

English or Englishes? Glocalisation of English Language Teaching in Okinawa as Expanding Circle

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Abstract

Sociologist Roland Robertson saw *glocalisation* as “the simultaneity – the co-presence – of both universalizing and particularizing tendencies” (1997:16), which describes how, multinational products or companies that aim for global expansion adapt to specific local conditions. This paper aims to shed some light on the way that English has spread around the globalised world and also, to analyse its implications. Okinawa is a small island off the coast of Japan where American culture has been influencing people in the form of residual colonial influence since the end of the Second World War (WW2) including 27 years of trusteeship period. This paper focuses on the island of Okinawa and aims to look at the history of teaching English in Okinawa, as well as in Japan, in order to examine what can be learnt about the process of English Language Teaching (ELT) in a modernising and evolving world. Suggestions and implications will be discussed, which will include local knowledge as a way to seek more equality and diversity of the languages in ELT.

Keywords: English, Glocalisation, Okinawa Island

Introduction

As a result of becoming the language of communication for many professional fields and industries, the English language has become a '*lingua franca*', a language that is widely used as a means of communication among people with different mother tongues. The spread of English through globalisation has led to native standards, especially that of Britain or America, being the goal for other 'norm-dependent' or "Expanding circle" (Kachru, 1985:12) countries. In my experience of teaching English in Okinawa, many young learners and even some Japanese teachers of English viewed native English as a superior language to any other. Likewise, they considered English culture to be superior to theirs. The effects of such views on English Language Teaching (ELT) in those areas are salient, taking the form of native English chauvinism, a very strong aspiration and assimilation of mainly American norms due to historical tensions and occupation. American English has had a strong influence yet, there are calls for 'globalisation' in ELT that encourage non-native English speakers to prioritise local knowledge, materials and uses of English into their teaching.

Brief History of the English Language and of that in Okinawan context

To understand the emergence of English as a *lingua franca*, it is important to acknowledge Kachru's discussion of the "Three Concentric Circles of world Englishes" (1985:12). He divided English into three circles: the norm-providing "Inner circle", the norm-developing "Outer circle", and the norm-dependent "Expanding circle". I will further explain Kachru's perception on the spread of English around the world, from the powerful native speaking countries such as Britain and America, as well as countries that used to be colonies of "Inner-circle" countries, to countries like Japan where English is a foreign language. This norm-providing influence is reflected in English language teaching. In inner-circle-produced coursebooks such as *Clockwise* (Naunton, 2000) and *New Cutting Edge* (Cunningham, & Moor, P.2005), European or American styles of living, learning and thinking are introduced as standardised and desirable. As a result, many learners from "Expanding circle" countries consider those cultures as superior to their own cultures and lifestyles. It is not surprising that these famous textbooks have been affecting English language learners for many decades.

In East Asia, particularly in Japan, the demand for English language has dramatically increased. This derives from what happened following Japan's defeat by America in the WW2. This defeat significantly affected Japanese people's sense of value as they finally realised the overwhelming difference between the two nations in terms of power and wealth after the war. This change of people's feelings from hostility to admiration of America can be clearly seen in Okinawa, which was occupied by the American army for 27 years after the end of the WW2. Okinawans' freedom was restricted under American occupation, but with each succeeding generation the attitudes towards America and its culture softened and, many younger Okinawans aspire to learn English in order to become a part of America. This native English language imperialism especially in the Expanding circle is one of the main challenges that contemporary ELT faces. This raises important questions about the role of English in Japan as well as in other contexts in East Asia.

Globalisation on ELT in East Asia

The Case of Japan

According to Kachru (1985), the core influence of globalisation regarding ELT in the periphery occurs in expanding-circle countries such as Japan. In the Cambridge Dictionary, the term 'globalisation' has two meanings. The first definition refers to an economic situation and the second one defines the term as: "a situation in which available goods and services, or social and cultural influences, gradually become similar in all parts of the world" (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.). Japan's relationship with the English language became prominent in the 1980s when the country's economic growth began to expand on the global stage. Accompanied with this expansion, the government recognised the important role of English as a *lingua franca*, and decided that Japan should aim to be one of the best English speaking countries in East Asia by proposing to develop people's communicative skills to enhance the development of global human resources (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology-MEXT, 2014).

In the case of junior and senior high school education, MEXT set English as a foreign language subject that should be taught at school and also laid out goals for students to:

1. Deepen their understandings of languages and cultures,

2. Nurture attitudes towards active communications,
3. Foster the foundation for communicative skills such as listening, speaking, reading and writing (for Junior high school).
4. Foster the communicative competence that enables them to accurately understand and deliver the information and / or thoughts (for high school)

(MEXT, October 2014, own translation)

These are globalisation-conscious aims that intend to nurture human resources by improving English skills. State, private, junior and senior high schools in Japan are trying to achieve those goals. One example is people called ALT: Assistant Language Teacher. Now that the government aims to improve communicative skills, prefectures and municipalities in Japan have started hiring teachers whose L1 is not Japanese, or, who have learnt how to teach TEFL / TESOL (Okinawa Board of Education, 2015). However, although the policy does not make a direct reference to the nationalities of the teachers that schools employ, many tend to look for native teachers rather than teachers whose English is an additional / second language. This preference towards native English teachers is very prominent in Japan and as Kubota (1998) points out; “teaching and learning English taught and learned in Japan will continue to gravitate toward the Inner Circle varieties and to promote Westernization in various aspects of Japanese life while failing to provide global socio-linguistic perspectives” (302). This is clearly illustrated in the MEXT’s website (2016) where the most popular choice for people studying abroad in 2013, was the USA as 19,334 chose to go there. For Japanese people, it seems that Westernisation relatively implies Americanisation.

The Case of Okinawa

Okinawa is in a particularly unique situation in Japan. Once, it had been an independent country called *the Kingdom of Ryukyu*, but in 1879 it became a part of Japan. This small island was under American military rule for 27 years after Japan lost the war. During the occupation, as it can be seen in many colonised lands, people started working for American soldiers for better payments and better lives, which made Okinawan people who had lost everything aspire to those affluent American lifestyles. The return of Okinawa to Japan took place in 1972 but all the American bases have remained in Okinawa. This historical background is crucial when considering Okinawan ELT

because, as explained, since the end of WW2, Okinawans have been directly influenced by the American culture, lifestyle and values, which have resulted in younger generations being more and more Americanised. This is reflected in a place called *American Village* (American Village, 2013). One retroceded area from the US government was utilised for tourism purposes and received attention from both local and foreigners. *Chatan Town* – a town in Okinawa – decided to create an ‘America’ within Okinawa so that people could experience how it would feel to be American.

Another aspect that reflects Americanisation in Okinawa is shown in school textbooks. Such an example can be found in the grammar series *New Treasure I* which is aimed at first year students of junior high school. The content starts with a Japanese girl and her family arriving in San Francisco, where she begins her new life at a new junior high school. The textbook includes many topics regarding American culture such as the Smithsonian National Zoo in Washington D.C. (70), volunteer activities in the US (94), Denali National Park in Alaska (118) and so on. The first year at junior high school is when students begin to study English as a compulsory subject, so the contents can have a direct influence on students’ image of the English language, which in this case is the dominant variety of American English. This could lead students to homogenise the Englishes into one overall westernised concept of English language. Nevertheless, current English education in Japan focuses on passing university entrance exams by teaching predominantly grammar rather than communication skills. There is a huge gap between the government’s aims of communicative English education and the English taught in schools. To fill in the gap or simply because of their strong aspiration for ‘America’, a large number of young Okinawans go to the *American Village* or to the bases to interact with American soldiers. Kubota (2002:27) suggests that the “Japanese attitude towards learning foreign languages has been influenced by an inferiority complex towards foreign cultures, which promoted self-colonization or self-Americanization.” Therefore, it can be argued that until the discussions of globalisation emerged, the strong demand and desire for Americanised ELT had been given importance by the people of the Expanding circle, especially from East Asian countries. The challenge in East Asia is balancing over-Americanisation with introducing culture whilst teaching English. Having interests in the English language and its culture is beneficial, but it is also important to preserve and distinguish the different Englishes by interweaving local contexts so that English education creates opportunities to broaden students’

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minds and to give them a chance to understand the importance of diversity. One way of achieving this is glocalisation.

Opinions on Glocalisation

Glocalisation – reflecting local knowledge, aspects and cultures to the globalised world is becoming an apt topic for discussion as globalisation has reached its critical point. In the field of ELT in particular, scholars are now focusing on the importance of introducing local aspects into classroom teaching, especially in the countries of the Expanding Circle. Globalisation has lessened the space, time and borders between people and at the same time has allowed for cross-fertilisation, that is, mixing local and global elements of the world (Kumaravadivelu, 2008). For that, Tsou (2015) expresses that in Taiwan, there is also an increasing need for inclusion of local aspects and cross-cultural understanding into ELT. Canagarajah (2005) points out that although our positionalities have been based on Westernised values, it is important to pay positive attention and take the local knowledge, value and validity for language education into great account. Gray (2002) looks at this view from the perspectives of material usage. Gray considers global English textbooks as a source of spreading European/American dominance using the phrase “one size fits all” and that those textbooks have been excluding the local contents. To solve the problem and raise awareness for diversity, acceptance and better understandings of the world outside the Inner Circle, he suggests to include local aspects into coursebooks for “a better fit” (2002:166). From the literature, it is illustrated that there is an increase in shared awareness of certain importances for addressing local aspects in ELT worldwide. Localising ELT does not only develop learners’ awareness towards their own cultures but also draws attention to real world issues outside of the classroom, giving both local and global perspectives in balance. This could help prevent further dominance of the idea of English language superiority. Based on the above discussion, I would like to introduce my suggestions as to how ELT in Okinawan context could support the element of glocalisation.

Suggestions for Glocalised ELT in Okinawan Context

Okinawa, as a part of Japan, receives strict guidelines for English education for junior and senior high schools from the Japanese government. Although both the local and national governments

aim at developing communicative skills and international human resources, education at school still remains grammar-centered. This derives from an entrance examination system that is quite common in East-Asian countries. No matter what schools they go to, students generally have to take entrance examinations for junior and senior high schools as well as for university acceptance. As academic credentials are still important for job-hunting, it is necessary for students to concentrate on gaining the grammatical knowledge and skills whilst they are at school through government-approved textbooks. Thus, it is not practical to abruptly change the entire English educational system at school and adopt a globalised English Language Teaching approach. So what can be done? I suggest the following:

- 1) Introducing locally-produced English books into ALT lessons. Currently, English communication lessons take place at school once or twice a week with foreign teachers, to make up for the lack of teaching, speaking and listening skills in normal English lessons. In those lessons, it could be useful to use books or materials that reflect local aspects. For example, there is a book called *EAT OKINAWA* which introduces Okinawan local vegetables, recipes and indicates where to source those vegetables (Ryukyu Shimpo, 2016). The book is written for foreigners (mainly Americans living in Okinawa) so some explanations or dialogues are written in Japanese, therefore it is convenient for ALTs to use them in classroom as it will make it easier for students to understand the content and to learn about local aspects in both English and Japanese.
- 2) Recruiting more non-native teachers with ELT experience. As for ALTs, there is still a tendency to hire native speakers with less teaching experience over non-native teachers with more experience. This derives from the widespread idea of native-supremacy. For students to recognise the existence of *Englishes* outside the classroom, it is advisable to hire more non-native English teachers with experience of teaching English as ALTs. This could help students assimilate the importance of many other elements of the “Outer-circle” in the world of English.
- 3) Introducing some materials from locally-based licensed guide studies (Okinawa Convention & Visitors Bureau, n.d.). To get approval from the local government to be a licensed guide, candidates need to pass both language and local knowledge examinations. ALTs could introduce materials that draw on and make use of local knowledge into their lessons so that students can be aware of their own history and culture.

Glocalisation of ELT is not an easy business. In fact, it does need a lot of attention and effort from schools, the local governments, public administration and the national government. However, if they can hybridise their own 'locality' with traditional globalisation and link it to local business, economy, society and daily lives, it can be a strong selling point of Okinawa/Japan/East Asia. Taking local knowledge and aspects into account in classroom materials and practices will definitely help the future of ELT.

For school education, it can be possible for Japanese teachers of English to discuss glocalising ELT with ALTs and gradually introduce small elements of local aspects into their grammar-centred lessons. Glocalising ELT should not be down to ALTs only, but, ultimately, full-time teachers of the English language should also be able to involve some kind of glocalisation into their own classroom teaching. Through a more glocalised ELT approach adopted by both Japanese teachers of English and ALTs who know other worlds of Englishes, students will not only be able to avoid learning only Americanised English but they will also grasp the concept of English diversity. Diversity in many ways can enrich humanity and foster a better understanding towards other cultures, people, and different values. If Americanised/Westernised mindsets in education were prevented from dominating and diversity was embraced and encouraged through glocalisation in ELT, students and their effect on society, not only in Okinawa but also around the world, could stand to benefit themselves and others in the future.

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