

Issues surrounding English language use in business in non-Anglophone countries: A Japanese Case Study

非英語圏語国のビジネスにおいて使われる英語の諸問題:
日本におけるケーススタディ

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Abstract

One of the consequences of globalization lies in the change in linguistic ability required of staff in the workplace. The organic expansion of companies along with mergers and acquisitions across borders and a growing international customer base have brought with them a rapid increase in the need for English. In international companies located in non-Anglophone countries there is a need for a functional bilingualism in workers at many levels of a business. This is necessary to facilitate the smooth running of the office and ensure efficient business communications with native speakers of English at company headquarters or in other companies. It allows communication between non-native speakers of English using an established lingua franca. Part of a project in progress, (see Lafaye 2011 for previous case studies), this work focuses on a New York domiciled Japanese company, in which English is one working language of two. Using an in-depth interview with the CEO, accompanied by questionnaires and follow-up interviews with employees, it looks at who is using English, how and why. Is the reason for the use of English economic, ideological, or status or image-driven? The study concerns Hayato New York. It found that English is of economic value and image-driven, and not for ideological ends.

要約

グローバル化がもたらした結果のひとつに、職場で要求される言語能力の変化がある。

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国境を越えての企業合併や企業買収、あるいは海外の顧客の増加に伴う組織の拡大は、英語に対する必要性を急速に増大させた。非英語国の国際企業では、今日、企業内の様々なレベルの仕事において、職務上、バイリンガルの働き手を必要とする状況がもたされた。英語力は職場の円滑な運営に必要であり、本社や他企業の、英語を母語とする人びととのコミュニケーションにも必要である。そしてまた、確立された国際共通語である英語を使用することにより、英語を母語としない人びととのコミュニケーションをも可能にする。現在進行中の研究計画（他の事例研究について、はラファエ 2011年参照）の一部として、この報告は、ニューヨークを本拠地とする日本企業—そこでは英語をふたつの使用言語のうちの一つとしている—を対象としている。代表取締役への詳細なインタビューと、従業員へのアンケートおよび事後インタビューを用いて、同企業において、誰が、どのような、どういう理由で英語を使用しているかを調査する。英語を使用するのは、経済的、イデオロギー上の理由なのか、それともステイタスやイメージ向上のためであるのか？今回調査した企業は、ハヤトニューヨークである。この研究により、英語は経済的有用性、イメージ向上のためであり、イデオロギー的な目的で使用されているのではないことが明らかになった。

1. Introduction

In Japan, owing to the way entrance examinations are structured, success with the English language determines in some measure which college of further education students will be able to enter, and often how they will be streamed in school. Later, students are required to pass more language tests when they apply for jobs, irrespective of their chosen career path. The impact of English on Japanese lives is unquestionable, yet in Japan there are few studies of English use in the workplace, where some of this heavy investment in language study should yield results. A selection of studies into language and the workplace in other countries can be consulted in the bibliography at the end of this paper (Hagen, S. (1999) Incelli, E. (2008) Ozaki, S. (2010) Sherman, T (2014), Talif and Noor (2014), and a discussion found in an earlier report in this project, (Lafaye 2011). The latter reported on English use in the workplace in France.

There has been a lot of interest recently in reforming language teaching policy in order to improve English competency levels in Japan. The fact that Japan will host the 2020 Olympic Games may provide the catalyst for change. There had already been promises by the government to address the issue early in 2013, notably to expand the JET program and send teachers to all elementary and secondary schools in the next decade (M. Ayako, 2013) and these predated the successful bid for the 2020 Olympics. However, the commitment to English was soon firmed up following the September win. A brief introduction to The Execution Plan

for the Reform of English Education in Response to Globalization which is the Ministry of Education's blueprint for improving English language education can be found in Kodera and Kameda (2013). Japan's TOEIC performance — 25th out of 27 countries, has been weak (S. Numata, 2013) and its position behind Korea in particular, ranked 22nd, may motivate further efforts to improve.

Rather than waiting for the results of the coming changes in language education, which will take time, some Japanese companies have made English a first or second official language, allowing them to recruit the best Japan has to offer, linguistically, and use such employees to advantage in their global development. Two high profile companies which have taken this route are Rakuten and Uniqlo, but some very small companies have chosen the same path. This paper is a case study of one such company.

2. Goals

The focus for the project is the use of English in the workplace in non-anglophone countries. The present study is concerned with a company in Japan. The goals of the paper are twofold. The first aim is to investigate English use, and issues relating to attitude and language learning experience. The second is to understand the rationale for the use of English in the company. The following two questions are addressed: 1. Who is using English, how and why? 2. Is the reason for English use in this company economic, ideological, or status or image-driven?

In an earlier paper in the project (Lafaye, 2011), the reason for using English as the working language in the 2 companies under study was clear. Company 1, a non-Anglophone company, Infores, was taken over by an American company (Symphony IRI); company 2, a non-anglophone company (Toyota), was operating in a non-anglophone country (France). The company now under investigation, however, is Japanese-owned and branches using English are in Japan.

3. Materials and Method

This paper is a case study of language use in a privately-owned, New York-domiciled Japanese hair salon, Hayato New York, employing some 50 people and having branches in New York, London and Tokyo. Data was collected from the Tokyo branches over three days in the summer of 2013. Questionnaires were distributed and follow-up interviews conducted with respondents who gave questionnaire answers requiring development. A total of 12

questionnaires and 4 interviews were carried out. 7 questionnaires were completed and 3 staff members interviewed at the Roppongi salon. 5 questionnaires were completed and 1 staff member interviewed at the Academy in Omotesando. In addition, the owner of the company was interviewed. All respondents are Japanese.

The questionnaire, in Japanese, was broken down into 20 statements, graded on a five-point scale from 5 (strongly agree) to 1 (strongly disagree). A semantic differential scale made up the 10 final items of the questionnaire, allowing the author to gauge emotional responses to the English language.

The questionnaire gathered information on the following question categories:

1. Who is using English in the company and why?
2. What is your attitude toward English?
3. How do you rate your English level and English learning experience?

4. Results

4.1 Questionnaire

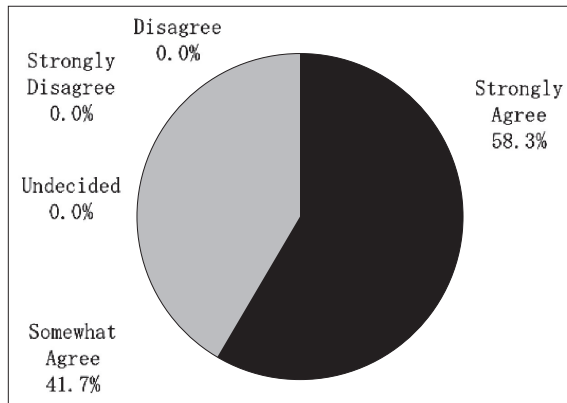
4.1.2. Who is using English in this company and why?

St 1 Foreign companies and customers always communicate with my company in English.
 St 2 This company sponsors English language training.
 St 3 I communicate with our branches in other countries in English.
 St 4 Only stylists and managers need to communicate in English in this company.
 St 19 English is useless to me professionally.

The responses to statements (hereafter st)1 to 4 and 19 relate to this question and the most significant findings are referred to below. It should be noted that statements 14 through 20 have only 11 respondents, as respondent 4 at the Academy completed only statements 1 through 13.

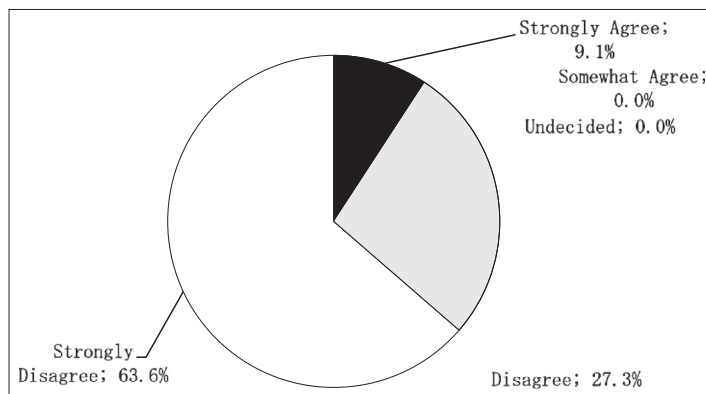
There is unanimous agreement that English use is important for Hayato employees. All employees agree that foreign companies and customers communicate with staff in this company in English, (st. 1), and 10 respondents of the 12 (83%) disagree with the statement that only stylists and managers need to communicate in English in this company (st. 4). Similarly, 10 of 12 respondents (83%) to st.19 agree that English is useful to the majority of this company's employees professionally.

Statement 1. Foreign companies and customers communicate with my company in English



Statement 1. ($\chi^2 = 18.83$, $df = 4$, $p < .01$) shows convergence or differing degrees of the same opinion.

Statement 19. English is useless to me professionally



Statement 19. had significant differences among response frequencies ($\chi^2 = 15.81$, $df = 4$, $p < .01$), and shows how important a majority of employees in this company think English is to their work.

The entire Hayato staff needs to use English on a regular basis, since 40-50% of the salon’s customers communicate in English. This comprises all the communication from appointment scheduling on the telephone or via the internet, welcoming the customers and while all the hair care beyond that is carried out, including during discussions about style, during washing, cutting, drying, massage and so forth.

It was observed that work in salons requires significant amounts of repetitive communication

and small-talk, and employees have multiple chances to perfect this kind of communication. There is also a requirement for specialized language use such as in descriptions of chemical products or possible reactions to these, and in explanations of cutting and styling techniques, using technical terms. Employees were also observed having successful telephone conversations in English, the mark of a confident foreign language user.

The results hitherto recorded present a very clear picture of the need for English everyday. However, in response to statement 3, 'I communicate with our branches in other countries in English, only 2 respondents agree or strongly agree, 8 others disagree or strongly disagree, and 2 are undecided. The reason for this unexpected response is that even at manager level only one or two couple employees need to communicate with other companies, as would be expected in a hair salon. Scaling methods do not leave an opportunity for gray areas and comments, so that respondents do their best to answer and the disagreement or indecision answers on the scale offered the only logical responses here.

4.1.3. What is your attitude to English?

St 11 I like English.

St 12 I have several non-Japanese, English-speaking friends.

St 15 I prefer to watch films in their original language (with or without subtitles) rather than dubbed into Japanese.

St 17 It is right that academic (scientific etc) and commercial (website) publications should primarily be in English.

St 20 English loanwords bother me. I prefer to use original Japanese words.

The responses to statements 11, 12, 15, 17, 18, 20, relate to this question and the most significant findings are referred to below.

Respondents answered overwhelmingly in the positive about whether they like English. 7 of 12 (58%) strongly agree and 5 of 12 (42%) agree somewhat (st11). Similarly, all but two respondents (83%) have non-Japanese English-speaking friends, indicating a positive attitude to English (st 12). Responses to statements 17 and 18 'It is right that academic and commercial publications should primarily be in English; The position of English as a global language is unacceptable to me' might be interpreted as negative. In answer to the statement that academic and commercial articles should primarily be in English, a majority (7) are undecided (58%), 3 disagree and 1 strongly disagrees. Should we conclude that respondents disagree with

the domination of the English language in academe and commerce? The author interprets it as non-negative because the issue may not have been thought about hitherto. The respondents may not have a clear idea of a need for academic and especially scientific papers to be read by the widest audience possible (and researchers worldwide) for comparative or fact-finding ends. Given the positive responses to other statements, this is the logical interpretation, rather than that respondents are worried about language death or language monopoly. The respondent sample does not have protective thoughts towards the Japanese language, given that 70% of respondents are comfortable with loanwords (st 20). Moreover, almost three quarters of respondents (72.72 recurring) are unopposed to the position of English as a global language (st 18).

4.1.4. How do you rate your English level and English learning experience?

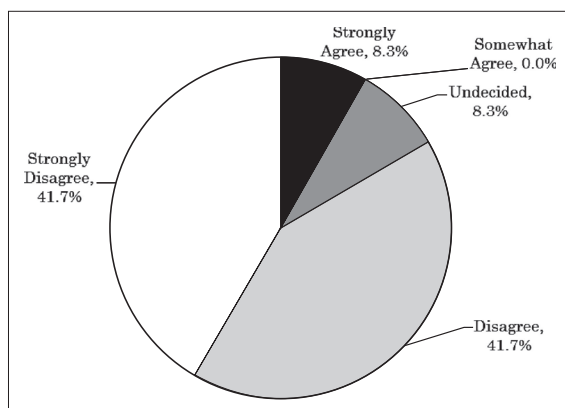
St 8 Language teaching methods at secondary schools in my country are excellent.
St 10 I think I have made an above average effort to study English.
St 13 A period of study abroad is essential in order to master a foreign language.
St 14 I read English better than I speak it.
St 16 I write English well.

The responses to statements 8, 10, 13, 14, 16, relate to this question and the most significant findings are referred to below.

Half of the available sample can not decide, or disagree with the statement that they made an above average effort to learn the English language (st.10). A majority (70% or 8 of 11) agree that they do not read it as well as they speak it (st.14). These responses are somewhat unexpected since non-native speakers of English commonly report that they read or write more easily than they speak and those who speak well point to enormous efforts in order to achieve this. They can be explained in the present context as respondents have regular and repetitive speaking practice with customers but do not have a need for writing or reading. All employees have been observed as competent speakers of English, albeit with varying levels of fluency. Surprisingly also, there was a mixed response to the statement that a period of study abroad is essential in order to master a foreign language, (st 13). 67% agree (8 in 12) but 2 disagree and 2 are undecided about the need for a long stay abroad. This is unexpected since Hayato staff members are all required to spend time in salons in England or the United States. In a follow-up interview, the most fluent respondent, C., who disagrees strongly with

the statement, said that motivation is everything and it is irrelevant whether one learns at home or abroad. Finally, in response to statement 8 regarding English learning experience, 83.41% of respondents report negatively.

Question 8. Language teaching methods at secondary school in my country are excellent



Question 8 has significant differences among response frequencies ($\chi^2 = 9.67$, $df = 4$, $p < .05$). Compared with result 8 in Lafaye 2011 regarding teaching methods in France, even more Japanese respondents disagree with the statement, 83.41% as opposed to 75.87%.

4.2. Emotional Response to English

Osgood's semantic differential (1957) helps researchers to measure opinion and attitude and values. In this study, 7 of 11 respondents or 63.63% chose items on the right of the median scale, each of these a confident communicator. While not conclusive, the result confirms earlier questionnaire findings that a majority of these employees have a positive attitude towards English, and in this section, respondents favouring such items as 'easy' over 'difficult', 'pleasant' over 'daunting' 'indispensable'. The response of T., below, is a good example, and indicates a very favourable disposition towards the English language.

英語について、二つの対照的な言葉でより強くなっとくする方に○をつけて下さい

	1	2	3	4	5	
21.難しい	:_____:	:_____:	:_____:	:_____:	:_O_:	簡単
22.苦しい	:_____:	:_____:	:_____:	:_____:	:_O_:	楽しい
23.不必要	:_____:	:_____:	:_____:	:_O_:	:_____:	必要不可欠
24.侵入	:_____:	:_____:	:_____:	:_____:	:_O_:	歓迎
25.貧しい	:_____:	:_____:	:_____:	:_____:	:_O_:	豊富
26.複雑	:_____:	:_____:	:_____:	:_____:	:_O_:	単純
27.はっきりしない	:_____:	:_____:	:_____:	:_____:	:_O_:	はっきりしている
28.多義的	:_____:	:_____:	:_O_:	:_____:	:_____:	正確
29.つまらない	:_____:	:_O_:	:_____:	:_____:	:_____:	おもしろい
30.醜い	:_____:	:_____:	:_____:	:_____:	:_O_:	美しい

4.3.1. Post-questionnaire interviews

An interview with T. provided some useful information about language use in the salon, about language education at school and about personal efforts regarding language learning. This employee was able to spend 2 years in the United States, working at Hayato New York and is now art director at one of the Japanese salons. He said that 40% of customers are Caucasian, making English use imperative on a daily basis; customers choose this salon not only for the service they receive but because they can use English. T. pointed out that Chinese and Korean customers are also very common but they communicate in Japanese.

About his English language learning experience, T. said that classes in junior and senior high school were boring with few chances for speaking. He thought more communicative classes would have proved effective. In junior high school there had been an assistant language teacher but not enough contact hours with him. However, T is at the top end of the 25 to 45 year-old age bracket in the sample and communicative language teaching has impacted on Japanese language education in the years since he left formal education. Tools that have helped T. to become fluent have included TV, specific podcasts like TED talks (the Technology, Entertainment and Design non-profit organization which has been broadcasting short informative talks since 1984) and reading comics in English. His experience matches that of a second interviewee, C. Both say they believe that personal motivation accounts in large measure for linguistic success, irrespective of what takes place in formal education.

4.3.2. Interview with salon owner

The author interviewed the owner of the company, Tanoue Hayato, in June 2013. Mr Hayato began his career in the 1980s, at a time when there were few male hair stylists. Men were barbers. Hayato moved to New York in 1989 and worked in a Japanese-American beauty salon before winning a green card in the U.S. immigration lottery, which had just started at that time (up to 55,000 are won annually, as detailed in Kirberger 2014), and which allowed him to open his own salon there in 1991. The salon, Hayato Beside, was renamed Hayato New York in 1994. Since then he has opened a series of hair salons in Tokyo (Omotesando, Roppongi, and most recently Harajuku) and one in London. He also opened a training academy (Empire Beauty Academy) in 2012. He now employs some 50 members of staff overall catering for customers in New York/London who are predominantly foreign (70%) and for customers in Tokyo 50% of whom are foreign. 20 staff work in New York, 7-14 work in London at any given time (depending on staff being dispatched from Japan) and 10 to 13 per salon in Japan's two main salons.

In the early days of Hayato New York, many Japanese nationals went to the salon asking for work, but they did not speak good English. This gave him the idea that he would offer them an internship, doing cutting, perming, colouring training, along with English language training. In the guise of a working holiday, he could have workers in exchange for training and language lessons. Staff would work for about 6 months, then return to Japan. This led to his present policy of offering every staff member overseas residence — in the U.S. or U.K. — usually for between 3 and 12 months, though some staff have stayed overseas for two years or more. Almost 300 of his staff have pursued such training over the past 20 years. One of the cornerstones of Hayato's salons is the raceless service offered, which means that they can cater to any hair texture. Another speciality is the service massage, imported to the U.S. from Japan and very much appreciated by foreign customers.

A Beatles fan, Hayato cited John Lennon's one world, no borders, idea as motivating. He said that he also respected the European system of free movement of worker and capital and would like to see this system grow. He wanted to be able to work and offer work in any country he chose to. He also came to believe that developing overseas was the way forward for helping cultural understanding and the best way to introduce good Japanese products and techniques to the world. He mentioned his similarity in spirit with companies like Honda or Toyota, introducing Japan to the world through a first-class product. He added that English was instrumental in making this happen now, just as Chinese would be important to

companies in the future. Hayato said that he aims to help his staff improve their English skills in order to function successfully in the workplace, however, he has noticed that young Japanese people are less interested in travel, adventure and studying abroad these days. He thinks that the availability of language school lessons in Japan which obviate the need for study abroad means that students tend to travel for short periods, touching other countries without any deep interest in them. He pointed out that employees at Hayato are different.

5. Discussion

5.1 Rationale for English use

The interview with Hayato gave the author some answers to the question of rationale for English use and his reasons for investing so heavily in language training for his employees. The interview shows that there could be some ideological foundation to the use of English in his salons. His sympathies for Lennon's dream of a borderless world and his admiration for the freedom that an economic union allows its citizens, suggest a liberal leaning. He also traveled at a time when relatively few young Japanese were doing so and no doubt a romantic and freedom-loving mindset developed at that time. Indeed, as a result, he now laments what he sees as a lack of adventure and energy in young Japanese people today, saying that they no longer want to go abroad, a fact that MEXT figures on the numbers of Japanese studying abroad confirm.

It was certainly by chance that Hayato noticed that giving internships in New York afforded young Japanese great benefits and coincidentally, helped him. In addition, his business success in New York coincided with rapidly developing cultural exchanges between the U.S. and Japan. Fundamentally he decided to use English language in his Japanese salons as cultural exchange and thanks to his global outlook, but the use of English as a working language in his salons is more pragmatic than ideological. He simply made note earlier than other businessmen that it makes good business sense in Japan to offer the foreign community a service in their own language. Hayato opened his salon when internationalism was in boom in Japan and focusing on the west was fashionable. Even if it stemmed from ideological roots, English use at Hayato New York is sustained because today it has become a strong and successful business model.

5.2 English Use; Attitudes

There is unanimous agreement among the respondents that English use is important for

Hayato employees, and specific uses were outlined in the results section above. Moreover, the requirement to use English is not limited to managers. However, despite positive attitudes to English and using it successfully on a daily basis the respondents have serious reservations about their formal language learning experiences which prompt the following observations regarding language education and efforts being made or which might be made to improve it. Some measures have already been put in place to improve language education in Japan and others are planned. The introduction of specific TOEFL scores as a university entrance criterion is repeatedly cited as a goal. (Mie Ayako, 2014). The first Abe Administration 2006-2007 had already started the work towards such reform and local efforts were also promised, including that of the governor of Osaka to give special funds to schools where students achieved high TOEFL scores. (Johnston, 2011). He subsequently appointed Toru Nakahara as superintendent of the Osaka Prefectural Board of Education and Osaka is presently the only public school system preparing its students for the TOEFL iBT (Clavel, 2014). Putting TOEFL in place as a measure of linguistic ability is a step but a system must be established to teach to that examination or improve language competence generally. The Osaka policy is a mark of responsible language planning.

Papers given at the OECD-MEXT Japan Seminar, 2008, laid out other requirements for improving language proficiency. Tetsuya Kashihara, (2008), reports on the seminar, Japanese education policy, globalization and linguistic competency, and includes content specifics regarding the grammatical items and functions students should master.

In her report at the OECD seminar, Aoyama Gakuin professor, Junko Saruhashi, pointed out that formal language training needed overhauling but stated this would not be enough. Linguistic auditing in companies, as defined and developed by Honna et Al (2006) would be essential to see where improvements could be made. In-house language training would definitely be required, as “compared to the language learning of formal education, in-house language training tend to be excluded from academic discussion and analysis.” (Saruhashi, 2008). Innovations are vital for 2 reasons. First, the Japanese birth rate continues to plummet and in response to that, companies are beginning to open their doors to foreign employees. Examples of this include Rakuten, Uniqlo, Panasonic, Lawson and Aeon, For example 130 recruits of a total of some 150 at Rakuten were foreign nationals in their September intake (Lafaye, personal communication, September, 2014). Moreover Tokyo University has made the decision to change its academic year calendar, making entry in September possible and making it easier to attract foreign students, thus allowing it to better compete with

universities overseas. These measures may give Japan a competitive advantage and respond to the requirements of globalisation, while simultaneously alleviating problems created by a low birthrate. However, as a result, it will also become more difficult for Japanese students to enter companies without strong English skills.

6. Conclusions

Hayato New York is a rare example of a small Japanese company successfully using English as a principal working language. Some 15-20 salons in Tokyo have one or more bilingual members but this salon is unique, both in its use of English as a principal working language and in its overseas training policy.

Hayato Staff are using English on a daily basis in the company and are happy about that. Moreover, they have a positive attitude to English, though they are less happy about parts of their formal language learning experience.

Such case studies serve to show how English is being used in companies in Japan but also to give valuable insight in to how working adults feel about English and about formal language education. This can inform teachers and researchers and serve to precipitate any necessary changes. It was noted that radical changes are already underway in Japanese education. This paper indicates the desirability, not only for changes in formal language teaching, but also in training in the workplace itself. The Nobel laureate, Shuji Nakamura, stated in October 2014:

“If Japanese companies don’t reform drastically and implement English as their daily business language, the economy will only continue to contract”

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