

THE TYPOLOGY OF ENGLISH IN JAPANESE SOCIETY: LEARNING FROM THE LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPE

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Abstract

The most prominent foreign language appearing in the Japanese linguistic landscape is English; used extensively throughout areas such as shop signs, road markings, product packaging, and clothing. Whilst much of this English appears in the English alphabet, a significant amount is written in katakana, allowing the words and phrases to be integrated into the Japanese syntactical structure. This article reports on the development of an activity which involved engaging students at the author's university with English in the Japanese linguistic landscape in order to facilitate the development of individual topics for a graduation thesis. The activity involved having students collect examples of English inscriptions from the linguistic landscape, write descriptions about each photograph, and bring them to class for analysis and discussion. Their comments were collected together and analysed to extract themes and areas of focus which could then be exploited by the students to help guide them in choosing a suitable focus for their graduation research. In this way the linguistic landscape was used as a pedagogical tool to get Japanese students to engage with and analyse the English that surrounds them beyond the classroom.

1 Introduction

In modern-day Japan, the linguistic landscape is characterised by frequent and dynamic interactions between a wide range of languages, expressed prominently through the extensive use of script mixing. For textual inscriptions in nearly all aspects of society, such as those found on shop signs, road markings, product packaging, clothing, building names, graffiti, and TV subtitles, the availability in Japanese of three distinct orthographies (kanji, hiragana, katakana), along with various derivations of the Latin Alphabet (e.g. romaji and English), combines with a generally favourable attitude towards linguistic borrowing to produce a vibrant multilingual landscape (Backhaus, 2007; Dougill, 2008). Amongst the various foreign languages found in this landscape, English is by far the most observed. It appears throughout Japan not only its native alphabet, but also in the aforementioned Japanese scripts; with it being possible to orthographically represent a single English word in one of five distinct ways (Barrs, 2013). This English can be wholly or partially adapted to the workings of the Japanese language, with any number of orthographic, morphologic, syntactic, and semantic alterations made as needed (Irwin, 2011; Kay, 1995), but at other times may be simply lifted out of English and pasted, unmodified, into the Japanese linguistic landscape. This distinction between what is termed in Japanese as *gairaigo* (i.e. loanwords adapted to fit the workings of the Japanese language) and *gaikokugo* (i.e. foreign words used in their original source language form) is one which is widely-recognised to be very difficult to make in practice (Irwin, 2011).

Because of the huge number of English words which have been borrowed into Japanese, many of them having found their way into the everyday Japanese language, the Japanese linguistic landscape can be considered one of the very few situations where the average citizen of Japan is immersed in a multilingual environment. Within Japan as a whole, monolingualism is the norm (Daulton, 2008; Irwin, 2011; Miller, 1971). If English is used at all, it is overwhelmingly as a foreign language, particularly within language learning contexts, with it having little to no institutionalised role to play in wider Japanese society (Morrow, 2004; Seargeant, 2008). In such contexts, the linguistic landscape has been seen as a fertile area beyond the classroom in which to engage learners of English as a foreign language with practical examples of language usage (Sayer, 2010).

This study reports on a language learning activity which involved engaging Japanese students of English with the linguistic landscape around them in order to generate avenues of research for their graduation theses. At the author's university the requirement of all 4th year undergraduate students in the English department is to complete a research investigation into a topic of their choosing, with one of the most challenging aspects of this requirement being the selection and development of a feasible and relevant topic. The primary cause of this difficulty lies in part due to the deeply-embedded cultural expectation throughout Japan that at all levels of education the teacher is the one to direct and guide the learners, and therefore provide them with the knowledge, ideas, and ultimately, topics for research (Loveday, 1996). In order to encourage self-selection of topics and thereby foster important aspects of taking responsibility for one's own learning, an activity was devised that would allow students to be supported in their own exploration of possible research topics, with the activity itself being an example of the type of research which could be conducted. This article first overviews the recognised value of the linguistic landscape for English language learning, before giving an explanation of the language-focused activity which was set up for the author's students. This is followed by a discussion of the main themes which developed out of the students' exploration of the Japanese linguistic landscape, and some examples of the avenues of future research fostered by these themes.

2 The use of the linguistic landscape for language learning

It has been acknowledged that providing opportunities of exposure to language, and the practice of using it, are particularly difficult in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) settings (Nation, 2003). In the learning of English in Japan, the vast majority of exposure to and practice with English happens inside the classroom, whether that be in the often-maligned scientific, teacher-fronted, grammar-translation style of English teaching in Japan, or in the more interactive, active-learning style of education which is gaining recent currency (Stanlaw, 2004). This fact of classroom-centred language learning with little opportunity of practice or reinforcement in society outside the school is one that is unlikely to change significantly in the future.

In such a context, the linguistic landscape offers one of the very few ways of increasing students' exposure to and engagement with a foreign language beyond the physical limitations of the classroom (Sayer, 2010). With a heightened awareness of the language in the linguistic landscape that permeates all aspects of a student's life outside the classroom, important connections can be made between the language-focused learning that is typical of a classroom based setting, and the meaning-focused input that can be gained from the attention

paid to the language found in inscriptions throughout society. Sayer (2010) raises the fundamental issue that, particularly in EFL settings, much of the language used in the linguistic landscape can go unnoticed. This is because in many EFL settings, such as in Sayer's in Mexico, the elementary level of receptive and/or productive competence in English of the general populace suggests that when English is used, it is done very often for decorative purposes rather than to instil a specific, denotative semantic meaning in the inscription. This is very true of the English used in the Japanese linguistic landscape, with much of the English being used for the stylistic purpose of embellishing the product, building, shop sign, or any other area of textual inscription, with modern, global, and fashionable associations (Dougill, 2008; Hyde, 2002).

Cenoz and Gorter (2008), in one of the most comprehensive analyses of the benefits of using the linguistic landscape for language learning, stress the importance of the input which the linguistic landscape can provide for second language acquisition. They state that the landscape around the language learners offers a rich source of informal learning which utilises the "authentic, contextualized input which is part of the social context" (Cenoz & Gorter, 2008, p. 274). This can help in issues of pragmatic competence, the acquisition of literacy skills, and a knowledge of how language is applied in society. Rowland (2012) gives an example of a linguistic landscape project that involved students collecting pictures of English used around them in their Japanese context, and analysing these in class within the framework of a guiding question: How and why is English used on signs in Japan? The outcome of his study found that a linguistic landscape project can be useful in developing students' symbolic competence and multi-literacy skills, whilst raising students' awareness of the English that is available to them in their native environment.

Within the framework of exploiting the linguistic landscape for educational purposes, the activity discussed in the current study was set up not for the specific goal of language learning itself, but with the main purpose in mind of helping students to discover and explore possible areas of further linguistic research. The aim was to support students in the development of their topics for their graduation theses, by guiding them towards a field of research that could provide a range of possible avenues of linguistic investigation. Because the activity itself was linguistically-focused, it provided a model-framework of the type of primary research that could be conducted into the linguistic landscape.

3 Description of the activity

The primary purpose of the activity was not the engagement with any particular aspect of the English in the Japanese linguistic landscape itself, but rather a more general exploration of English in Japanese society in order to generate further research topics for the students' graduation theses. For this thesis, students are required to select a topic of investigation, conduct preliminary secondary research around the topic, and then carry out a medium-scale primary research activity in order to produce data for analysis and description. The final product, if they have chosen to write their thesis in English, is a 4000-word dissertation on their chosen topic following the standard structural components of an introduction, literature review, methodology, results, findings, and conclusion. The production of the thesis is itself a large undertaking for the students, but they are guided in its construction with regular tutorial sessions concerning issues such as research method training and data analysis procedures. Where the student is most independent is in the selection of the topic, with the graduation

thesis being conceptualised as the production of a competent piece of academic research conducted on a topic in which the student is personally interested. As such, it was considered beneficial to at least provide the students with some guidance in the kinds of linguistic questions which could be turned into a large-scale research investigation. Figure 1 shows the cyclical process of academic investigation which the activity was set up to foster.

The activity involved 20 students from the author's 3rd-year seminar class on World Englishes conducting a research investigation into the types of English found in the Japanese linguistic landscape. The project was conducted in the vacation period between the 1st and 2nd semesters of the Japanese university academic year, which is when students need to begin formulating possible research topics for their thesis. They begin writing the full thesis at the start of their 4th year. Students were first of all given the task of finding ten examples of English textual inscriptions in their surrounding environment outside of the classroom. They were given the freedom of choosing any inscription they wanted, with the only requirement that they record where the inscription was found. Then students were given a basic typology of varieties of English in Japan, which was developed by the author from his own investigations of the linguistic landscape (see Figure 2), and students were asked to try to categorise the inscriptions they found within one of the categories in the typology; or alternatively suggest a new category if they felt the typology given to them didn't sufficiently account for the example of English which they had found. Students were then asked to write a 50-100-word description for each of the photographs, detailing what the inscription was, why they put it into a certain category, and anything interesting that they noticed about the inscription. Students handed in the report at the beginning of the second semester.

The reports were then analysed using a very simple process of data analysis outlined by Richards (2003). This involves (1) collecting the data, (2) thinking about what has been collected, (3) categorising the data with the help of a coding system, (4) reflecting on the categories, (5) organising the categories into larger groups, (6) connecting together the ideas which are generated, and (6) collecting further data (p. 272). Steps (1) to (5) were conducted using the reports submitted by the students, with step (6) being the primary aim of the research in that students would use their findings to go back out and investigate a particular area of interest in more detail. Step (3) of the data analysis process, the categorising of the data with a coding system, involved going through the comments and writing out the main themes encoded in the students' comments. These themes were then collected together into larger 'areas of focus' which represented potential fields of further investigation. Students were then given these themes and areas of focus in order to help frame possible research questions. Table 1 presents the results of the categorisation of the themes and areas of focus which developed out of the analysis of the students' comments.

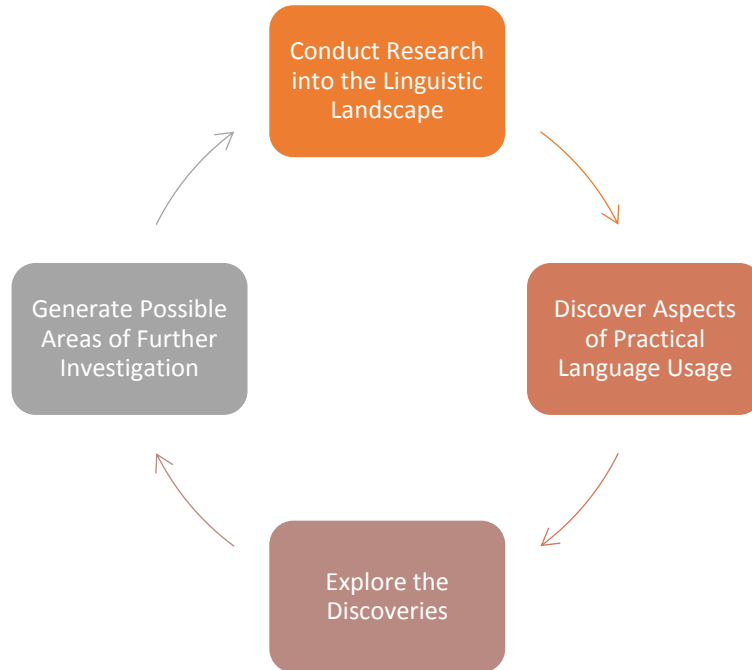


Fig. 1. Cyclical process of investigation using the linguistic landscape

<i>'Alphabet' English</i>			
Alphabet Academic English AAcE	Alphabet Decorative English ADE	Alphabet Advertising English AAAdE	Alphabet Translation English ATE
<u>Textbooks</u>	<u>T-shirts</u>	<u>Fliers</u>	<u>Appliances</u>
For Japanese	For Japanese and non-Japanese	For Japanese and non-Japanese	For non-Japanese
I'm fine thank you	Dimple Enhancement	SALE	Push

Fig. 2. The typology of varieties of alphabet English in Japan (English written in the latin alphabet)

4 The main themes and areas of focus

As shown in Table 1, a qualitative analysis of the comments given by the students about their experience of trying to categorise the examples of their chosen English inscriptions resulted in

18 major themes grouped into four major areas of focus. In Table 1 the main themes have been grouped into each major area of focus, and the frequency with which each theme was raised by individual students is given to show how common the theme was through the data set. The last column of the Table gives one or two representative examples of comments given by the students.

Table 1. The main areas of focus, main themes, and example comments

Main Focus	Main Themes	Freq.	Example Comments
The Japanese Linguistic Landscape in General	English is everywhere in Japanese society	6	-English seems around me more than I knew... -So many signs in shops use English...
	Heightened awareness of English around	4	-I never noticed that English before... -Now I am worried about English on my clothes...
	The Japanese linguistic landscape is multilingual	2	-More language than I thought... -I noticed Chinese and Spanish
How English Looks	English looks fashionable	11	-The quality of this thing is higher because of the English... -Japanese people think English is very fashionable...
	English for decoration	5	-This English probably attracts our attention... -Japanese people like the way English looks...
	English is cute and cool	4	-This English is really cute... -Some English looks so cool compared to kanji...
	English for product naming	2	-I think this thing would be strange with a Japanese name... -The English for this item makes it look good...
Who the English is For	Not sure of the intended reader of the English	5	-I don't know if this English is for Japanese or foreign people... -Maybe this is for Japanese people, but I'm not sure...
	Translated terms may help visitors	2	-The translation is useful for visitors... -Foreigners will be able to understand how to use this...
	Some translations have only minimal English	2	-Maybe the English is not enough on this sign for foreign people... -There needs to be more translation on this...
The Linguistic Aspect of the English	Linguistic meaning is not important	18	-The meaning doesn't matter... -Japanese people don't care about the meaning...
	Many English words are basic parts of Japanese	12	-These words are common in Japanese language... -The word 'post' and 'box' are regular Japanese words...
	Strange English on T-Shirts	11	-I don't understand the words on many T-Shirts... -I don't want to wear my T-Shirt anymore...
	Grammatical and spelling mistakes	6	-Why was this English not checked... -I am embarrassed by the incorrect English on this package...
	Adaptations	4	-The word is abbreviated in Japanese... -This word is pronounced differently...
	Hard to categorise	2	-This English has many purposes...

			-I can't decide what kind of English this is...
	Japanese-English is common	2	-There is a lot of English that is only in Japan... -Maybe foreign people don't know this English...
	English allows greater creativity	1	-A Japanese word here would be too direct...

It was found that the general themes running through the comments could be grouped into four major areas of focus. It seems that many of the students had become more aware of the linguistic landscape around them in general. They had noticed not only the amount of English around them, but also the availability of other language such as Chinese and Spanish. Another area of focus was in the appearance of English, with themes of how English is fashionable, cool, and cute being prevalent in their comments. There were also comments made about who the English is actually intended for, with themes concerning the nature and depth of the translations. And then there was the area of focus that looked at the linguistic aspects of the English, focusing on issues such as spelling, grammaticality, adaptations, and semantics. This last issue, of the semantic meaning of much English in Japan being of less importance than the decorative nature of the English is a dominant theme in much of the literature into English in Japan.

This Table was given back to the students in order to help them focus their attention on major areas and specific themes which could be used to generate research questions for their theses. It was not a requirement that students had to select a topic included within the ideas in the Table, but was meant primarily as an assistive tool to help guide students in possible areas of research. Some of the research questions which students then developed out of this activity are as follows:

- How much English is used in everyday Japanese life?
- What processes are involved in the naming of Japanese cosmetic products?
- How do Japanese people feel about products with English names rather than Japanese ones?
- How many English loanwords are used on a daily basis by Japanese people?
- Do foreign visitors to Japan understand the English which they encounter?
- Do Japanese people understand the English written on their clothing?

5 Conclusion

Whilst the research questions given above are only the initial formations of possible avenues of research which the students have identified, the psychological, linguistic, and sociolinguistic features embedded in the questions suggest that these can, with some necessary manipulation, be turned into feasible and relevant topics of study. Using a language-focused activity such as this which gets student to actually carry out their own primary research can be an effective way to begin students on the path to discovering their own avenue of research. In EFL contexts such as in Japan, where opportunities to explore and practice English beyond the classroom are very restricted, the linguistic landscape can offer a fertile area of investigation from which to develop a wide range of research enquiries.

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