chinese cultural imperialism (Joseph 2004). The proposal, nevertheless, was quashed by the Ministry of Education in 1873. Interestingly, there were additional unsuccessful attempts to adopt English as an official language during the period of American occupation (1945-1952) and more recently in 2000, despite the fact that no mention of language is made in the Japanese constitution (for an overview see, for example, Heinrich 2007).

By the 1880s there was a backlash against the fascination with all things western (Ike 1995: 5), reflected by a decision taken by the Ministry of Education in 1883 to choose Japanese and not English as the medium of instruction at Tokyo University and symbolically by the assassination of Arinori Mori in 1889 by an ultranationalist. Although this backlash against the west continued in Japan into the twentieth century, English nevertheless remained a compulsory subject at middle school, despite a number of calls to make it available only as an elective (Ike 1995: 6). In 1922, Harold E. Palmer founded the Institute for Research in English Teaching (IRET) in Tokyo (Smith 1998, 2004). Through the work of the IRET, Palmer (and latterly A. S. Hornby) made a significant contribution to English language teaching in Japan, an influence which

continues today, particularly in pedagogical research and development (Smith 1998: 287). During the war period (1941-1945), however, English learning was discouraged. As a result, the Ministry of Education reduced middle school study of English to four hours per week for boys and dropped it completely for girls (Koike and Tanaka 1995: 17). Under the seven-year occupation by the USA, the new constitution, which came into effect in May 1947, introduced a new educational structure: six years at primary school, followed by three years each at junior and senior high schools and two or four years at college or university. The first nine years of schooling were compulsory, a legal requirement that continues to this day. Although English instruction was formally an elective in the school system, in practice it was virtually obligatory (Koike and Tanaka 1995: 17). The influence of the United States also shifted the instructional model of English from RP to mainstream US English (Matsuda 2000: 38; Smith 2004: 151-152; Yoshikawa 2005: 351-352). Outside of the school system, learning *eikaiwa* (English conversation) also became popular. The hiring of foreign teachers of English (i.e., from the inner circle of English use) to work in private language schools catered for the increasing demand for English conversation from a wide range of learners, including housewives, students and businessmen. This resulted in increased opportunities for Japanese learners to interact with native speakers of English. Since the 1980s learning English has been promoted by business and government as a strategy to ‘internationalise’ the nation, reflected in the slogan *kokusaika* (internationalisation) (Kubota 1998: 296-297).

### **The changing role of English in the Japanese education system**

Until recently, most students began learning English in Japan in junior high school (i.e., middle school) at approximately 12 years old (grade 7). Although some students learned the language for three years only (grades 7-9), the great majority completed a full six years of English education. However, from 1997, selected elementary schools in Japan have been able to offer English conversation as an after-school activity to pupils of grade 3 and above. Moreover, in 2002, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) implemented the 'New Course of Study' policy, under which many more elementary schools in Japan could choose to offer English language instruction as part of a new subject, 'integrated studies'. Indeed, in its first year of implementation, 'English conversation activities' were carried out at 'approximately 50% of all public elementary schools' (Ministry of Education *et al.* 2003: point 2.5). It is important to note, nevertheless, that the teaching context of integrated studies is not determined by MEXT itself, but by the local (mainly Japanese) teaching staff. As a result, the Ministry is reportedly undertaking steps to promote teacher-training and resource development in elementary school English instruction (Honma and Takeshita 2004: 199).

There have also been changes to English language instruction in junior and senior high schools in Japan. This is mainly in response to criticisms of the effectiveness of English language teaching at these institutions by both Japanese industry and government officials, who have generally called for a more practical approach to English language education in Japan because of perceptions of the importance of English in many aspects of trade, science, tourism and other leisure areas (Butler and Iino 2005: 26). The results

of a survey detailing the TOEFL English language examination scores (for 1997-1998), where Japan (along with North Korea) was ranked the lowest of all twenty-six Asian countries, greatly intensified these criticisms (Kaiser 2003: 200; Aspinall 2006: 257). As part of their response, MEXT drew up a five-year proposal (2003-2008) entitled ‘Action Plan to Cultivate “Japanese with English Abilities”’ (Ministry of Education *et al.* 2003). In the proposal, the Ministry recognised the importance of English to the future of Japan and to the world generally:

English has played a central role as the common international language in linking people who have different mother tongues. For children living in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it is essential for them to acquire communication abilities in English as a common international language. In addition, English abilities are important in terms of linking our country with the rest of the world, obtaining the world’s understanding and trust, enhancing our international presence and further developing our nation. (Ministry of Education *et al.* 2003: introduction)

With almost immediate effect, the learning of a foreign language (overwhelmingly English), previously an elective, was formally designated as a compulsory subject at junior and senior high schools throughout Japan (although for many pupils the study of English had, in fact, been *de facto* compulsory for a considerable period). As before, all public junior and senior high schools are currently required to follow the national curriculum for English put forward by the Ministry and to use only those textbooks approved by MEXT. In addition, specific targets in English were set for all junior and

senior high school graduates to attain. The ultimate objectives of the plan are to ensure that all Japanese nationals, upon graduation from junior and senior high schools, are able to communicate in English and, in addition, that university undergraduates attain an ability to use English in their work (Gottlieb 2005: 73). Although in junior high schools there has been a considerable reduction in the number of hours of English study per year as part of the *yutori kyōiku* (relaxed education) policy, a greater emphasis has been placed on oral-aural skills. Although such policy guidelines clearly reflect the desire to move towards a more communicative approach to English language teaching (i.e., less teacher-centred, with greater student participation), it is highly debatable whether this has been followed in practice (Gottlieb 2005: 34). Indeed, since approximately 50% of high school students continue to study at post-secondary level, the content of English class activities at high school level remains more concentrated on reading, writing and grammar than on speaking and listening skills, in order to prepare students for the English component of university entrance examinations (Butler and Iino 2005: 29; Gottlieb 2005: 31-32). McArthur (2003: 21) points out that such a focus has wider implications for the English language proficiency of Japanese learners, who, ‘while working meticulously, and on the whole successfully, with the written language, have had great difficulty in speaking and listening to English’.

A further initiative by the Ministry of Education in 2002 was the decision, in a pilot programme, to appoint a number of high schools, as ‘Super English Language High Schools’ (SEL Hi), where English is designated as the language of instruction not only in English language classes but also (partly) in other (unspecified) subjects. The function of the selected schools is to conduct research into classroom practice, teaching methods and

other curricular matters (Ministry of Education *et al.* 2003: point 2.1), with the ultimate objective of contributing to the improvement of English language teaching (ELT) in Japan. By the end of 2002, sixteen such schools had been established, with the opportunity for the selection of more schools at local government level (Honna and Takeshita 2005: 364). Moreover, a further policy aim of MEXT is for 10,000 high school students to go overseas to study, per annum, in order to attain more international experience; although in 2003 only 1000 students actually did so (Ministry of Education *et al.* 2003: point 2.3).

In 1987, the Japanese government established the Japan Exchange and Teaching Programme (JET) in order to recruit young, overseas university graduates as assistant language teachers (ALTs) to participate in foreign language teaching in high schools in Japan. The aims of the JET programme are very specific:

The purpose of this program is to enhance mutual understanding between our country and other countries, and to contribute to the promotion of internationalization in our country through promoting international exchange as well as strengthening foreign language education in our country. (Ministry of Education *et al.* 2003: note 5)

The great majority of ALTs are employed as assistant teachers of English (AETs) (Lai 1999: 215), most likely as a reflection of perceptions amongst policy makers in Japan that it is the English language which can contribute most to the ‘promotion of internationalization’ in Japan. Moreover, one factor which is of particular importance in

the present study is that current Japanese policy towards English explicitly favours speakers from the inner circle, as:

a native speaker of English provides a valuable opportunity for students to learn living English and to familiarize themselves with foreign languages and cultures...In this way the use of a native speaker of English has great meaning...Therefore, for the enhancement of the teaching system, the effective use of native speakers of English...will be promoted. (Ministry of Education *et al.* 2003: point 2.2)

It is interesting to note that no mention is made of the wide social and geographical diversity within native varieties of English. Nevertheless, the implication seems clear: high school learners of English in Japan should look towards (speakers of) varieties of inner circle speech for 'notions of correctness'. Indeed, this is demonstrated by the traditional recruitment policy for the JET programme, with AETs recruited from the inner circle of English use, most particularly the USA (McConnell 2000: xvii). For example, the official figures for 2006-2007 indicated that out of a total of 5,057 ALTs, 2,759 participants were from the USA, 699 from the UK, 655 from Canada, 340 from Australia, 254 from New Zealand and 112 from the Republic of Ireland (JET Programme 2006). Much smaller intakes to teach other foreign languages were accepted from China (11), France (10), Germany (7) and South Korea (3). However, in 2000, citizens of Singapore, Jamaica and the Philippines became eligible to participate as AETs (Gottlieb 2005: 72). In 2006-2007, for instance, there were 48 participants from Jamaica, 32 from Singapore

and 1 from the Philippines. Although the number of AETs from these countries is relatively small, their recruitment may demonstrate a new awareness amongst policy makers in Japan of the advantages of also exposing high school students to outer circle varieties of English.

A knowledge of English is essential to enter higher education in Japan as every university institution, whether national, private or prefectural includes English as a subject in its entrance examination (Matsuda 2000: 55). Indeed, a student's English score is most often given the greatest weight in these examinations (Butler and Iino 2005: 30). As described above, English entrance examinations tend to focus on reading, writing and grammar at the expense of oral-aural skills. As a result, the specific term employed in Japanese to describe the English tested in these examinations, i.e., *juken eigo*, implies that this is a particular type of English and thus, different from 'real English' (Kobayashi 2000: 23). In recent years, universities in Japan have attained a great deal more self-determination. Hence, at present, there are no national guidelines for foreign language teaching at Japanese universities. In practice, many four-year universities require students to study two foreign languages, one of which is almost always English (Kobayashi 2000: 23). English is traditionally taught as part of 'liberal arts' studies by (mainly Japanese) professors of American Literature, and, to a lesser extent, British Literature as well as professors of Linguistics,. Most classes tend to be large and meet for only 90 minutes per week (Matsuda 2000: 59). In addition, since it is the prestige of the universities which Japanese students enter that determines their future, and not the quality of the research they do there (and since graduation is almost a foregone conclusion) (Ryan and Makarova 2004: 52), university classes are often poorly attended. There are, however,

some signs of change. For instance, in a bid to meet the challenges of the steadily declining birth rate in Japan, which is now affecting student numbers (Honma and Takeshita 2004: 204), a growing number of universities have begun teaching some undergraduate and postgraduate courses in English (Gottlieb 2005: 35). This policy has two aims: to recruit higher numbers of international students (Gottlieb 2005: 35) and to establish popular courses which can attract Japanese students (Koike and Tanaka 1995: 126). Moreover, some private universities, such as the prestigious International Christian University in Tokyo, now commonly teach in both English and Japanese. The Ministry of Education has also recently initiated a scholarship scheme for short-term overseas study for Japanese students who utilise exchange agreements between universities in Japan and overseas (Ministry of Education *et al.* 2003: point 2.3).

In the private sector, large numbers of individuals continue to learn English in language schools throughout Japan. English language teaching (ELT) is big business in Japan and a healthy ELT publishing industry also exists. It was estimated that as much as 3,000 billion yen (approximately 30 billion US dollars) was spent on the ELT industry in Japan in 1995 alone (Koike and Tanaka 1995: 19). Private language schools can be divided into two distinct groups. The first group, ‘cram schools’, where teachers are invariably Japanese, prepare junior and senior high school students for English (and other) examinations (Neustupny and Tanaka 2004: 14). The second group, whose teachers are almost always from the inner circle, generally offer courses for adults who wish to improve their proficiency in conversational English, i.e., *eikaiwa*. Kobayashi (2000: 24) maintains that because of a strong association between English and *kokusaika* (internationalisation) in Japan (see below), the motivating factor for these adults to learn

the language is their perceptions that ‘they need to study English to become internationalised’.

The above discussion has demonstrated that at all levels of the education system in Japan there is a clear distinction between the purposes of learning English. This has led Miller (1982: 276-277) to suggest that there are two distinct types of English taught in Japan: *eigo*, focussing on grammar and where the purpose is to pass exams; and *eikaiwa*, where the purpose is to learn the language for international communication (see above). Although the view of McVeigh (1997: 72-78) is somewhat extreme, he extends the argument, claiming that Japanese education system has deliberately appropriated the English language for its own ‘impractical’ uses, where the language is categorised either into a Japanese view of the world (*eigo*) or a non-Japanese view of the world (*eikaiwa*).

### **The rise of English language media in Japan**

It is important to remember that the ‘Japanese media represent a large, diverse and varied field containing the pursuit of many agendas, conflicting ideologies, technical procedures and distinct styles’ (Clammer 1997: 133). Nevertheless, the media (together with the ELT industry) in Japan have responded enthusiastically to the association between learning English and internationalisation described above. This association is particularly evident in the use of English in Japanese television commercials. This is borne out by the results obtained in Haarmann’s studies of the use of English and French in television advertising in Japan (1986, 1989). Haarmann demonstrated that that whilst both languages were

employed as symbols of prestige in commercials as a means of enhancing the products advertised, the use of English, in particular, was believed to promote stereotypical associations of ‘international appreciation’. In contrast, French was employed in order to promote images of ‘high elegance’ and ‘a sophisticated lifestyle’.

Access to spoken English in Japan is also available from the radio. Although the majority of radio programmes broadcast by both the public (i.e., NHK) and the commercial radio stations are in Japanese (where nevertheless, music from the US and the UK is often played), some specialist English language programmes do exist, principally for English language instruction, news and entertainment (Tanaka 1995: 45). Moreover, in recent years, access to international radio stations through the internet has become freely available in Japan (and elsewhere), presumably resulting in greater exposure to different varieties of spoken English amongst Japanese who download English language programmes from overseas radio stations.

Since 1992, it has also been possible to watch bilingual television programmes in Japan, or programmes subtitled in Japanese, a great proportion of which are American movies or news (Tanaka 1995: 46-47). In a recent overview of English programmes on Japanese television, Moody notes that whilst English is not prevalent in dramas or documentaries, there are a growing number of programmes, designed for English language instruction for both children, e.g., *Eigo-de Asobo* (Let’s Play English), *Sūpa Eigorain* (Super English Alien) and adults e.g., *Bera-Bera* (Fluency Station), *Jissen Bijinesu Eigo* (Practical Business English), *Eikaiwa: Tōku and Tōku* (English Conversation: Talk and Talk). Moody also maintains that the English employed as a target model in such programmes is generally ‘North American English’ (2006: 212-

213). Moreover, with the recent growth of satellite and cable television in Japan it is now possible to access overseas channels, such as stations from CNN (USA) and the BBC (UK). In cinemas, there are also opportunities to watch a large number of English language movies, again subtitled in Japanese, the majority of which are exported from the USA (Tanaka 1995: 46-47).

In terms of the availability of written English, two daily Japan-based English language newspapers are freely available for purchase (*The Japan Times* and *The Daily Yomiuri*) as well as two weekly publications (*The Japan Times Weekly* and *The Nikkei Weekly*). The readership comprises both L1 (i.e., first language) speakers of English and Japanese. Tanaka (1995: 40-42) maintains that the written variety of English employed in these newspapers is either ‘Standard American’ or ‘Standard British’ and that the functions of English language newspapers in Japan are to explain Japan in English as well as to promote comprehensive coverage of world news (thought to be lacking in the Japanese language newspapers). In the case of the latter, both *The Japan Times* and *The Daily Yomiuri* have to compete with *The International Herald Tribune* (financed by *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*), which is also freely available for purchase throughout Japan. It is also important to note that English language newspapers from a great many countries are also widely available on the internet for users throughout the world. The English language newspapers in Japan also provide a valuable forum for vigorous debate on the current and future role of English in Japan (McConnell: 2000: 74). Despite the existence of English language newspapers and the high profile of the English language generally in Japan, there is, nevertheless, no tradition of native Japanese literature written in English (Sergeant 2005: 316).

## **The Influence of English in Japan**

### ***The influence of English loanwords***

Besides the education system and the media, perhaps the most salient way in which the English language influences Japanese society is through the continuing influx and nativisation of English loanwords into the Japanese language. Although *kango* (Sino-Japanese words) are also a major linguistic influence on the Japanese language as a result of the long history of language and cultural contact, most Japanese do not perceive these as loanwords (Gottlieb 2005: 11). During the Meiji period, *gairaigo* (foreign loanwords), from western languages, particularly English, became instrumental in the modernisation of Japan (MacGregor 2003: 18). Since the end of World War Two, when there was a series of script reforms, the normal practice in writing Japanese has been to supplement kanji with hiragana to represent features of Japanese and to employ katakana for foreign (i.e., European) loanwords and foreign names as well as for italicisation and other emotional content (Gottlieb 2005: 79-80; Daulton 2008: 18). From the time of the American occupation onwards (1945-1952), aided by the expanding mass media, the number of English loanwords nativised into Japanese has increased dramatically (Carroll 2001: 162). Indeed, it has been estimated that approximately 10 per cent of the lexicon of a standard Japanese dictionary as well as 13 per cent of the words used in daily conversations are foreign words (mostly English) and 60-70 per cent of new words in

revised Japanese dictionaries are from English (Honna 1995: 45). This has led Stanlaw (2004: 81-82) to claim that:

over the last fifty years, the popularity of English in Japan has risen dramatically, but this has found greatest expression not in the creation of large groups of 'native' or 'near-native' speakers of the language, but rather through the nativization of English loanwords and (English-based neologisms) within the Japanese language system.

Kay (1995: 68-72) has identified a number of processes by which English loanwords are adapted into Japanese. First, orthographical: almost all loanwords are now written in katakana and there is a general consensus over the katakana spelling. Secondly, phonological: the mora structure of the Japanese sound system, namely, vowel or consonant plus vowel, is generally applied to loanwords. Some vowel and consonant sounds in English which do not exist in Japanese are substituted by their nearest Japanese equivalents, e.g., [sɪ] → [ʃɪ], hence 'taxi' is realised as *takushii*. Thirdly, morphological: the need to add extra vowels to English loanwords results in some very long adaptations. Hence, loanwords are often truncated, e.g., *sūpā*, denoting 'supermarket'. Acronyms and abbreviations, seldom written in katakana, also exist, for instance, *DPE* for 'developing, printing and enlarging'. Japanese and English hybrid compounds also exist, e.g., *haburashi*, 'tooth (Japanese) + brush', denoting 'toothbrush'. There are also compounds created from English morphemes in Japan. These neologisms are known in Japanese as *wasei eigo* (Japan-made English), e.g., *pureigaido*, 'play + guide', denoting 'ticket

office'. Finally, semantic: as in the case of other languages, loanwords acquire culturally specific meanings, e.g., *manshon*, from 'mansion', denoting 'high class block of flats' and *mōningu sābisu*, from 'morning service', denoting 'set breakfast offered by a restaurant'. It is worth noting that since English (and other) words are altered phonologically, morphologically and semantically in a process of assimilation, to meet the requirements of Japanese society, the term 'loanword' is somewhat misleading (Carroll 2001: 161). A more appropriate term may be 'English-inspired vocabulary items' as these words are essentially Japanese items and are likely to be employed in Japanese very differently than they are used in other varieties of English (Stanlaw 2004: 20).

Nevertheless, the above discussion has demonstrated that the ways in which English words are nativised into Japanese are clearly complex and play an important role in Japan. Whilst many English words are employed by virtually all native speakers of Japanese, at least to some extent, there are particular sections of Japanese society where English terminology is used more frequently. J-pop (Japanese pop music), for instance, is one important area where English words have been employed extensively. Indeed, Moody (2006: 210), in an examination of 307 J-pop songs in the Japan top-50 charts of 2000, reported that almost two-thirds of the songs contained English lyrics. Stanlaw (2004: 104-125) believes that English words are employed in J-pop songs for a range of complex but interrelated purposes, including audacious (i.e., non-traditional), symbolic, poetic and exotic reasons, as well as to create new structural forms, to 're-exoticise' the Japanese language itself and to express aspects of Japanese consumer culture and images of Japanese domestic life. Interestingly, Inoue (2005: 169) notes that both song and band titles are increasingly written in *rōmaji* (i.e., Roman script) and not katakana, which he

feels is indicative of the current status of the English language in Japan. Similarly, English words are also found in modern Japanese literature, and most notably in Japanese poetry (Stanlaw 2004: 122). English is thought to be used in Japanese poetry for a range of functions, including the construction of new analogies, metaphors and metonyms and for visual and graphic effects (for an overview see Stanlaw 2004: 123-125).

The use of English terms can also function as alternative forms of discourse for instance, as ‘ingroup youth language’ (Loveday 1996: 195-197). The language of adolescents in Japan and in particular, high-school girl language (*kogyaru kotoba*) has indeed been greatly influenced by English words. This is evident in the term *kogyaru* itself, being composed of *ko*, from *kōtōgakkō* (high school) + *gyaru*, from ‘girl’.

Although many of these innovative terms tend to be short-lived, other recent examples include: *chōberiiba*, from *chō* (ultra) + *berri* (very) + *ba* (bad), denoting ‘worst’; and *makuru*, from *maku* (McDonald’s) + *-ru* (finite verb ending), denoting ‘to go to McDonald’s’ (Coulmas 2007: 60). It is perhaps adolescents, more than any other group in Japan, who employ English loanwords simply for fun, as a form of ‘language play’ (for an overview see Gottlieb 2005: 13). Relatedly, English terms are also used by the Japanese underworld as a criminal code, as a means of ‘achieving external unintelligibility’ (Loveday 1996: 196). An example of this is the term *anaunsā*, from ‘announcer’, denoting ‘informer’.

Honna (1995: 52-53) notes that, in recent years, many specialist fields have nativised English terms. This is especially true of the computer industry, where due to the spread of computer technology, words such as ‘hacker’, ‘networking’ and ‘input’ have been incorporated as *hakkā*, *nettowākingu* and *inputto* respectively. Related to the above,

but used by a wider section of the Japanese population, many English words are assimilated into Japanese for the purposes of describing new (or pseudo-new) phenomena which did not previously exist in Japan (Torikai 2005: 252). Examples include: *puraibashii* from ‘privacy’; and *hōmuresu* from ‘homeless’, which do not have Japanese equivalents. Similarly, English loanwords are also employed, especially in advertising, in order to create new images of ‘old things’. For instance, *kitchin* from ‘kitchen’ and *ribingurūmu* from ‘living room’ update their Japanese equivalents *daidokoro* and *ima*. In this way, the utilisation of English loanwords in the naming of products can promote images of ‘a sophisticated western lifestyle’ and/or of ‘internationalisation’. English loanwords are often employed by almost all sections of the native Japanese-speaking population as euphemisms to express difficult sentiments or taboo topics (Daulton 2008: 38). Examples include: *shirubāshiito*, from ‘silver’ + ‘seat’, denoting ‘a reserved seat on public transport for the elderly’; *sōpurando*, from ‘soap’ + ‘land’, denoting ‘massage parlour’; and *toire*, from ‘toilet’. There is also some evidence that English words are employed most frequently by both male and female native speakers of Japanese in discussions of ‘romantic topics’ and when discussing originally western sports such as golf, football and baseball. English words are also believed to be employed by Japanese males more in academic discussions than in everyday speech (Kachru and Nelson 2006: 174).

It is important to note that although katakana script continues to be the principal medium for English loanwords, it has recently acquired a somewhat ‘old fashioned image’ in Japan (Inoue 2005: 174-176). This appears to be largely due to the growing tendency for English (and to a lesser extent, other European languages) to be written in

their original Roman script (i.e., rōmaji) (Inoue 2005: 174; Coulmas 1999: 407-408; MacGregor 2003: 18). This phenomenon is particularly evident in music, fashion, the print media and advertising in Japan (Loveday 1996: 103-107; Stanlaw 2004: 141-142). Evidence of an ongoing change is supported by the findings of a study which demonstrates a transition in the linguistic landscape of Tokyo generally, towards more information provision in languages and scripts other than Japanese. The author believes this has been implemented both by official agencies (top-down) and by private agents (bottom-up) (Backhaus 2007: 81-83). The change detailed above appears to be a reflection of the shifting relationship between Japanese and English (Inoue 2005: 176) and hence, is likely to be of major sociolinguistic interest for the future study of the status and use of both languages in Japan.

### *Nihonjinron, kokusaika and English*

The discourse of *nihonjinron* (literally, ‘theories of Japanese’) is concerned with aspects of the uniqueness of Japan and the Japanese people (Miller 1977; Dale 1986; Yoshino 1992; Reischauer and Jansen 1995: 395-412). The *nihonjinron* literature has generally espoused the view that the Japanese constitute a culturally unchanging and socially homogeneous ethnicity that differs racially from all other known peoples (Dale 1986: introduction) The discourse invariably employs a ‘group model’ (or ‘consensus model’), which emphasises a monolithic picture of the Japanese nation, in order to explain Japanese society (e.g., Yoshino 1992: 17-22; Donahue 1998: 4-5; Stockwin 1999: 27;

Hasegawa and Hirose 2005: 219-220). Interestingly, Yoshino (1992: 18) believes that the group model serves the interests of the ruling establishment in Japan as it implies that society is 'hierarchically organised based on the relationship between paternalistic superiors and their subordinates'. Whilst the issue of Japanese national identity has been a popular topic for discussion in Japan since the Meiji period (Kubota 1999: 19), *nihonjinron* as an ideology, in fact, only developed post-1945 (Befu 1992: 26; Maher and Yashiro 1995: 9). Publications on Japanese uniqueness peaked in the 1970s and 1980s, written mainly by academics but also by journalists, critics, writers and businessmen (Yoshino 1992: 9). Stanlaw (2004: 274) points out that the discourse of *nihonjinron* continues to be:

something of a national pastime in Japan. Television talk shows, popular and scholarly magazines and daily newspapers often discuss the problem of 'who the Japanese are' or 'where the Japanese come from'. In these discussions, it is the stress on the uniqueness of being Japanese that is most often emphasized.

The Japanese language is considered a central aspect within the *nihonjinron* framework (Dale 1986: 56; Yoshino 1992: 12; Coulmas 1999: 406; Carroll 2001: 38), where the language is portrayed as somehow uniquely different in important functions to all other languages (Maher 1995: 107; Gottlieb 2005: 4). Suzuki, for instance, has claimed that the Japanese language is unique because 'the Japanese have a tendency even today to do without personal pronouns in conversation whenever possible' and goes on to maintain that 'western linguists have never found it necessary to deal with problems of

this sort because such phenomena do not exist in Occidental languages' (Suzuki 1978: 123), a claim which is clearly false, as any speaker of Spanish or Italian, for instance, can testify. Critics of nihonjinron have maintained that the mystification of Japanese culture and language is used as a subtle way of marginalisation (Kachru 1997: 69). Carroll (2001: 139-140), for example, writes that:

the nihonjinron theories of Japanese uniqueness exclude foreigners by definition, particularly via the argument that no one who has not been born to parents of Japanese blood, grown up in Japanese society, and speaking Japanese from childhood, can ever really understand the language or how it works in that society.

Gottlieb (2005: 5) points out that such a viewpoint persists despite millions of non-Japanese around the world being able to speak, read and write Japanese. In the nihonjinron framework, Japan is also portrayed as a linguistically homogeneous country (Gottlieb 2005: 5). However, a plethora of recent studies focussing specifically on multilingualism in Japan have demonstrated that Japanese society is a great deal more linguistically diverse and complex than much of the earlier literature had suggested (Maher and Macdonald 1995; Coulmas and Watanabe 2002; Gottlieb 2005: 18-38). Nevertheless, the myth of linguistic homogeneity appears to have persisted, not least in the minds of language policy makers (Maher 1995: 109). Indeed, Coulmas and Watanabe (2002: 249) note that '...at the present time, Japanese society offers an opportunity to

study the transformation of a society operating largely under monolingual assumptions into one which has to come to terms with greater linguistic plurality’.

Intriguingly, English plays an important role in the maintenance of the myth of the uniqueness of Japanese culture and language. For example, Coulmas (1999: 406) maintains that perceptions of the uniqueness of the Japanese language for many Japanese are not based upon factual knowledge but rather as a result of ‘superficial exposure to English grammar at school’. Moreover, whereas the Japanese language is often characterised as ‘emotional’, ‘ambiguous’ and ‘indirect’, English, in comparison, is frequently seen as ‘logical’, ‘succinct’ and ‘direct’ (Carroll 2001: 170; Matsuda 2000: 174). Hence the discourse of *nihonjinron* stresses the uniqueness of Japanese language and culture principally in relation to English and ‘the West’ (e.g., Yoshino 1992: 11-12; Kawai 2004: 68), a strategy which Kubota (1999: 19) maintains essentialises Japan as ‘the other’, a process she defines as ‘self-Orientalism’ (for a discussion of Orientalism see, for example, Said 1978).

Since the 1980s, *kokusaika* (internationalisation) has been actively promoted by both business and government in Japan (Reischauer and Jansen 1995: 395; Mouer and Sugimoto 1986: 377). The term *kokusaika*, however, is somewhat misleading, as its principal ideal is to promote cultural exchange only with the west, and in particular, with the USA (Kubota 2002: 16). In this way, *kokusaika* is closely related to *nihonjinron*, as both discourses define Japan only in relation to western nations (Kubota 1998: 296-297). Increasingly, the teaching and learning of English has been identified as a principal strategy to ‘internationalise’ Japan (Gottlieb 2005: 36-37). As described above, evidence of this desire to internationalise can be found in recent foreign language policy reforms

implemented by the Ministry of Education, most notably through the establishment and continued extension of the JET programme. In addition, the general prevalence of the English language in the Japanese media and the plethora of private language schools throughout Japan offering ‘conversational English’ also denote the association between *kokusaika* and the learning of English for many Japanese. Tsuda (1997: 25-26) has warned that perceptions of English as an international language in Japan have resulted in the glorification of speakers of varieties of inner circle English, a process he defines as ‘Anglomania’. A similar view is held by Kubota (2002: 24), who believes that the ‘Anglicization’ aspect of *kokusaika* focuses specifically on the teaching of ‘North American varieties’ and, to a lesser extent, ‘British varieties’ of English in Japanese schools in order to achieve ‘international understanding’. Nevertheless, she notes that the ways in which the USA and other western nations are represented in English language textbooks and in English language classes in Japan tend to be ‘idealized, simplified and given a certain stereotype’ (Kubota 1998: 298) and indeed, there is some evidence to suggest that these simplified stereotypes of inner circle countries may influence the attitudes which Japanese learners hold towards standard and non-standard varieties of English spoken in the inner circle (McKenzie, 2008a, 2008b).

## **Conclusion**

The above discussion has attempted to demonstrate the complex and rapidly changing role which the English language plays in Japan. The paper has illustrated that English, spoken and written, is prevalent in the media in Japan. The language is also

taught extensively as a foreign language in schools and universities and is gaining in importance at all levels of the education system. Linguistically and ideologically, English continues to be a major influence on both the Japanese language and Japanese society, not least in helping to maintain the myth of the uniqueness of Japanese language and culture. Nevertheless, in a rapidly globalising world, where English is increasingly used for international communication, combined with greater numbers of migrants and overseas visitors to Japan, there is evidence of a shift in the relationship between Japanese and English. For this reason, as in other areas of the expanding circle, there is a clear requirement in Japan for further empirical research to be conducted investigating the spread, use and attitudes towards English and its varieties. The findings from such studies are likely to broaden understanding of the changing sociolinguistic position of English in Japan and will undoubtedly have major pedagogical and language planning implications for educators and policy makers involved in English teaching and learning in Japan.

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Figure 1 Kachru's concentric circles of English (adapted from 1996: 2)

