Creating Space for World Englishes Perspectives in the ELT Classroom: Voices of High School Students in Japan

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Abstract

This paper reports on teacher research which explored the practicality and potential of World Englishes (WE)-informed pedagogy in the Japanese secondary education context. Based on qualitative data from written reflections and post-unit individual interviews with seven high school students in Japan, this paper presents students' perceptions of the English language, their learning of it, and its use, detailing the impact the instructional unit had on these students. The data showed that the unit enabled the students to critically reflect on ideologies surrounding the English language, heightening their awareness of the multiplicity and complexity of its use and users. In addition, increased desire to learn about different Englishes and improved perceptions toward students' own English were observed. However, the data also revealed an unexpected effect on one student's perception toward English, implying that the instructional unit might have stressed the significance and power of English over other languages. Drawing from these findings, pedagogical implications as well as future directions for English language education are discussed.

Keywords: *teacher research, World Englishes, language ideology, English Language Teaching, high school, Japan*

Triggered by colonization and the European expansion, the widespread use of the English language for international and intranational communication led to the emergence of the World Englishes (WE) paradigm (Buschfeld & Schneider, 2018), the pedagogical impact

of which has been explored extensively in the field of English Language Teaching (ELT). As the paradigm that acknowledges multiple identities by pluralizing English, WE made it possible to question, resist, and upset normativity surrounding the English language in a post-colonial and globalized world; this has direct and explicit implications for ELT. Although the WE framework has been faced with a number of scholarly criticisms from the standpoints of power and politics, sociolinguistic complexity within a nation and named variety, and hybrid language practices triggered by globalization (e.g., Bruthiaux, 2003; Jenkins, 2015; Pennycook, 2007, 2016), it has long served as an important catalyst for scholars and teaching professionals to discuss issues of linguistic hybridity and ELT with critical perspectives toward linguistic hegemony. Researchers' attempts to bring WE perspectives to the classroom have been made across Kachru's (1985) three concentric circles: the Inner Circle (e.g., Henderson Lee & Pandey, 2021; Kubota, 2001; Sharifian & Marlina, 2012; Tardy, 2020), the Outer Circle (e.g., Ali, 2015; Baumgardner, 1987; Kaushik, 2011), and the Expanding Circle (e.g., Bayyurt & Altinmakas, 2012; D'Angelo, 2012; Lee, 2012; Rajprasit, 2021; Rose & Galloway, 2017). Recent compilations such as Low and Pakir (2018), De Costa et al. (2019) and Shibata et al. (2020) represent researchers' ever-growing interest in WE and WE-informed pedagogy.

The actual impact that WE research has had on education outside academia, however, might not be clearly observable at both the policy and classroom level (see Aoyama et al. in press, for a review of impediments to WE-informed pedagogy). Kubota (2018) argues that the implications of WE research have not had the expected impact on ELT policies, especially in Expanding Circle contexts. ELT policies in Japan (MEXT, 2009, 2018), for example, continue to show a lopsided reliance on native speaker models for what is believed to be effective language teaching (Aoyama, 2021). At the classroom level, the lack of both theoretically and practically sound research-informed pedagogies presents application challenges to teachers, making it difficult for them to prepare for positive change (Matsuda & Friedrich, 2011). More importantly, stakeholder attitudes do not seem to reflect a full understanding of the complexities surrounding English use and users in the globalized world. Inner Circle Englishes continue to be highly valued, impacting both teachers' and students' attitudes toward English teaching and learning, and thus, impeding their sense of ownership of the language (e.g., Ahn, 2014; Butler, 2007; Matsuda, 2003; Saito & Hattos, 2009). In order to address such challenges in ELT, as Kubota (2018) argues, it is essential that scholarly knowledge is shared beyond academic communities. Teachers, in particular, should have access to a contextualized and practical framework, lesson designs, and suggestions on WE-informed pedagogies that they can apply to their teaching contexts.

This paper thus attempts to introduce a contextual model which contributes to the existing literature regarding WE-informed instruction in the classroom, while providing suggestions and future directions for ELT prompted and navigated by analyzing students' voices. Although this instructional unit was designed and contextualized for advanced high school students in urban Japan, it is hoped that there is potential for application of the unit by teachers in other contexts within the country, in other places within the Expanding Circle, and even in other circles as well.

English Language Education in Japan and World Englishes: Policies, Practices, and Problems

Acknowledging the English language as "a common international language," that is essential for life in the 21st century (MEXT, 2003, para. 22), the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) has been furthering English

education reforms across the elementary, lower secondary, and upper secondary levels of education to develop a more integrated comprehensive curriculum. Such a perspective, that is, viewing English as a common global language, inevitably leads to the question: Which English should be taught in the classroom? This inquiry involves negotiation of political, ideological, and neoliberal standpoints of teaching and learning English, especially in norm-dependent Expanding Circle contexts (Kachru, 1985) such as Japan. The national guidelines for secondary English education in Japan state that "contemporary standard English should be used" (MEXT, 2009, p. 6) for teaching language elements such as vocabulary and grammar, explaining that contemporary standard English means English that can be used as a means for global and everyday communication, as opposed to that which is only used and understood within a specific area or group (MEXT, 2018). At the same time, the guidelines touch upon "the reality that different varieties of English are used to communicate around the world" (MEXT, 2009, p. 6), suggesting that teachers raise students' awareness of different varieties of vocabulary, spelling, pronunciation, and grammar. In addition, they stress the importance of exposing students to the variety of English their non-native English-speaking teachers speak, as students will not necessarily interact with only native speakers in their lives (MEXT, 2018).

However, the guidelines have also shown an explicit reliance on native speakers of English for providing effective instruction across every stage of English education, clearly demonstrating a perceived correlation between native speakers of English and what is standard and correct (Aoyama, 2021). In hiring practices of Assistant Language Teachers (ALTs), Inner Circle English speakers are predominantly preferred (Kubota, 2018). In 2019, 89% of the ALTs from the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Programme were from Inner Circle countries with the United States being the largest contributing country, providing 56% of the total 4679 ALT participants, though there has been a slow increase in the number of Outer and Expanding Circle countries participating over the years (CLAIR, 2019). Also, some boards of education in Japan conduct special English teacher examinations that allow native speakers of English to be employed as tenured full-time teachers without attending a teacher licensure course at university, which is normally part of the stipulated requirements for becoming such a teacher (e.g., Hyogo Prefectural Government, 2021; Osaka Prefectural Government, 2021; Shizuoka Prefectural Government, 2021). These hiring practices for English teachers illustrate a disconnect between English education policy in Japan and WE research, whose pedagogical implications are centered on moving away from monolithic native-speaker norms.

The established notion of English as a common international language in MEXT's policy accelerated the emphasis on communication in English in Japanese secondary foreign language education, the concept of which is packaged in a simplified four skills competency-based approach (Kubota & Takeda, 2021; Naka, 2017). The instrumental focus on communication in English teaching and learning is apparent in the national guidelines, as MEXT (2018) recently revised the goals of English education in reference to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), promoting the use of Can-do statements in developing student competence in the four language skills during curriculum design. This shift was motivated by the belief that acquiring knowledge of vocabulary or grammar should not be the goal of English education, or rather, that this knowledge should be able to be utilized in actual communication (MEXT, 2018). To achieve this goal, it is important to clearly define what constitutes communication, where it is expected to happen and with whom, how it can be achieved, and how or whether its

effectiveness can be measured. However, there is little deliberation about such essential questions regarding communication in MEXT's policy. Consequently, assessment of communicative competence in English has been based on a monolithic, normative conception of proficiency that focuses on the native speaker model (Murray, 2018). This is in part due to the wide promotion of Can-do statements with a simple instrumental focus, with the resulting assessment failing to uphold the principles of plurilingualism that CEFR espouses.

At the classroom level, efforts have been made to put WE-related research scholarship into practice, though these have been dependent on scholars who work with students and teachers (Matsuda & Matsuda, 2018). In the Japanese context, there are a number of case studies in which scholars have reported on the application of WE-related pedagogies. For example, Rose and Galloway (2017) reported on a pedagogical task that encouraged Japanese university students to critically reflect on standard language ideology through a debate of the controversial Speak Good English Movement in Singapore. Drawing on students' comments in their reflection papers, Rose and Galloway concluded that this awareness-raising task can "help teachers and learners to realize that standards are imagined benchmarks, and that it is the actual use of a language that indicates its legitimacy" (p. 7). Another example is the initiatives by the Department of World Englishes at Chukyo University, a private university in Japan, where the curriculum is designed with the WE paradigm as its theoretical foundation (D'Angelo, 2012). Throughout the program, students are given opportunities to learn Englishes used in international contexts and to examine their own attitudes and biases toward them. With WE theory being one of the required classes for all freshmen, the university offers electives such as sociolinguistics, Asian Englishes, and intercultural studies in order to promote attitudinal changes in students. The success at Chukyo University led to the initiation of a pilot WE-informed English course at its affiliated high school (Lee, 2012). With the course's cultural and linguistic emphasis on Asia, including topics such as Korean traditional and pop music and the Korean variety of English, Lee observed positive changes in students in terms of, for example, their confidence in speaking their own English and their awareness of different English varieties.

As Lee (2012) points out, one of the challenges English teachers face is a lack of information and resources which can support them in implementing a WE-informed teaching practice. Unfortunately, even in the academic community, published reports of WE-informed pedagogies focused on Japanese elementary and secondary contexts, as opposed to tertiary contexts which are the teaching sites for scholars, are scarce. Considering the paradigm shift WE aims to bring to the classroom (i.e., the necessity to move beyond institutionally pervasive and persistent native-speaker norms particularly predicated on the Inner Circle Englishes), it is critical that there be a variety of resources and professional development opportunities that allow teachers to decenter such norms in ELT through critical reflection on the paradigm's relevance, implications, and application to their teaching sites. More practical reports that detail a unit design and teaching materials supported by a pedagogical rationale for achieving the unit goal should be available for teachers who want to bring WE perspectives into their classroom. This paper attempts to address such teachers' needs by detailing an instructional unit contextualized for high school students in Japan.

Methods

This study was framed within the qualitative approach, taking place as teacher research in the form of collaborative "systematic inquiry conducted by teachers" (Borg, 2015, p.

105) in their teaching sites in order for them to better understand their teaching practices. The authors of this paper were two high school teacher-researchers working in the teaching context described below. The research questions which the teacher-researchers sought to explore are: (a) What perspectives do high school students in Japan hold toward the English language and its learning and uses? (b) How does a contextualized WE-informed instructional unit impact the students' attitudes toward the English language, their learning of it and its uses?

Research Setting and Participants

The setting of the study was a Japanese prefectural high school which puts a strong emphasis on foreign language study, especially on its advanced-level English study courses. Except for exchange students, the majority of students have never lived outside Japan, though several classes include returnee students who have spent several years living in an English-speaking country. In general, students are highly motivated to improve their language ability, especially their English. Most English language classes consist of around 20 students and are team taught in the target language by a Japanese English teacher and assistant language teacher working together. Students also have opportunities to put what they've learned into practice when they go on overseas study tours, participate in foreign exchange programs with other schools, and take part in other activities the school organizes in order to give them opportunities to experience and learn about other cultures.

This study concerns a two-credit English course, which was taken by two groups of 19 and 16 students who were 17 to 18 years old in their third year of Japanese high school. The WE-informed instructional unit presented in this study was carried out by the teacher-researchers after the final examination of the course, as a stand-alone unit disconnected from the regular curricular units. Thus, assessment was not involved in the unit. The post-unit individual interviews were conducted by the Japanese teacher-researcher with volunteer student participants three weeks after the completion of the course. Consent was obtained from each participant and their parents via an official school letter which explained that student participation would have no impact on their grades at all. Seven students, Aki, Emi, Haruka, Misa, Nana, Taku, and Yuko (pseudonyms), agreed to participate in the study. A possible reason for this low participation rate is that the teacher-researchers recommended students only volunteer to participate in interviews if they had already finished their university entrance exams. All participants were learners of English who have never lived abroad, with the exception of Haruka and Taku who respectively spent 10 months in France and two years in the United States through study abroad programs.

WE-Informed Instructional Unit

The key theme of this unit was the pluralism of English (Kachru, 1992). This was the focus when designing the unit, around which its objectives were based. The unit's central aim was to provide students with the knowledge they needed to be able to critically examine the dominant language ideologies which are likely to exert a strong influence on their English learning experience. It took place over five 50-minute classes in which students engaged in various activities designed to provide them with the scaffolds they needed to achieve the unit goal. The lessons were conducted by two teacher-researchers in a team-teaching arrangement, where classes were led by the Japanese teacher of English with the English teacher from New Zealand assisting. Two classes of 19 and 16 students each participated in lessons twice a week, though not all members were always present. As the unit was conducted in an English course, instruction was given in English,

and student discussion was done primarily in English. Japanese use arose in some of the discussions, and was not discouraged, as it was deemed necessary for students to fully engage with the complex topic. The unit took inspiration from the pedagogical themes introduced by Kachru (1992) and adapted them to the teaching context in the form of the following two themes.

(a) Focusing on sociolinguistic profile: To facilitate a nuanced, deep understanding of pluralistic use of Englishes around the world, the unit first invited learners to reflect on the sociolinguistic profile of their L1, Japanese, focusing on its language diversity and critiquing the concept of standard Japanese while reviewing historical aspects in Japan. Helping students juxtapose the sociolinguistic profiles of Japanese with Englishes, the unit directed students' awareness to English use and users through analysis of Kachru's (1985) three concentric circles.

(b) Promoting attitudinal flexibility through variety exposure: The unit attempted to promote students' awareness of the diversity of language variety and language users while inviting them to think through standard language ideology. The teacher-researchers hoped that this would enable them to have greater attitudinal flexibility, allowing them to rethink their perception of the English language. The unit was implemented through a variety of activities including a dictation exercise, an analysis of WE speakers and their linguistic backgrounds, and a discussion with exchange students from other Expanding Circle countries.

Day 1 - Introduction to the plurality of English. This first class aimed to raise students' awareness of the variety that exists within the English language by introducing them to the WE model and having them start thinking about the concept of "standard" language. With the Japanese teacher's anecdote about his experiences interacting with a variety of English speakers in the U.S. acting as an opening, the first class started with an introduction to WE. The questions used for the introduction included "What is English?" and "What are Englishes?", which led to an explanation and analysis of Kachru's three concentric circles. Following this was an introduction to the concept of standard English, asking students "which English do you think should be taught in high schools in Japan according to MEXT?" To facilitate students' understanding about language variety and standard language in relation to the English language, the focus was then shifted to Japanese, aiming to enable them to relate their background knowledge and experiences with Japanese to the concept of WE. After a quick discussion of what Japanese dialects they knew of and their impressions toward them, students then examined a graph in Nagase (2015), which represented a 5-point survey on Japanese respondents' impressions toward four major dialects and standard Japanese, ranging from "cold" to "warm," "unsophisticated to "sophisticated," "hard to understand" to "easy to understand" and so forth. This discussion of dialects led to a brief explanation of standard Japanese, "dominant" dialects, and "stigmatized" dialects, which were the key concepts discussed in the next lesson. The lesson was concluded with written reflection by students on what they already knew before the class, what surprised them, what learning point they felt was important, and what they wanted to learn more about in the classes to come.

Day 2 - Language ideology and language users in Japan. The second class aimed to provide students with an understanding of the historical and sociocultural origin of Japanese dialects, raise awareness of the dominant language ideologies in Japan, and shift students' focus from dialects to people who speak dialects. It began with a review of the first class, and then asked students to consider why several dialects exist in Japan before discussing major historical reasons, such as closed communities and underdeveloped transportation. Students then formed small groups, shared their experiences with other

dialects, and talked about the dialects they could speak themselves. They also speculated about what standard Japanese is and when and why it appeared in the past. This was followed by class discussion about warring with foreign countries, modernization during the Meiji era and the political support for the formation of a nation-state, resulting in standard Japanese, an idealized version of Japanese based on the Tokyo dialect which is used in the political, cultural, and financial center of Japan. Students then watched several videos about Japanese dialects and speakers of those dialects. For example, in one video, students were encouraged to try and guess the home regions of participants in a television variety program based on their dialects alongside the celebrity guest appearing on the program. Another video was about a skit in which a formal speech is given in an exaggerated version of a North-eastern accent which eventually becomes intentionally incomprehensible. Students were asked to reflect on whether targeting certain dialects in comedy programs is acceptable and reflected on why some dialects become the victim of stigmatization. Students were asked to think about and discuss the challenges people who speak "non-standard" Japanese have to face before completing a written reflection on the day's activities.

Day 3 - Entering the world of Englishes. The lesson focused on increasing students' understanding of WE by having them analyze video and audio recordings. It began with a refresher on Kachru's categorization of countries into circles. Students then listened to three audio recordings representing these circles, listening to speakers from India, Japan and the United States and made notes of their impressions, what country/area each person came from, and which circle each speaker's region belonged to. This activity aimed to show how speakers from each circle were able to effectively communicate in English regardless of whether they sounded like Inner Circle English speakers or not. After students finished listening to all three recordings, answers were solicited, and to complete the activity, the TED talk video clips from which the recordings were sourced were revealed to the students. The next activity aimed to direct students' attention to variation within varieties, in order to avoid the perceptional homogenization of the nation-based varieties. Students analyzed a video recording of a person with a Southern American accent reading a sentence and tried to write down what he was saying. Students then discussed whether English and Japanese without accents existed given that the English spoken in the American Midwest and Japanese spoken in Tokyo can both be considered dialects. This was followed by reviewing the issue of power in dialects. The final activity aimed to further develop students' awareness about how different individuals' English use could sound by having them listen carefully to language users from diverse backgrounds, including those who had mobilised across different regions or countries as well as those who hadn't. In the activity, students briefly read over five descriptions of English speakers' sociolinguistic backgrounds before listening to randomly ordered recordings from each of them and trying to match the descriptions to the recordings[1]. Each speaker read the same content and a transcript was provided to students so that students could focus on the way each speaker spoke their English. After revealing the answers, students were asked to write a reflection. The speakers' background information, audio clips, and script used for the activity were adapted from the website of International Dialects of English Archive (https://www.dialectsarchive.com).

Day 4 - Interacting with WE users. In this class, students interacted with WE users, receiving the opportunity to improve their understanding of global communication by hearing how English is used and perceived in Expanding Circle countries and how linguistic variation and dialects function in other countries. Four exchange students from Thailand, Taiwan, Germany, and France were invited to the class. The regular students

formed four groups and one exchange student joined each group. After icebreaker activities, the regular students introduced what they now knew about Japanese dialects and answered any questions asked by the exchange students, who were learners of Japanese. In the next activity, these roles were reversed, with exchange students introducing their knowledge of dialects in their home countries and answering questions asked by the regular students. In the final activity, the exchange students talked at length about how English is used in their society, describing their own English education, what attitudes are held toward the language in school and society as a whole, English's relevance to career progression and in daily life, and answering questions from the regular students.

Day 5 - Final reflection: Revisiting standard language ideology. The final lesson reviewed the key ideas of the unit and aimed to nurture a nuanced understanding of what "standard" is in terms of the English language, encouraging students to discuss dominant language ideologies by having them reflect on what "standard English" is and how their perceptions of English had evolved through the unit. It began with a review of Kachru's three circles and the concept of Englishes. Students were asked to briefly discuss whether they felt they were learning "standard English" at school. Students examined definitions for standard English written by MEXT (2018) and Lowenberg (2012), and had a short discussion about which one they preferred, sharing their reasons with the class. To conclude the unit, students spent about 15 minutes writing a few short paragraphs of reflection on what the important things they learned from the classes were, how their perspectives toward the English language had changed as a result, and how they wanted to learn/use English in the future. Students were asked to write their reflections in English to help them consolidate their learning, as their ability to express themselves was of a sufficiently high level, and this also formed part of the English instruction component for the course.

Data Analysis

The semi-structured interview elicited nuanced responses from the participant students and involved asking them follow-up questions in students' L1, Japanese, based on the final written reflections they had completed at the end of the unit on Day 5. Following the analytical coding methods suggested by Merriam and Tisdell (2016), the transcribed interview data and students' final reflection paper were analyzed and given open codes. The codes were then grouped together according to the salient themes that emerged from the analysis, which speak to students' perceptions of and experiences with English and the unit's pedagogical impacts. The analysis of the interview data was conducted in Japanese, and the responses that fall under the identified themes were then translated into English by the teacher-researchers (bilingual language users whose L1s were English and Japanese respectively) for the purpose of presentation, whereas the students' final reflection responses in English were presented as they were.

Limitations

As is often the case with practitioner-oriented research, this study bears typical limitations such as those Rose et al. (2021) observed in their extensive review of pedagogical research. As teacher research aiming to introduce classroom innovation often does, this research took the form of a small-scale, one-shot project reported on through written reflection and retrospective interviews.

Since the study does not include longitudinal data collection or follow-up research due to contextual constraints, the trustworthiness of the conclusions that can be drawn from it is lessened. However, efforts were made to strengthen the trustworthiness of the study's

conclusions by providing detailed description of in-class instruction and by carefully designing the data collection process in order to illustrate the impact the unit had on students. Prioritizing student engagement, student impact was measured through written reflection and post-intervention interviews as opposed to pre- and post-intervention surveys. A pre-intervention survey was judged to have the potential to diminish students' enthusiasm to engage with a novel topic in the classroom, but its inclusion would have made it easier to measure the impact the unit had on students.

In addition, due to the positive rapport and power differential between the teacher-researchers and the students who volunteered to take part in interviews, social desirability bias in the form of the desire to please their instructors may have influenced students when reporting on how their instructors' unit had influenced them. As described above, attempts were made to minimise this bias through ethical research design.

Findings

The research questions for this study were "What perspectives do high school students in Japan hold toward the English language and its learning and uses?" and "How does a contextualized WE-informed instructional unit impact the students' attitudes toward the English language, their learning of it and its uses?". This section presents findings that answer these research questions, detailing the emergent themes of the students' voices identified in the data analysis. Each theme pertains to the students' pre-existing perspectives and experiences regarding the English language, their learning of it and its use, and the pedagogical impact the instructional unit appeared to have on them.

Strong Focus on American and British English and Discovery of Varieties Beyond

The first emergent theme pertains to the existing emphasis on American and British English in students' perceptions and their newfound understanding of varieties beyond these Inner Circle Englishes. Students talked about their initial perceptions in which American and British English were the main varieties of English, and how this had shifted by the end of the unit. Writing on her final reflection that "I didn't know the word 'Englishes' and what it means. People all over the world speak English in various ways and we have to respect every Englishes," Aki further elaborated on her realization of this fact in the interview:

> Until now I'd had an image of English as being American or British English, that only that kind of English was English, so now I came to feel like, oh, this should also be considered a type of English.

Similar to Aki, in Nana's interview, she explained that she had also previously viewed American and British English as "the main kinds of English." Having previously never heard of the Expanded and Outer Circles of English, she felt she had become "a bit used to hearing different kinds of English" through the unit. Another student, Haruka, commented during the interview:

> I already knew a little bit, like I knew that American English and British English are different. But I learned that there's other types as well, like Singaporean English and Japanese English, and realized that around the world there are so many differences in English that we in non-English speaking countries don't have any experience with.

These students' voices illustrate how American and British English form the dominant image of what English is for high school students in Japan. This also indicates a lack of opportunities for students to be exposed to other types of English in everyday classes, and

students explicitly pointed this out during the interviews. Such scarcity of instruction on language variation, which could in turn perpetuate the dominant status of American and British English in the classroom, became another theme which is presented in a later section.

Naive Simplification of Variety Within a Nation

While students' initial perceptions emphasized American and British English as the main types of English, their conceptualization of such Englishes appeared to have been oversimplified. For example, the fact that a variety of regional dialects exist within the U.S. may not have occurred to them. Referring to the video of a speaker with a Southern American accent, Yuko remarked:

> *I thought that in the U.S., everyone spoke the same way. Of course, the U.S. and the UK are different, like they pronounce things differently, but I didn't know there were such great differences within the U.S. I just assumed they all spoke the same for some reason.*

She mentioned in her final reflection that the unit impacted her perspective toward English, as she did not know that just as varieties of Japanese exist in her home country, varieties of English can be found in an Inner Circle country abroad. Referencing the same video in her interview, she shared, "I was really surprised by the video we watched." Aki also shared her reaction to learning of regional varieties of English, commenting "Even if you say 'American English,' it's amazing how it's so clearly different depending on the region. I knew that pronunciation can differ a little, but I didn't realize just how much difference there can be between regions."

Lack of Opportunities for Learning About/Experiencing Language Variety

As previously discussed, the dominance of American and British English on students' perceptions toward English may have resulted from a lack of instructional opportunities for them to experience different types of English at school. For example, Yuko talked about the difficulty she had had when she tried the description matching activity in class, explaining that "I couldn't work it out at all." She mentioned that she was used to American English, and continued, "English teaching materials in Japan are basically all like that, right?"

Another student, Nana, also touched upon the learning materials she had used at school. Nana's response echoed Yuko's remarks, stating in the interview that although lessons on language varieties are not included in English textbooks in Japan, "I thought that's the kind of thing that really matters." Influenced by her enriching experience during the unit, she showed an appreciation for the importance of understanding the issues surrounding WE.

Moving Away From Standard Language Ideology

Through a variety of activities in class, the unit allowed students to think about and critique standard language ideology, which was the main goal of this unit. The analysis of data revealed students' nuanced understandings about the complexities of and their critical perspectives on the English language. Taku, revisiting his understanding of standard English, wrote on his final reflection paper:

> *I learned about the ideas of "standard English." In this globalized world, it is very difficult to define "standard." Yet there are types of Englishes that are inners, outers, and expandings, the language using "English words" with "English grammar" will be English. That's what I learned from here.*

During the interview, he was asked to elaborate more on his comment that "the language using 'English words' with 'English grammar' will be English." He explained, "Japanese people often say that speaking English means being able to use perfect grammar and proper pronunciation, and if you can achieve that then you'll finally be speaking English." Here, Taku references the common association of speaking English with use of "perfect" grammar and "proper" pronunciation that is prevalent in Japan. He continued, voicing a desire to move away from such pervasive normativity, by saying "But actually, using the English that you know, and being willing to try to speak with it, I felt like that itself is what speaking English is."

Explaining that such beliefs were strengthened by the unit, Taku also shared his reflection on one of the in-class activities where he watched the videos of three speakers giving TED talks in English:

> *I thought to myself that when the Japanese person spoke, their English had a strong Japanese accent. But even so, they were understood, which made me feel that actually we don't need to sound like native speakers to use English.*

As Taku commented in his reflection paper, defining standard English is not an easy task considering the multiplicity of the English language. Aki raised an objection to the simplified separation of English predicated on a standard/non-standard binary during the interview:

> *Of course, you could say that the English used on the news is basically standard, but I now feel that separating language into standard and non-standard isn't good. Do we really need to define a kind of standard English?*

Misa is another student who critiqued standard English, reflecting on her past English learning experiences and attitudes toward English. In her day five reflection, she explained the negative attitude she used to have toward the Japanese English her past teacher spoke and her realization as a result of the unit:

> *I thought the education of English I learned in junior high school was low-level because my teacher taught and spoke "Japanese-English." However, I realized that the lesson in a junior-high-school was good for understanding about Englishes and we don't have to learn only American English.*

During the interview, Misa explained the unit cemented a belief that she had developed after entering high school:

> *[The junior high school teacher's] pronunciation of certain words like "him" was kind of like "hinm", which was a bit funny, and I felt like, I don't want to speak like that. I chose this school because I felt that way, because I wanted to be with people who could speak English at a high level even though they're Japanese. But I realized after entering that pronunciation isn't everything, that willingness to communicate is also important, and that communication isn't conveying 100% of what you want to express, which isn't possible, but about being willing to communicate and have your partner understand about 80% of what you want to say. I felt that way before starting this unit, so at the end of the unit I felt like I had reconfirmed that yeah, fundamentally that's the way it is.*

Impacting Students' Perception of Their Own English

Some students revealed that they were harboring insecurities about the English they spoke, and that the unit had changed the way they felt about their spoken English. Nana described how her discovery of the Expanding and the Outer Circles of English and the

opportunity to hear different kinds of English had influenced her feelings about the language. In the interview she commented, "If I had been asked what kind of English I speak, I wouldn't have known how to reply, and I didn't have confidence [in my English] at all but I felt that really, whatever English I speak is okay."

In her interview, another student, Aki, reported being embarrassed about her English when speaking in front of an audience, and critiqued the common association of American and British pronunciation with fluency. Reflecting that before the unit she had felt negatively about speaking Japanese English, she shared a new perspective:

> *Up till now when I spoke English, I've often felt like despite my progress, in the end, I'm just speaking Japanese English. That said, I feel like putting a huge amount of effort into trying to sound "natural" isn't right, that there's no need to get so hung up on pronunciation.*

Aki indicated that she was able to look at her current language ability in a more positive light due to the discovery of a new way of thinking about fluency.

Desire to Learn About Different Varieties of Englishes

The data analysis showed that students are motivated to learn about different varieties of English, a result which serves as a reminder that students' interests are not fixated only on the Inner Circle Englishes. Students' individual needs, such as having the ability to be able to communicate with speakers from countries belonging to other circles, might be potentially invisible to teachers due to the lack of purposeful instructional opportunities.

Emi, for example, was inspired after watching a YouTube video of people in an African country trying their best to explain things in their English, and decided she wanted "to train my ears to be able to understand anyone," referencing the TED video watched in class during her interview.

Another student, Aki, recounted in her interview a teacher's warning about the difficulty of interpreting Singaporean English and how the teacher expressed their aversion to dealing with linguistic differences. She defiantly insisted on the importance of being able to understand speakers of English from a variety of linguistic backgrounds, touching upon potential people she might communicate with in her future:

> *English is being used by many people in various forms around the world. Right now, I'm studying using American and British learning materials, so my ears are very used to these ways of speaking, but the people I will meet won't always be such people [American and British people]. Now I feel that even once I'm able to use English to live my daily life, I want to be able to properly communicate with anyone no matter who they are.*

A third student, Misa, emphasized the importance she placed on using English as a tool for communication. Pointing out the heavy focus on American and British English in school, in the interview she commented, "Like I said before, even before this unit I felt that the basic goal is communication, whether you use English or gestures, either way they're just tools to be able to communicate, so in the end that's what's important." She continued by saying that the unit led her to become more interested in "actively searching out different kinds of English myself."

Unexpected Outcome: Greater Value Put on the Dominance of English as the World's Common Lingua Franca

Exposure to a variety of Englishes and the opportunity to critique language ideology

appears to have led to the development of students' attitudinal flexibility, which was the key outcome the unit strived for, and students' increased or newfound desire to learn about English varieties other than Inner Circle Englishes was also a welcome result. However, sometimes students take away something not intended by the unit design. During the interview, Haruka, who experienced a one-year exchange program in France in the previous year, shared the perspectives about language and culture she had held since before taking part in this instructional unit. She had felt that "to learn about other countries' culture and values, it's important to interact with people from those countries in their language." She continued:

> *Because of my experience studying abroad, I felt that way from the beginning, and I still feel that it's important to learn a variety of languages to learn about different cultures, for example by studying Spanish or French. However, through this unit I started to think that because English is a language which is used all around the world, by learning English, you can learn about the world. It's not quite a shortcut, but learning English can become an opportunity to learn about the world, the fastest way to learn about it. It's used in more places than any other language, so you can speak to a whole variety of people using it, and I feel that makes English really important.*

It goes without saying that the points that students take away from instruction can vary, and this is impossible to control. Haruka's reflection revealed that even though the unit aimed to promote students' attitudinal flexibility, the activities used in the unit, with a heavy focus on exposure to the variety of Englishes in the world, could also have unintentionally cast light on the dominant status the English language enjoys in today's globalized world, creating the potential for students to believe it holds supremacy over other languages.

Discussion and Implications

This final section discusses the findings and their pedagogical implications as well as future directions for English education in Japan and similar teaching contexts.

Awareness-Raising Instruction on Language Varieties

First, as the unit outcome indicated, explicit awareness-raising instructional opportunities involving international and intra-national varieties of English remain limited in public secondary education contexts in Japan. The data analysis revealed the simplistic mindset students previously had toward English with its focus on differences between American and British English. This finding is in line with Matsuda (2003), which is understandable considering the fact that such Inner Circle Englishes have been, often tacitly, pervasive in multiple forms such as materials, testing, and hiring practices (e.g., Brown, 2014; Canagarajah, 2006a; Kubota, 2018; Matsuda, 2002). However, as the students were in their final year of a high school education that focused on language learning and international studies, it was expected that students would have higher levels of awareness of English varieties before the unit. This highlights the cruciality of education on this topic, as exposure to English is scarce outside the classroom in this Expanding Circle country (Hino, 2012). Without deliberate, explicitly focused in-class instruction on the existing diverse English varieties used globally and their language users, it would be difficult to direct students' attention to the plurality of English, let alone to have students understand the basic sociolinguistic profiles of each English in relation to power, which would serve as a foundation for challenging dominant language ideology. Moreover, it would be more beneficial for students to receive such awareness-raising instruction from

the early stages of their English education. This awareness may facilitate a realization that English can be a fluid and nuanced conduit for communication which embraces diversity, allowing them to interact with other speakers of English unimpeded by the constraints of a binary standard/non-standard conceptualisation of English throughout the course of their study and beyond. By learning to accept the differences in the way speakers use English for communication, students will be better prepared to work with people from a diversity of linguistic backgrounds and be able to practice attitudinal flexibility toward English use and users.

Pedagogical Impacts on Students

The goal of this unit was not simply to raise students' awareness of English varieties through exposure to them; it also invited students to utilize their heightened awareness and critical reflections on their beliefs and experiences with English to challenge standard language ideology. Student discussions on common beliefs and ideology surrounding the target language in the classroom may sound ambitious, or even unrealistic for high school L2 learners, especially in the Expanding Circle setting where the use of English is not abundant outside of the classroom. Indeed, previous research and reports on instruction with a similar focus dominantly targeted tertiary contexts (e.g., Bayyurt & Altinmakas, 2012; Galloway, 2013; Rose & Galloway, 2017). However, as the findings indicated, the unit successfully encouraged these high school students to think through the issue of "standardness" of languages, native and non-native speakers, and the complexity and multiplicity of Englishes in today's world, enabling them to discuss dominant language ideology through scaffolded instruction and a series of activities using both L1 and L2. The unit even helped some students to reflect on their relationship with and personal use of English, indicating a potential impact on their L2 speaker identity. In addition, not only was an increase in students' awareness observed, but also an increase in student interest in and desire to learn about different types of Englishes. Considering these pedagogical benefits, incorporation of a WE-informed instructional unit in curricula or even the design of a WE-informed curriculum would be sound, practical proposals for English educators in Japan. This incorporation is vitally important as the concept of proficiency in the English language is complex in light of the variety of Englishes and communities, which, according to Canagarajah (2006a), necessitates one to be multidialectal. As Canagarajah claims, being multidialectal does not mean acquiring production skills in all the different varieties of Englishes. Instead, it means being able to facilitate communication with a diversity of English speakers, a task which requires passive language competence in order to understand the different parties. In addition, we believe that flexible, respectful attitudes toward varieties of Englishes and a willingness to communicate are the foundation of this passive multidialectal competence. Of course, such competence is not fully developed through awareness-raising activities alone. The teaching of hands-on strategies which can be utilized to facilitate and accommodate communication with diverse speakers of Englishes (see Canagarajah, 2007, 2014; Kubota, 2012, 2019; Shibata et al., 2020), including both linguistic and non-linguistic strategies, is a necessary step for educators who advocate a WE-informed instructional approach. However, we argue that an effective awareness-raising instructional unit with a specific goal is necessary scaffolding for students before they move on to learning such strategies.

Teaching World Englishes: The Teacher's Dilemma

As indicated by the data analysis, the unit appeared to have a positive outcome overall, although it cannot be denied that there might have been social desirability bias in the form of the participant students' desire to please their instructors when voicing their views on the unit, and the points students took away from the unit varied considerably. Their

participation in the unit prompted them to think about standard language ideology, raising their awareness of the multiplicity and complexity of the English language. However, the unit also had an unexpected impact on one student's perceptions toward English, which was not within the scope of the unit's objectives. Although the unit sought to promote attitudinal flexibility toward different Englishes by exposing students to WE speakers through a variety of activities, it also exposed students to the popular discourse in which the English language is pervasively used by both native and non-native speakers in today's globalized world, highlighting the significant power that the language holds. In other words, the stressing of the diversity of Englishes in order to challenge language ideologies in the unit might have had the potential for students to come to believe that English virtually is *the* international language. This overlaps with Kubota's (2012, p. 55) warning that even those engaging in critical discussion can "take for granted the assumption that English is a global link language," an idea which is more accurately "viewed as a discourse rather than an absolute fact," but which nonetheless strengthens the dominant presence of English in societies around the world. The issue discussed here might be one of the dilemmas that arise for teachers who take on a pluralist approach in the English classroom and support multilingualism.

One suggestion for addressing such dilemmas is to collaborate with teachers of other subjects such as social studies and other language related subjects, jointly designing each curriculum to complement what might be lacking in the other. In Japanese secondary education contexts in particular, considering the teaching content set in the national curriculum guideline and the number of teaching units allocated to English classes, it might be a challenging proposal for English teachers to also bring students' attention to and promote awareness of languages other than English using their limited class time. Thus, collaboration with other subject teachers in the cooperative design and individual implementation of lesson units under a shared institutional goal may help to mitigate such dilemmas.

Collaboration for Change: Toward Sustained and Well-Designed WE Pedagogy

Along with such cross-disciplinary teacher collaboration, successful implementation of WE-informed approaches in secondary English education would also necessitate English teachers to work closely together with departmental colleagues. This is especially true in the secondary public school context in Japan, where English teachers who teach the same course at a school are often expected to share the same syllabus and assessment. Lack of collaboration within the course may result in a WE-informed instructional unit, if implemented by only one teacher working with particular students, becoming a "spin-off" or "one-shot" project which deviates from the scope of the shared syllabus with no assessment involved, meaning that learning may not be sustained, a dilemma which is reflected in the current study's instructional unit design. Strong collaboration facilitated by a teacher leader or leaders in the workplace that promote mutual aid and learning would be key.

In addition, as Matsuda and Matsuda (2018) suggest, joint collaboration between WE researchers and groups of English teachers interested in WE pedagogy would be beneficial. The WE-informed program at Chukyo High School affiliated with Chukyo University (Lee, 2012) would be a successful example of such collaboration; but at the same time, a unique case as they are associated private institutions, allowing for greater freedom of interaction between the two. An increase in university endeavors to reach out to teachers in public high schools would be welcomed, especially in cases where connections to universities in terms of the curriculum and personnel interactions are scarce. This call for collaboration between scholars and public school teachers is not as

easy as it sounds due to local contextual factors in Japan, such as heavy daily teacher workloads and the lack of administrative support for classroom-based research in public schools. It is not impossible, however, as there are professional development opportunities for teachers, limited though they may be, that can serve as a source of initial contact with WE specialists and related pedagogies. These opportunities could include mandatory in-service teacher training programs periodically offered by each local board of education, and optional workshops and seminars offered by boards of education, the government, universities, or private educational organizations. Demonstration lesson projects in which interested parties are able to observe a teacher's practice as they conduct lessons with a specific focus and aims would be another potential opportunity to bridge teachers and WE specialists, since such projects often allow for collaboration between teachers and professionals such as teacher trainers and university professors outside of school.

Canagarajah's (2006b) argument that teaching English as an international language requires the collaboration of teachers in different communities developing curricula, pedagogies, and teaching materials that are sensitive to local teaching contexts is still relevant today. The need for the joint creation of such teaching resources is becoming increasingly crucial, given the weak connections between research and pedagogy.

Concluding Remarks

It is hoped that this study contributes to the existing body of work detailing practitioners' collaborative endeavours in WE pedagogy, offering practical ideas for potential application to similar teaching contexts. Teachers wishing to implement these ideas will need to consider the characteristics of their own contexts and assess the transferability of the current study's findings. Although the potential limitations of this teacher research cannot be denied, as the findings have shown, WE pedagogical activities may hold great potential for having a positive impact on students. The instructional unit showed that through research-informed pedagogy adapted so as to be relevant to students, teachers are able to invite students to challenge language ideology in the societies they live in, which in turn allows them to take the critical first step in reconceptualizing and further developing their communication skills in English. This will help students to achieve the greater level of communicative competence they will actually need – not one which is reduced to a measurable quantity to be compared against the native speaker norm – in the increasingly diverse societies they will belong to in the future.

Note

[1] It should be noted that accent identification listening tasks can run the risk of constructing or reinforcing stereotypes toward language varieties and users if tasks and instruction are uncritically designed. See Aoyama et al. (in press) for further discussion.

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