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“Global English” vs. “English as a Global Language”

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The literature obviously owes uses of the word *global* in the above title to the buzzword *globalization* in reference to the fact that the world is claimed to be interconnected by extensive networks of communication and transportation, which have facilitated rapid exchanges of information along with heavy traffic of goods and people in all directions. English has prevailed in these networks and has been claimed to be the dominant lingua franca, although one still needs more than it alone to be able to communicate with people in various parts of our planet.

One of the interpretations of *global (...) communicative competence*, in the theme of this conference, is that *global* ascribes attributes that one's competence would have to have in order for him/her to communicate successfully wherever his/her interlocutors or correspondents are in today's world. Such an interpretation may presuppose a uniform English-speaking world in which the speaker would have no particular linguistic adjustments to make to his interlocutors or correspondents, because they all speak some monolithic form of *global English*. Alternatively, it may presuppose an internally diverse Anglophone world in which various varieties are used and the speaker/writer would have to accommodate or shift to various local/regional varieties in order to guarantee successful communication wherever he/she travels.

The first scenario of a monolithic English is obviously empirically mistaken. The Anglophone world is heterogeneous, including some (nonstandard) varieties that are not mutually intelligible. There is thus no monolithic English to teach or learn in order to be able to communicate with every conceivable English speaker in the world. There is diversity even in the standard varieties naturally used by educated speakers. Therefore the second scenario is empirically conceivable, although there are no speakers who are competent in all the diverse regional or national English varieties, not any more than there are speakers who (actively or passively) command all the dialects of their (native) vernacular languages.

One must thus make some choices, or is simply subjected to the choices already made for him/her, when he/she learns English. Factors determining what Standard English variety one learns have to do with what the learner needs English for and where, i.e., who he/she is likely to interact with and what about. Often enough, decision makers must invoke various notions such as economic power, historical tradition, or privileged trade/business relations to favor a particular variety, e.g., American or British Standard English. Note that even these considerations don't solve the problem if the learner intends to travel all over the world, or to interact with the widest random range of people in the United States or in the United Kingdom. Yet, the alternative of learning all the relevant varieties is not practicable; it is difficult enough already to master one single variety.

Thus, in teaching English in Japan and to Japanese, educators must ask themselves what Japanese people are most likely to need English for and where, as well as what

particular varieties are likely to serve their diverse needs. Answers to these questions alone must rule out a number of alternatives and enable teachers to focus, within their respective competences, on the varieties that matter rather than on some fictional “global” variety. English may be a “global language” but it does not have a global, uniform system used everywhere. The next question is whether it is realistic in Japan to teach more than one particular variety and how to let the learner choose?