

Discussion on Teaching Varieties of English to Students in Japan, who desire to Study Abroad

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Abstract

In order to explore the usefulness of English varieties than American or British English for such Japanese students, Japanese international students who studied at a University in England were selected as participants of this study. A research was performed to investigate how Japanese international students used and perceived English language as an international communication and understanding. This was a survey-based research in which data were collected by questionnaires and interviews. The findings from this study showed that the knowledge of English varieties might be useful for communicating with different mother tongues and international understanding. The cause of their communication failure was that minimal opportunities to speak English in Japan and being unfamiliar with different communication styles. Whether Students prefer to learn varieties of English or American or British English were shown individually. The notion of international understanding was also considered differently at different contexts. In order to achieve such understanding, students required to learn other languages or increase high English proficiency, as well as English varieties. Hence, this study suggests that improving international communications and understanding requires several elements, such as awareness of English varieties, and abilities of high English proficiency and other languages.

1. Introduction

English is a necessary language for higher education in many countries and often holds key information in a variety of academic areas at a global level (McKay, 2002). According to Ingulsrud, Kadowaki, Kurobane, and Shiobara (2002), studying abroad is likely to attract university students' attention for academic and professional objectives, which gives students further educational opportunities. Ayano (2006) states that a number of Japanese university students have opportunities to study abroad where especially the United States and the United Kingdom are preferred.

In Japan's educational context, however, Toyama (2003), who was the Minister of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, states that international understanding and cooperation are essential as a member of the international society where English is a key language as a common international language.

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Hence, from this concern, acquiring English communication abilities is important for Japanese children, which connect them with wide varieties of different nationalities, so that Japan develop further (Toyama, 2003). Honna (2008) points out that as a common international language, teaching English as an international language, not as an American or a British language in a language class is important. Although the notion of international understanding is often considered as learning about other cultures in Japan, it requires both explaining our own culture, and understanding other cultures (Honna, 2008).

In language classes, however, students are likely to learn primarily white middle-class North American or British varieties of English and culture (Kubota, 2002; Matsuda, 2002, 2003a; Marrow, 2004; Fraser, 2006; Honna, 2008), in which English varieties of Asia and other nations are paid little attention (Morrow, 2004; Zhao, Lin and Hoge, 2007). Matsuda (2002) (2003b) emphasises exposing varieties of English for language students, which is under the World Englishes perspectives, in order to prepare them for international communication worldwide and international understanding (kokusai rikai). Matsuda (2002) (2003a) and Morizumi (2009) state that a lack of English varieties may lead students to be surprised and confused when they encounter unfamiliar English varieties outside the language classes. Morrow (2004) also maintains that with the awareness of English varieties, students might feel their own English accent and non-native English varieties as acceptable. Furthermore, Kubota (2002) points out that American or British English centred English teaching encourages students to take a narrow view of different cultures, such as particularly between the United States or the United Kingdom and Japan. Besides, Matsuda (2003b) points out that such understanding requires a number of different languages precisely alongside of English language and its varieties.

On the contrary, Morrow (2004) points out that Japanese students may not prefer different English varieties to be taught, even though those varieties are not inferior. Quirk (1995) also argues that students may feel confusion or surprise when they encounter varieties of English. Hence, in order to explore the usefulness of developing students' familiarities with other English varieties through English education for international communication and international understanding, this research was based on international Japanese students with academic objectives. There is one research question that will be examined:

How awareness of English varieties is important to students who desire to study abroad for academic purposes?: whether it is for international communication or for international understanding.

A research was conducted to investigate the above at a University in the North of England. The participants of the research comprised 16 Japanese students at this University. The research data were collected through the questionnaires and interviews, of which the methodology and the results will be discussed later.

2. The Use of English and English Education

The Different Use of English Language worldwide

A great number of people use English as an international language for communicating with different nationalities in both local and global settings (McKay, 2002). This results in wide varieties of English so that the

term English is likely to change Englishes (Jenkins, 2006). Kachru (1992) points out that the English has become a key language among non-native speakers. What is noteworthy is that at present, the number of non-native English speakers has surpassed the number of native speakers (Graddol, 1997, 2006; Crystal, 2003; Jenkins, 2003). The usage of English, however, is diversity depends on countries and contexts (McKay, 2002).

Kachru (1992) (1998) categorises the trend of English varieties into three different circles. The first category is the Inner Circle, which includes the United Kingdom, the United States and Australia. In this Circle, English is widely spoken in almost all function as a first language (L1) (Schnitzer, 1995; McKay and Bokhorst-Heng, 2008). The second category is the Outer Circle, which includes multilingual countries, such as Nigeria, Singapore and India, where English is used as an institutionalized non-native varieties (ESL) (Kachru, 1992). English frequently holds an official status and plays important roles in several aspects, such as education, administration, and the press (Schnitzer, 1995; McKay, 2002). Here, however, many people use English as the speakers of the Inner Circle countries, therefore, there is grey area between the Inner and Outer circles (McKay, 2002; Jenkins, 2006). Lastly, the other countries, such as Japan, Brazil, Egypt, and other European countries, are classified in the Expanding Circle (Kachru, 1992, 1998). English is not generally used on a daily basis (McKay and Bokhorst-Heng, 2008) but the result of learning English as a foreign language (EFL) within the country contributes to the spread of English (McKay, 2002). However, in several countries, such as Norway and Denmark, people have native like English fluency (Graddol, 1997). Hence, there is also grey area between the Outer and Expanding circles (Jenkins, 2006). In addition, students in this circle are likely to study English to communicate with other non-native English speakers in global settings, especially in the Expanding Circles (Jenkins, 2009). This causes a question of teaching Standard English of the Inner Circle countries to language students. Hence, the use of ESL and FFL is likely to change to English as an international language or English as a lingua franca (ELF) communication (McKay, 2002; Murata and Jenkins, 2009).

English learning contexts in Japan will be demonstrated in the next section.

Japan's English Learning Contexts

Japan is categorised in the Expanding Circle where English is taught as a foreign language, according to Kachru (1992) (1998), where there is no local model of English as in the Outer Circle countries (McKay, 2002). Hence, native speakers' English is situated as a standard model in language classes (Jenkins, 2003). Whereas a command of English skills seems unnecessary in Japanese daily life (Hashimoto, 2007; Yashima, Zenuk-Nishide and Shimizu, 2004; Okuno, 2007), English language is often required for senior secondary and university entrance examination or job applications (Stanlow, 1992; Butler and Iino, 2005; Yamshima, Zenuk-Nishida and Shimizu, 2004; Okuno, 2007). In the classes, particularly American or British English and cultures are selected to be taught to students (Kubota, 2002; Matsuda, 2002, 2003a; Morrow, 2004; Fraser, 2006; Honna, 2008). Furthermore, there is a tendency to focus on English grammar and vocabulary in the classes and in entrance examinations preparation, in which communication skills are often not required (Yamshima, Zenuk-Nishida and Shimizu, 2004; Butler and Iino, 2005; Okuno, 2007). Nevertheless, the fact that English is widely spoken in international settings leads to emphasis on teaching English for international communication (Kubota, 2002; Matsuda, 2003b; Toyama, 2003; Yano, 2003; Fraser, 2006).

According to Toyama (2003), developing international understanding for students is important in global society to enhance Japanese economics and to help other countries, in which English is a key language for linking with Japan and different nations in communicating. Such nations are likely to involve countries around the world (Toyama, 2003). The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) (2003b) enhanced exchange programs with high schools between Japan and abroad for five years from 2003 in a plan. The significant fact is that English communicating in global settings is likely to take place between people from three different circles in Kuchru's (1992) (1998) term, in which non-native speakers are surpass (Graddol, 1997, 2006; Crystal, 2003; Jenkins, 2003). Yano (2009) claims that non-native English speakers speak English for accessing information worldwide and as means of expression towards themselves which includes their societies, cultures, identities. MEXT (2003a) focuses on teaching the fact that varieties of English are used as a means of communication worldwide. These are results in emphasizing on exposing students to teach not only native English varieties, but also other English varieties in language classes (Matsuda, 2003b; Fraser, 2006).

In addition, according to Kubota (2002), learning English relates to international understanding in Japan's language classes, which means *kokusai rikai* in Japanese. Horibe (1998) points out that English language is concerned as bridges of multiple cultures, therefore, it is possible that English learning includes understanding different cultures (as cited in Kubota, 2002, p.22). Matsuda (2002) concerns that students learn cultural differences worldwide from their own culture that is the starting point of international understanding. Such understanding includes fostering students' understanding and appreciation toward diverse countries worldwide (Matsuda, 2003b). In order to achieve these, exposing other language varieties and also non-native and native English varieties are required (Matsuda, 2003b). Honna (2008), however, states that although Japanese people often believe that international understanding means learning different cultures, such understanding also includes explaining Japanese ways of life clearly. Teaching various cultures, however, needs to be carefully considered since the use of English in international setting no longer belongs to the Inner Circle countries (McKay, 2002).

The following section will explore how such situations influences Japanese students' attitudes toward English language.

Students' attitudes toward English language in Japan

According to Lafaye and Tsuda's (2002), Matsuda's (2003b) studies, a large number of Japanese students believed that English was an important language as an international language for international communication and to gain wide range of information, in which English was strongly connected with a single country, the United States. Lafaye and Tsuda (2002) indicated that 71 percent of the university students wish to communicate in English with native speakers of the language, whereas several students (26 percent) responded they would communicate in English with people who spoke ESL or EFL. According to Matsuda's (2003b) study, 70 percent of students said they would use English to communicate with Americans rather than other Asians. Nevertheless, most students were likely to believe that 'a good command of English was important in understanding people from other countries and their cultures' (87 percent) (Matsuda, 2003b, p. 487). Hence,

Matsuda (2003b) points out students have a lack of awareness of different English varieties except American and British English. This is because textbooks are likely to be presented in the language of the Inner Circle countries and cultures (Matsuda, 2003a). Fraser's (2006) study, however, showed students' awareness of several varieties of English of the Inner and Outer Circle countries. From this fact, familiarity of English reflects their awareness of English varieties (Fraser, 2006). Furthermore, students' preference of English varieties is that "may depend on variables such as personal experience, familiarity, gender, cultural conceptions or status, or could simply result from aesthetic appreciation of someone's voice" (Fraser, 2006, P. 86). A trend for preference of English pronunciation indicated that they chose American English rather than other English varieties in Matsuda's (2003b) and Fraser's (2006) studies. 84 percent of Matsuda's (2003b) participants desired to pronounce English like Americans or British. Fraser (2006) also found that a number of students believed the importance of having native speakers' pronunciation (89.4 percent). Hence, as a standard model of English, students are likely to strongly select American English in both Matsuda's (2003b) and Fraser's (2006) studies. Lafaye and Tsuda (2002), however, demonstrated that only 26 percent selected native English as a model of English. Non-native English speakers were chosen as a model by 26 percent and 46 percent was in favour of ELF. However, 75 percent were likely to be envied or admired good speakers of English and 85 percent were overwhelmingly not satisfied their English proficiency (Lafaye and Tsuda, 2002).

A study by Matsuura, Fujita and Mahoney (2004) revealed that only 23.8 percent have positive attitudes toward acceptance of Japanese English. Matsuda (2003b) also found that Japanese English pronunciation, was often seen negatively, as well as incorrect form through her study. The reason of negative attitudes toward Japanese English pronunciation was that 45 percent perceived their English as unintelligible (Matsuda, 2003b). In addition, Japanese English pronunciation was considered as incorrect form, not cool or less fashionable (Matsuda, 2003b). Fraser (2006), however, reported that students did not seem negative toward Japanese English. Rather, they strongly showed the importance of pronunciation as native English speakers (Fraser, 2006).

Unlike students in the previous studies, Japanese international students in England have more opportunities to communicate with different nationalities that may include both native and non-native English speakers. In these cases, students might perceive the role of English differently. In order to explore the necessity of presenting varieties of English to Japanese students, other than American or British English, Japanese international students' attitudes toward English varieties were investigated.

3. Methodology

Participants

This research was carried out at a University in the North of the United Kingdom in the summer term of 2009. Since there was limited numbers of Japanese international students at the University, merely 16 students were found to participate in this study. 13 of them were postgraduate students of the University, one was graduate student and the rest were visiting students. In order to find those research participants, e-mails were sent to Japanese students. The e-mails sent to the students included details of this research, such as the length of time,

the aim, and a brief explanation of the questionnaire and interview. The participants included 7 female and 9 male students, whose ages were between 22 to 35, and were all born in Japan. They had studied English in secondary schools in Japan. 2 PhD students had studied for 5 or 6 years at the University. 11 MA students had studied for 9 months to about a year. One graduated student studied at the University for 3 years and 2 visiting students for 11 months. They majored in subjects including Environment, Economics, Education History, Music, Politics, Sociology and Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL).

Instrument

This research was a survey-based research in which data were collected by questionnaires and interviews. Questionnaires are useful to find patterns of occurrence and to investigate phenomena that are not easy to observe (MacKey and Gass, 2005). Interviews were used to investigate the background to the answers, with which data from questionnaire are identified more precisely. Since Japanese language often uses more ambiguous words than English, the questionnaire was written in English for clarify questions. There were 49 questions with a 5-point Likert scale, Yes/No questions and four open-ended questions. The questionnaire consisted of three sections: students' attitudes toward EIL, opportunities to communicate in English with other nationalities and suggestions of how to improve Japanese language education. The questionnaire was handed to participants individually and it was filled out by the participants before they were interviewed.

Right after participants completed the questionnaire, a face-to-face interview was conducted, which was recorded as research data by IC recorder. All except 5 participants, who were back in Japan at the time, took part in interviews. Therefore, a questionnaire was sent to those who were back in Japan by e-mail, and after evaluating the questionnaires, further questions were sent by e-mail, instead of the interviews. The interviews were conducted in Japanese, as well as the document of questions, because using their native language would allow participants to express their opinion easily or structure their thoughts more appropriately than using English. Interview questions were based on answers given on the completed questionnaire by each student. The interview was divided into three sections, including attitudes toward the English language, English varieties, and English language education in Japan.

Analysis

The data were analysed with a research question. How awareness of English varieties is important to students who desire to study abroad for academic purposes?: whether it is for international communication or for international understanding. Questionnaire data and interview results were presented in sections; the opportunities to communicate with different nationalities, positive attitudes toward English varieties, neutral and negative attitudes toward English varieties, English varieties and international understanding, the experiences of international communication and students' attitudes, understanding English for international communication. In order to present the trend of each section, the number of participants was calculated. In order to analyse the interview data, transcripts of the recorded interviews of all participants were made. Since the interviews were conducted in Japanese, the transcripts were written in Japanese which were subsequently translated into English. These data were compared with the results of the questionnaires and categorised, identified and analysed.

Similarities and differences between the present research data and previous studies were discussed.

4. Findings

The opportunities to communicate with different nationalities

During their time at the University, all participants had a large number of opportunities to speak English with people from different countries (See Table 1). 15 students had opportunities to communicate with people from East and Southeast Asian countries, such as China, South Korea, Thailand or Malaysia. However, there also were many opportunities to communicate with people from the United Kingdom (12 students) and other European countries (13 students). The number of experiences to communicate with people from countries in the Inner Circle, except the United Kingdom, however, was lower. For example, the United States was 7 students and Canada, Austria and New Zealand were only 2 students. Therefore, they rather had more opportunities to speak English with people from South America (8 students) and Africa (6 students).

Table 1

Q9. I have many opportunities to speak English with students

	SA	A	Neutral	D	SD
from Japan	0	0	5	8	3
from East and Southeast Asian	11	4	1	0	0
from other Asian countries	4	8	2	2	0
from South America	1	7	4	3	1
from Africa	0	6	4	4	2
from the United Kingdom	8	4	3	1	0
from Europe except the United Kingdom	6	7	1	2	0
from the United States	1	6	1	5	3
from Canada, Australia or New Zealand	1	1	3	4	7

[Number=16] SA=Strongly Agree; A=Agree; D=Disagree; SD=Strongly Disagree

How such experiences influence on students' attitude towards English varieties will be seen in the next section.

Positive attitudes toward English varieties

In the questionnaires, 11 students considered knowledge of English varieties was important, while 2 of them believed it was unnecessary (See Table 2). According to the interviews, students provided detailed opinions: 'It is very hard to listen to British English with strong dialect, is it not? What are they talking about? I could not understand several lecturers at all' (Student A); 'One may need as knowledge. If students learn Japanese English as a Japanese style of English and not as a mistake, Japanese students may have more confidence in speaking English' (Student B). Student C also considered awareness of the varieties was important when she

communicated with others. However, Student C mentioned that it was unnecessary to learn English before studying abroad; rather, Student C thought that learning Basic English, which is taught at school, was more useful because at least you could fundamentally communicate in English. There were also a few students who considered that learning English of the Inner Circle countries provides students with opportunities to communicate with people worldwide.

Table 2

	SA	A	Neutral	D	SD
Q13. knowledge of a wide variety of Englishes in the world is important	3	7	4	2	0

[N=16] SA=Strongly Agree; A=Agree; D=Disagree; SD=Strongly Disagree

Neutral and Negative attitudes toward English varieties

The students who showed neutrality or negativity in open-ended questions had different views. With regard to the neutral position (4 students), several reasons were pointed out: ‘If we know American or British English, we can communicate with everybody around the world’; ‘my interest is their own language, not so much can English varieties’. The interviews also demonstrated students’ opinions: ‘At first I could not understand what lecturers were saying about with the strong features of mother tongue in English accent they had. However, after several lectures, I got used to the accent and it rather became easier to listen to. Hence, as knowledge, it may be useful but I think gaining Basic English first is more practical to achieve further English skills’ (Student J).

Several other students considered the knowledge was not important in questionnaires: ‘As an English learner, a variety of English confuses me’; ‘English is a tool for communication. So, the knowledge of a variety of English is not important for communication.’ Through the interviews, more detailed reasons were revealed: ‘Even though you learn English varieties, they are diverse and it depends on the people you are communicating with. So I always manage those differences during communication. I have two Thai friends but one has a very strong accent, though the other’s accent has less L1 features’ (Student D); ‘It is English proficiency rather than English varieties. This means that good speakers of English can speak English well regardless of the countries they are from. So, there is no need to separate it into varieties of English’ (Student E). Furthermore, Student E mentioned that ‘When I use English, there is no need to speak with people from all over the world. I just need necessary information and to communicate with people from a particular country.’

The relationship between English varieties and international understanding will be examined in the following section.

English Varieties and International Understanding

The interesting finding in this research was that 15 students considered that English was important in international understanding, and 11 believed that the language was not enough to understand other nationalities

and cultures (See Table 3). Furthermore, in order to communicate with other nationalities around the world, 10 students pointed out that English was not enough (See Table 2).

The interviews demonstrated that the notion of international understanding, however, was different in each individual. The majority of students often stated that knowing speakers' mother tongue was also important to understand them, especially when communicating with people who could not speak English. They sometimes found through their travel in other countries that not everyone could speak English at where English was not the native language. Student G pointed out that there were limitations to communicating with Filipinos in English, especially with people from rural areas, even though his experiences in the Philippines showed him that English was learnt as an ESL in the country. Student H, however, claimed that even when he communicated in English with people who have high English proficiency, it was different from communicating in their mother tongue. Hence, Student H considered that the possibility of understanding other cultures or people through English would depend on the conception of such understanding. Student C had a different view: 'I understand native English speakers can speak English very well but even non-native speakers, particularly those from European countries, acquire English skills more readily than Asians. As an international language, I think, it is important for everyone to be able to communicate at the same level. This means using English as an international language is very disadvantageous for the Japanese. I wonder whether I can understand the meaning at the same level of native-speakers or not. Even if I talk about my feelings, people may not understand.'

Table 3

Q6a. English is essential:

	SA	A	Neutral	D	SD
in international and intercultural understanding	8	7	1	0	0
to communicate with other nationalities all over the world	8	7	1	0	0

[N=16] SA=Strongly Agree; A=Agree; D=Disagree; SD=Strongly Disagree

Q7. English is not enough:

	SA	A	Neutral	D	SD
in international and intercultural understanding	4	7	2	2	1
to communicate with other nationalities all over the world	3	7	2	3	1

[N=16] SA=Strongly Agree; A=Agree; D=Disagree; SD=Strongly Disagree

The experiences of international communication and students' attitudes

The results of questionnaires showed that even though students often encountered with varieties of English, 14

of them got confused by unfamiliar British English accent as well as 15 students by unfamiliar other types of English (See Table 4). In addition, they were likely to feel more inferior of their English proficiency in communicating with British students rather than with other international students. 12 students felt their English proficiency was inferior when they communicated with British students and 8 were for other international students (See Table 5). However, each 10 students preferred to pronounce and speak English as British students do (See Table 6). Furthermore, they often had interests in English varieties in the Inner Circle countries rather than varieties of English in other two circles. 14 of them had interest in the Inner Circle English varieties, however, only each 9 showed their interests towards two other English varieties (See Table 7). Furthermore, although students were likely to wish to communicate in English with people from the three different circles except the Japanese, British people were mostly preferred to communicate with by all participants, in which 11 agreed strongly (See Table 8). Japanese English pronunciation, however, was not seen negatively as the previous studies. 11 students agreed the unnecessary for Japanese students to pronounce as British students and 9 mentioned the unnecessary towards speaking like home students (See Table 6).

Table 4

Q15. I get confused when I encounter unfamiliar English accents in:

	SA	A	Neutral	D	SD	NA
British English	7	7	1	1	0	0
Other Englishes	6	9	0	0	0	1

[N=16] SA=Strongly Agree; A=Agree; D=Disagree; SD=Strongly Disagree; NA=Not Answer

Table 5

Q18. I feel that my English proficiency is inferior when I talk to:

	SA	A	Neutral	D	SD
British Students	8	4	3	1	0
International students	1	7	5	3	0

[N=16] SA=Strongly Agree; A=Agree; D=Disagree; SD=Strongly Disagree

Table 6

	SA	A	Neutral	D	SD
Q19. I would like to pronounce English as British Students do	2	8	5	1	0
Q20. I would like to speak English as British Students do	2	8	4	2	0
Q21. Japanese students should pronounce English as British students do	0	0	5	7	4

Q22. **Japanese students** should **speak** English 0 0 7 5 4
as British students do

[N=16] SA=Strongly Agree; A=Agree; D=Disagree; SD=Strongly Disagree

Table 7

Q12. I am interested in the Englishes which are used

	SA	A	Neutral	D	SD
as a first language	8	6	2	0	0
as a second language	6	3	6	1	0
as a foreign language	4	5	4	1	2

[N=16] SA=Strongly Agree; A=Agree; D=Disagree; SD=Strongly Disagree

Table 8

Q10. I am interested in communicating in English with students:

	SA	A	Neutral	D	SD
from Japan	2	2	1	4	7
from East and Southeast Asian	7	7	2	0	0
from other Asian countries	7	7	2	0	0
from South America	6	7	3	0	0
from Africa	6	8	2	0	0
from the United Kingdom	11	5	0	0	0
from Europe except the United Kingdom	7	8	1	0	0
from the United States	8	6	2	0	0
from Canada, Australia or New Zealand	7	7	2	0	0

[N=16] SA=Strongly Agree; A=Agree; D=Disagree; SD=Strongly Disagree

Understanding English for international communication

The role of English in international situations may be difficult, for a few students to accept, without encountering with non-native English speakers. The results of the questionnaires showed that all Japanese students used English as an international language, while half of them also used American or British English as a fundamental English variety (See Table 9). According to the interviews, most students accepted the role of English in global settings, in their lives, or language classes: ‘students frequently consider that English is definitely the most used language in the world, and therefore is an international language. It might actually be so. In the extreme views, there is a major assumption that people think the only foreign language is English’ (Students A); ‘I have been taught English not as an American English per se, but as a tool to communicate with people from worldwide’ (Student I). However, 3 other students understood it through experiences of

communicating with people from the Outer and Expanding Circle countries: ‘When I entered university in Japan, there were many international students from the Middle East who used English for communication. That is when I noticed English was not only spoken by American or British people’ (Student C). Student F found that English was not limited to native speakers through communication with non-native English speakers in Singapore. Until then, she believed that English belonged to only native speakers of English. Students K had this realization in England through encountering a wide variety of nationalities, since she did not have opportunities to use English in Japan.

Difficulties in English communication, however, may not always relate to a lack of English varieties. 3 students pointed out that the most important factor in communication was transmitting the meaning to listeners. However, they had fewer opportunities to speak and listen to English in the language classes. Hence, they often expected to improve communication skills rather than acquire knowledge of English varieties. For example, Student C considered that her lack of confidence in speaking English led to difficulties in communicating, writing and reading in English.

Table 9

	SA	A	Neutral	D	SD
Q2. I use English as an international language	9	7	0	0	0
Q4. I use American or British English because these are basic example of English	6	2	7	1	0

[N=16] SA=Strongly Agree; A=Agree; D=Disagree; SD=Strongly Disagree

5. Discussion

In this section the results from the questionnaires and interviews will be discussed, in order to answer the research question: How awareness of English varieties is important to students who desire to study abroad for academic purposes?: whether it is for international communication or for international understanding

English varieties for effective communication

As Matsuda (2003b) and Fraser (2006) stated, students consider that awareness about English varieties promotes their international communication skills in English in this study. Japanese students were more likely to communicate with non-native English speakers than native speakers, even in the Inner Circle countries. They encountered unfamiliar native English accents during their study in England. This is due to the international settings, which in turn means that some lecturers and students may have unfamiliar English accents without regard to native or non-native. Furthermore, being familiar with English varieties, Japanese students might become more confident in speaking English, as formerly mentioned by Matsuda (2002) (2003), Morrow (2004) and Morizumi (2009). In addition, unlike previous studies, students did not show negative attitudes toward Japanese English in previous study. Hence, English varieties which students are likely to encounter in the future should be taught (Fraser, 2006).

However, teachers should consider the fact that the type of non-native English varieties does not always reflect features of their native language. Hence, unfamiliar native and non-native English varieties still lead to confusion, which is shown by the results on Table 1. Furthermore, even if students have experiences of English communication worldwide, they may prefer to learn native norm of English. It is an interesting fact that whereas students believed that Japanese students do not need to pronounce (11 students) and speak (9 students) English as its native speakers, 10 students were willing to learn native English in present study. Students were likely to feel that their English is inferior compared to people from the Inner Circle (12 students) rather than other foreigners (8 students). Unlike the Outer Circle countries, English is not used in their daily life in Japan. Therefore, it can be sad that the students understand that English has two roles: one is Basic English being used as the mother tongue in the Inner Circle countries, and one as an international language. Hence, native English may also be Basic English for some students. In such contexts, Fraser (2006) indicates that “students should not be denied access to native speakers models and techniques for approximating to native speakers speech should they desire it” (p. 90). Here, however, importantly, the preference of native English does not always relate that students are intolerant of other English varieties.

In addition, in order to be more confident and to accept the international role of English, several students may need to experience communicating with non-native speakers of English as Matsuda (2003b) stated: “students should have more personal contact with people from other cultures, especially non-US/European” (p. 494). Fraser (2006) points out that “students should be encouraged to participate interactions in English without embarrassment about their own Japanese pronunciation and to recognise that effective communication can occur regardless of the varieties” (p. 90).

For these reasons, although awareness of English varieties help Japanese students to English communication in international settings, they should be taught how to manage and communicate when they encounter such situations, which may be more practical.

English varieties for International Understanding

In present study, students were likely to concern that international understanding meant to understanding different countries and cultures. English varieties helped students to understand other nationalities and cultures, however, the understanding was considered individually at different contexts in the present research. Therefore, this study carefully presents the relationship between English varieties to international understanding in the language classes. Japanese students often found that even in the Outer Circle countries, where English often had official status, not every person could speak English fluently in this study. Such experiences lead students to different views of international understanding. This indicates that international understanding requires learning and speaking other languages besides learning English varieties. A high level of English proficiency may also be required when students interact with native speakers of English. Hence, although individuals may be at different proficiency level, addressing to study English varieties as well as other languages, on top of achieving high English skills seems important for international understanding.

6. Conclusion

This study suggests that teaching English varieties should consider the different uses of English in different contexts for Japanese students who desire to study abroad for academic objective in Japan. In present study, awareness of English varieties helps facilitating English communication and international understanding. For example, with such awareness, international students are able to communicate more easily with people who have different L1 and understand them. The difficulties in English communication, however, are likely to take place because of a lack of opportunities to speak English with other nationalities and a lack of familiarity. Hence, students should be provided with opportunities as many as possible to communicate with different nationalities worldwide and learn how to communicate with them. It is important fact that even if students communicate with different nationalities worldwide, they become confuse to unfamiliar English varieties regard less of native and non-native speakers. When they prefer to be taught in merely Standard English which is taught in the classes rather than to be taught varieties of English as well, teachers should consider it.

The relationship between English varieties to international understanding is important to teach carefully, since students might perceive it individually at different contexts. It is possible understand other cultures and nationalities through varieties of English. However, such relationship may lead to ignorance of other language varieties and improving high English proficiency. Students strongly concern that such understanding requires understanding of home languages rather than English varieties, when they desire to truly understand them in this study.

This, however, is a small case study in which merely 16 participants, who are mostly at postgraduate level, were involved. Hence, there are limitations to this research. Undergraduate students may have more opportunities to communicate with British students than postgraduate students; however, this may vary individually. Furthermore, a higher level of English abilities will be required for postgraduate students, which level may differ depending on their fields of studies. Hence, examining undergraduate and postgraduate students separately with a larger-scale study will provide more practical results from questionnaires and interviews.

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