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Twitter posts on English language learning in Japan: Attitudes towards 'Neitibu' 'native speakers'

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Twitter Posts on English Language Learning in Japan: Attitudes Towards *Neitibu* ('Native Speakers')

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Abstract

　To critically explore the ideological nature of English and English learning/ teaching in Japan, this study, as part of a multifaceted project, explores how attitudes towards English（or learning/teaching English）are displayed on the social media platform Twitter. First, I examined the results of the thematic analysis of Twitter discourse with an analytical viewpoint of native-speakerism, illustrating the underlying assumptions and inconsistencies in attitudes towards English learning. Then, I applied van Dijk's（2004）analytical framework and explored the recreation of the power relationship between 'native speakers' and 'non-native speakers' in the social media discourse. This study argues that hegemonic ideology is recreated by 'ourselves' by unintentionally applying inverted 'ideological squares'. This study focuses on Japanese society as a case study of learning English as a foreign language, revealing a self-defeating attitude towards 'native-speakers', which potentially reinforces their own subjugation, in turn having implications for future studies in global contexts.

Introduction

This study aimed to explore how attitudes towards English (or learning/teaching English) are displayed on the social media platform Twitter. This is positioned as part of a larger multifaceted project that explores the ideological nature of (learning/teaching) English in Japanese society. I collected texts from Twitter (microposts[1]) as data and interpreted their content with an analytical view of 'native-speakerism' (Holliday, 2005, 2017).

Native-speakerism, or the mythologised role of 'native speakers' in the field of English Language Teaching (ELT) and applied linguistics (Kachru, 1992, p. 358), has been pointed out since the 1980s, following the work in World Englishes from the 1970s (Kamhi-Stein, 2016). Native-speakerism was clearly defined by Holliday (2005, p. 6) as 'an established belief that "native-speaker" teachers represent a "Western culture" from which spring the ideals both of the English language and of English language teaching methodology'. Over the past few decades, research has attempted 'to confront NNS [non-native speakers] marginalisation' (Kumaravadivelu, 2016, p. 70) in multiple ways, including the formation of the Non-Native English Speakers in TESOL Caucus in 1998 (later upgraded to an 'Interest Section' of the TESOL organisations in 2008; Non-Native English Speakers in TESOL Interest Section, 2015). However, as Kumaravadivelu (2015, viii) described, native-speakerism 'has become an all-pervading entity whose tentacles hold a vice-like grip on almost all aspects of English language learning, teaching, and testing around the world'. In recent years, controversialists have lamented the current situation where, as discussed

later, issues raised by them have not been significantly addressed (Cook, 2016; Holliday, 2015; Kamhi-Stein, 2016; Phillipson, 2020).

The Japanese situation is no exception. In the 1990s, a scholarly movement highlighted the power of English and its influence on Japanese society (e.g. Nakamura, 1994; Oishi, 1990; Tsuda, 1990). In 1995, a widely circulated magazine for English language teachers and researchers in Japan titled *Gendai Eigo Kyōiku* (*Modern English Teaching*) (Kenkyusya, 1995) featured a section titled 'Rethinking English' with feature articles on the linguistic imperialism of English. Since then, despite scholars' repeated (although infrequent and sparse) arguments and warnings about the existence of native-speakerism and its profound impact on English language education, this belief seems to have been reinforced and become more deeply etched in our minds. Therefore, in-depth qualitative research is required to explore the creation of this deep-seated belief in Japanese society. As a first step in exploring the ideological nature of English, I have investigated what is happening and how (learning/teaching) English is talked about on Twitter. This can contribute to a clearer understanding of 'what native-speakerism is and how it operates' to 'disrupt, and eventually dismantle, the unfair native-speakerism dominance in ELT' (Kumaravadivelu, 2015, p. viii).

In the Japanese context of this study, talking about (learning/teaching) English seems to be a common social phenomenon. As a member of this society, I have often encountered situations where people seem to uncritically feel (or are forced to feel) that English is the only international language, which is a blind belief in an ambiguously defined globalisation and internationalisation scenario. In Japanese society,

English language education is particularly susceptible to popular opinions and beliefs, and many foreign language education policies have been reformed based on these beliefs. Although discussions on learning English are frequent and ubiquitous, I hypothesised that general popular opinions on the subject could be detected on social media. The literature review on native-speakerism below will help contextualise this hypothesis, the methodology, and results of my analysis of Twitter microposts.

Literature Review

As English enjoyed a 'momentum of growth' (Crystal, 2003, p. x), which resulted in 'the present international status of English' (Kachru, 1992, p. 355), a new range of discussions in ELT appeared in the 1990s among scholars worldwide. These discussions included the ownership of English and the role of 'native speakers' (Widdowson, 1994), the mythologised role of 'native speakers' in ELT and applied linguistics (Kachru, 1992), and influential false beliefs about the diffusion of English and ELT (Phillipson, 1992). As previously mentioned, the current project is positioned in the discussion of sociological, sociolinguistic, and political studies of the English language in the period influenced by globalisation (Erikawa, 2018). In this section, I review relevant topics and major arguments in studies of native-speakerism, focusing on the dichotomy between 'native' and 'non-native' speakers and the power relations between them, mythologised 'native speakers', and the definition of 'native speakers'.

A major discussion in the field of ELT in this period focuses on raising awareness of the mythologised role of the 'native speaker' in ELT and applied linguistics (e.g. Canagarajah, 1999; Kachru, 1992; Phillipson,

1992). Considering the cross-cultural functional range of English – its internationalisation – Kachru (1992) pointed out six fallacies about the users and uses of English that hinder the recognition of its sociolinguistic reality and proposed teaching World Englishes. Some of these fallacies are related to 'native speakers' of English, or the native model of English, which characterises the countries in the Inner Circle (the US, the UK, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand) as 'the traditional cultural and linguistic base of English' (p. 356). Phillipson (1992, p. 185), discussing the UK's Anglocentricity while establishing and expanding ELT in newly independent countries, pointed out fallacies related to ELT. These include 'English is best taught monolingually', '[t]he ideal teacher of English is a native speaker', and '[t]he earlier English is taught, the better the results'. Canagarajah (1999, p. 79) also refuted the centralised role of the 'native speaker' in judging grammaticality under the Chomskian paradigm, which promoted the superiority of 'native speakers', saying 'the native speaker fallacy is linguistically anachronistic' in today's hybrid postcolonial age.

Although we are discussing this issue as if a group that could be self-evidently labelled 'native speakers' existed, an increasing amount of literature has focused on the ambiguity of this definition. A classic pioneering work in this regard is Paikeday's (1985) *The Native Speaker is Dead!*, which was 'the first attempt to put "(non-)nativism" onto the centre stage of linguistic inquiry by challenging current undisputed assumptions on the matter' (Moussu & Llurda, 2008). Based on a thorough discussion of the basic concepts of linguistics, involving authorities in linguistics, philosophy, psychology, and lexicography, he concluded that

the 'native speaker', in the linguist's sense of arbiter of grammaticality and acceptability of language, is 'quite dead', as in the book's title (Paikeday, 1985, p. x). Medgyes (1994) wrote another pioneering work that argued that the definition of 'native speaker' is ambiguous. He objected against each criterion of oft-quoted definitions of the 'native speaker'; for example, a 'native speaker' of English is someone who (1) was born in an English-speaking country, (2) acquired English during childhood in an English-speaking family or environment, and/or (3) speaks English as his/her first language, and concluded by querying 'whether the native/non-native division is indeed no more than a myth' (p. 16), arguing that all the criteria are 'fuzzy', 'inconsistent', 'subtle', and 'ambiguous' (pp. 10–11).

These discussions are based on the status of English as the language of international communication and the diverse characteristics of English and sociolects within different varieties of English. Many studies have focused on the identity of English users. Rampton (1990) suggested an alternative terminology for the concept of 'native speakers' and mother tongues by introducing the ideas of language expertise, language inheritance, and language affiliation. Hansen Edwards (2017) employed Leung, Harris, and Rampton's (1997) concepts of language expertise, inheritance, and affiliation, and examined how and why speakers of English from multilingual contexts in Asia self-identify as 'native speakers'. She concluded that multilingual users in Asia identify themselves as 'native speakers' because of their use of English with family members and their expertise in English compared to other language(s). Interestingly, as evident from the data analysis, nobody 'mentioned speakers of inner circle varieties of English as a norm against

which they measured their own ability; rather, expertise was measured against other languages learnt' (Hansen Edwards, 2017, p. 766).

There have been discussions on the use of the term 'native speaker'. The use of this term can be divisive, for it implies the existence of another term, 'non-native speaker', which means the opposite and implies deficiency, leading to discrimination against the so-called 'non-native speakers' at many levels. To cite Holliday (2005, p. 4), 'the use of "non-" usually signifies a disadvantage or deficit'. Braine (2010, p. 6) clearly stated that the term 'non-native speaker' is pejorative. Cook (1999, 2008) discussed themes in the relationship between 'native' and 'non-native' speakers and proposed the terms 'the L2 user' and 'the (monolingual) native speaker' from a multi-competence perspective. Kamhi-Stein (2016) pointed out that the dichotomy between 'native' and 'non-native' is reinforced by the fact that the terms themselves are used to argue against the dichotomy between them, citing what Moussu and Llurda (2008) called a paradox. Although for some scholars, the term 'non-native speaker' does not have negative connotations, there have been discussions on alternative terms (e.g. Braine, 2010; Lee, 2005).

As apparent in this section, many scholars have questioned the definition of the term, highlighting the ambiguity in defining 'native speaker'. In this paper, the terms 'native (speaker)' and 'non-native (speaker)' are written with inverted commas, following Holliday's (2013, pp. 19-20) assertion that the categories are 'constructed by ideologies and discourse…. and they are always "so-called"'.

Despite these scholarly efforts for more than three decades, issues relating to native-speakerism in ELT do not seem to improve. The major

controversialists have lamented this situation in recent studies. For example, Holliday, who conceptualised a more mutually inclusive identity, 'Position 2' (Holliday, 2005, pp. 11–12), as a new way of viewing language and context, pointed out that native-speakerism had not in fact been solved, although it seemed to have been, stating that it 'is so much in the air in both professional and popular circles' (Holliday, 2015, p. 14). Another leading scholar, who discussed the 'non-native' English speaker teachers (NNEST) movement's achievements, also pointed out that global hiring practices have not seen any advances (Kamhi-Stein, 2016). In the area of second language acquisition, syllabuses, examinations, and published coursebooks, Cook (2016), who questioned the use of the native speaker model from a multi-competence perspective in 1999, showed how a monolingual perspective with an emphasis on 'native speakers' still exists. The most recent publication by a major controversialist on the current situation, to my knowledge, is by Phillipson (2020). He discussed whether his book *Linguistic Imperialism*, published in 1992, had caused a paradigm shift in ELT, claiming that 'many things have not happened yet' in his lecture.

As stated in the Introduction section, to address how this deep-seated belief known as native-speakerism manifests in the discourse around learning/teaching English, I examined people's discussions in relation to English and learning/teaching English on Twitter. In doing so, I hoped to reveal the bigger picture of language learning in Japanese society.

Methods

Social Media (Micro) Posts as Data

I selected Twitter as a representative social media platform for the

present study and collected and analysed microposts posted on it. With the rapid popularisation of social media or 'Web 2.0', which provides 'expansive new opportunities for content creation and dissemination, collaboration, and creativity' (Marwick, 2010, p. 4), not only have the Internet and social media integrated into our lives but have also enabled anyone with Internet access to express their opinions by independently creating content or interacting with other users' content (Myers, 2010, pp. 10–11). As a relatively heavy user of the Internet and social media, I feel that websites and apps are places where people can talk about (learning/teaching) English relatively freely and where general or popular opinions on (learning/teaching) English can be observed.

Among the variety of multimedia content, including blogs, video blogs, and microblogs (Zappavigna, 2012), I focused on Twitter microposts since Twitter is a widely used platform. In Japan, Twitter is one of the most widely used social media platforms (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, Japan, 2019, pp. 3–4). According to a survey by Nielsen (2018c), a company that analyses digital media usage behaviour, the number of Twitter users through a computer or smartphone in 2018 in Japan was 43.65 million. This ranked in the eighth position, behind Amazon, Facebook, Rakuten, LINE, YouTube, Google, and Yahoo Japan. In terms of hours of use per day, according to another analysis by Nielsen (2018a), Twitter ranked fifth in 2018, following two gaming applications, a text and voice messaging app, and a Japanese emoji keyboard app. Among the 18- to 34-year-olds surveyed, about 80% use the top 4 online services (Google, YouTube, Yahoo Japan, and LINE), and about 70% (both men and women) use Twitter (Nielsen, 2018b). Based on these statistics,

we can see that online service use is integrated into the lives of many Japanese people.

Aside from its substantial share of the online service market in Japan, Twitter was deemed the most appropriate data source because of the following reasons: (1) its content is mainly public and accessible to anyone who uses the service, (2) the discourse on Twitter is social and conversational (Lee, 2018), and (3) with the use of hashtag (#) search, it is relatively easy to collect a large amount of naturally occurring textual data. As Zappavigna (2012, p. 4) noted, '[t]he extremely large volume of naturally occurring language is of great interest, as data, to linguists', as it is to social scientists.

Conceptual and Analytical Framework

This research is interested in real-life settings in the contemporary world. Specifically, it takes Japanese society as a case study. Additionally, the analysis focuses on an ideology that is prevalent and most influential on a subconscious level as part of a multifaceted project on the ideological nature of (learning/teaching) English in Japanese society. Considering these factors, a qualitative approach was employed.

More specifically, given the purpose of this research, critical discourse analysis (CDA) was applied as a conceptual framework. The main tenet of CDA is that language use is viewed as a social practice. Furthermore, the common interests among different approaches in CDA as a paradigm are 'de-mystifying ideologies and power through the systematic and *retroductable* investigation of semiotic data' (Wodak & Meyer, 2009, p. 3, emphasis in the original), making it suitable for this study. The

Twitter microposts analysed in this study are perceived as reflections of social phenomena at the discourse level, which may be best suited to CDA, whose interest is not '*in investigating a linguistic unit per se but in studying social phenomena which are necessarily complex*' (Wodak & Meyer, 2009, p. 2, emphasis in the original).

First, I investigated concepts in the data using thematic analysis (Attride-Stirling, 2001). This analysis was largely influenced by the notion of 'native-speakerism' (Holliday, 2005) and the 'native speaker frame' (Lowe, 2020). After conducting thematic analysis and finding the main themes in the data, I applied van Dijk's (2004) analytical framework, which aims to reveal underlying ideologies by analysing 'ideologically based social representations' (p. 730). Considering how English grew to its 'present international status' (Kachru, 1992, p. 355) and assuming that 'English has power' (p. 355), discourses regarding English must be considered socio-politically and politico-culturally, dependent on their context. Therefore, van Dijk's (2004) framework, which focuses on the relationship between political discourse and political ideologies, fits well with the aims of the current project.

Ethics

Although the content on Twitter is mainly public, it is unlikely that when people post on Twitter, they expect their posts to be 'subject to public or scientific scrutiny' (Kozinets, 2020, p. 164). Based on a consequentialist justification, estimating the potential harms and benefits of the current study, I do not think that analysing microposts as they were originally posted to show a nuanced picture of their contents and

contexts is problematic. Additionally, the process of translating the microposts may minimise privacy invasion. However, in following a 'deontological ethics' (Kozinets, 2020, pp. 168-170) as much as possible, I present examples of the data completely anonymised.

Data Collection and Analysis

To explore how attitudes towards (learning/teaching) English in relation to *neitibu* ('native' speakers) are revealed on Twitter, microposts were collected with the search word #*neitibu* (#native) in Japanese. The word *neitibu*, written in *katakana* characters used for foreign loanwords, is used similarly to mean 'native speaker' of English in the context of learning/teaching English in Japan. As is standard practice when searching on Twitter for information under a certain theme, I typed #*neitibu* into the search box and captured the screenshots of the 100 most recent microposts. Among these, 17 were immediately discarded because they were irrelevant to language education, for example, a company name that contained the word *neitibu*. Upon further investigation, some of the remaining 83 posts were also discarded, such as microposts that were primarily about languages other than English (12 in total: Chinese [10], Korean [1] , and Spanish [1]), a fashion style (18), outdoor activities (3), or music (1). After eliminating these, 49 microposts related to English (language education/language teaching or learning) were finally chosen as data for further analysis.

Thematic Analysis

After the familiarisation stage, which involves gaining an overview

of the entire data set (Ritchie & Spencer, 1994, pp. 178-180), the data were analysed following the central concept of thematic analysis, which is 'the examination of commonalities, the examination of differences and the examination of relationships' (Gibson & Brown, 2009, p. 128). As the first step, empirical codes were generated through a close one-by-one examination of the entire data set. Then, by examining the property of each code and the relationships between code categories, code families, meaning 'collection[s] of two or more codes that are regarded as being related to each other in a significant way' (p. 138), were identified. After the reiterated close examination of commonalities, differences, and relationships between codes and code families, a story, meaning 'a conceptual relation between two or more aspects of a given analytic framework' (p. 149), was generated.

The stories that emerged from the data set obtained in this study suggest that a) the 'dichotomy between "native speakers" and "non-native speakers"' (code families, or thematic headings [Holliday, 2016, p. 100], are shown in quotation marks) clearly exists; b) the fact that '"native speakers" are people from inner circle countries' seems to be taken for granted; c) people perceive '"nativeness" as a qualification' and '"native speakers" as a goal/model' and may have 'inferior feelings about English learnt at school'; d) although the word *neitibu* (native) is used pervasively as if there is a taken-for-granted meaning, people have, in fact, an 'ambiguous definition of "native speakers"', which may lead them to have contradictory ideas on achievement in English language learning, perceiving it as an 'achievable objective' or an 'unachievable ideal'; e) people perceive '"English daily conversation" as

the main objective in learning English', and 'listening', 'pronunciation', and 'colloquial expressions' as being essential elements to learn 'English daily conversation'; and f) if the desire to be able to have 'English daily conversation' with '"native speakers" from inner circle countries' remains unsatisfied, there may be less focus on instruction and practice of 'pronunciation', 'listening', and 'colloquial expressions', – people may have 'negative feelings towards "school English"'.

Results

Before describing each thematic heading with examples, it must be pointed out that among the interacting microposts collected for this project, one notable characteristic is that they refer to a group that would seem to be identifiable as 'native speakers'. Although this is hardly surprising because all microposts were collected with the search word *neitibu* (native), many microposts presuppose the existence of a clearly defined group of people, including micropost (1), which seems to be a job advertisement and seems to assume the existence of a group of people who can be defined as *Eigo Neitibu* (English native).[2] Applicants for this job must be *Eigo Neitibu* and, during the screening process, their eligibility should be assessed. There are no exact means of knowing the definition of *Eigo Neitibu* in this advertisement, but it appears to presuppose common knowledge about who can be labelled *Eigo Neitibu*.

Micropost (1)
 A Job Advertisement Which Looks for *Eigo Neitibu* (English Native)[3]
 ■ Jobs using English ■

For *Eigo Neitibu* (English Native)‼

【temporary staff: Osaki/*Eigo Neitibu* (English Native)/1,950 yen per hour/English check (proof-reader) and administrative assistant at major Japanese companies!】

***-c.jp/career/languag...[4]

#English #native #jobs

Dichotomy Between 'Native Speakers' and 'Non-Native Speakers'

If there is an identifiable group of people called *Eigo Neitibu* (English native), which can be translated as 'native speakers of English', it implies the existence of the other group(s) – 'non-native speakers', as mentioned above. As can be seen in the following microposts, in almost all aspects of learning English, a difference or contrast between 'native' and 'non-native' speakers is mentioned, as if these terms are essential terminology for ELT discussions.

Micropost (2)

Some #non-native people aim to pronounce like #*neitibu no hito* (native people), but I do not think Japanese people who are said to be bad at #English pronunciation have to be obsessed with pronunciation.

For example, we don't have to be careful about pronouncing 't' in 'night' clearly.

Many real *neitibu no hito* (native people) do not pronounce it.

Although many studies have discussed the ambiguity of the concept

of 'native speaker' and 'whether the native/non-native division is indeed no more than a myth' (Medgyes, 1994, p. 16), these terms continue to be used blindly today as if there is a group of people who can self-evidently be referred to by that label. Some scholars, such as Oda (2012) and Kubota (1998), argued that the Japanese loanword *neitibu* almost always means 'Caucasian' for Japanese learners of English.

'Native Speakers' are People From Inner-Circle Countries

The examples in the current data set showed that *neitibu* are considered to be people from the US, the UK, Australia, or New Zealand, among inner-circle countries (Kachru, 1992). Micropost (3) mentions *Amerika jin* (US nationals) and *Igirisu jin* (UK nationals) as examples of *neitibu* (native speakers) after talking about how *neitibu* (native speakers) pronounce words. In micropost (4), after discussing words that signify an abundance in number, that is, 'many' and 'a lot of', which are learned at school, 'lots of' is shown soon after the hashtag #*neitibu*, and 'heaps of' is added as an example of a usage seen only in Australia and New Zealand, with the hashtags #New Zealand, #Australia, and #slang.

Micropost (3)

For people who are not #native of #English, it is almost impossible to pronounce like *neitibu no hito* (native people). This is why I do not think they should bring their pronunciation close to native people's pronunciation.

For both American and British people, we can see differences in

their pronunciation. On the contrary, many people do not pronounce properly, compared to #non-native who have practised a lot.

Micropost（4）

A lot of tomatoes

Speaking of '*takusan no*'（a lot of）

many／a lot of

are often used, but

#native

'lots of' is also often used!

Same meaning

By the way, 'only' people in #New Zealand #Australia use（#slang）

'heaps of'

Is it something like '*namara*' used only in #Hokkaido?

'Nativeness' as a Qualification

As mentioned earlier, we cannot exactly know how *neitibu* people are defined in the local discourse in this data set. However, we often encounter discourse in which *neitibu* is treated as a qualification. As in micropost（1）, where a classified employment advertisement required applicants to be *neitibu*, it is commonplace to come across discourse where being *neitibu* is treated as an essential element of being a professional expert, in many cases as a teacher. This implies that any person who is *neitibu* can become a good teacher. In micropost（5）, a senior high school reports a recent event at the school, with a link to its website, showing a picture of a classroom with a teacher standing in

front of it. In both the text and the caption for the image, the title of the text on the webpage, 'Experience English by native speakers', is shown. It is very possible that people who are called *neitibu* have a suitable qualification to teach at school in Japan. However, the representation in micropost（5）is problematic because it implies that being *neitibu* is a sole credential for being qualified as a teacher.

Micropost（5）

'Experience English by native speakers' | ****** **** Senior High School *-****.ac.jp/topics_news/20…

#********* #school #senior high school #native

'Native Speakers' as a Goal/Model

As we can clearly see in microposts（2）and（3）, we often encounter microposts referring to 'native speakers' as a goal or model in terms of pronunciation. In addition, as in microposts（6）and（7）, people seem to perceive English expressions that they learn and use as different from those used by 'native people', which serve as a goal and model to be learnt from. Although people may learn and use correct vocabulary, people believe in the existence of *neitibu eigo*（native English）. A part of micropost（7）reads, 'I have looked into *neitibu eigo*（native English）which are easily mistaken by Japanese people'; this implies a variety called *neitibu eigo* which users of other varieties must pursue. Therefore, deviation from this variety is considered a mistake. This might be one reason why people feel that English learnt at a state school, among other forms, is inferior（this will be discussed later）.

Micropost（6）

I have posted a new article［on my blog］.

'*Aa, sorede* #*omoidashita*（Oh, that reminds me)!' I want to say this in #English, like #native.

blog.*********.com/2019/05/15/57_...

For you who want to say, not ordinary '*omoidashita*（I remember)' but '*Aa, sorede omoidashita*（Oh, that reminds me)' in English naturally, this is a recommendable article.

Enjoy, then!

#furefure #every day *eikaiwa*（English conversation）

Micropost（7）

I have looked into *neitibu eigo*（native English), which is easily mistaken by Japanese people. – ********do

********do.com/study/overseas... #English #native

'English Daily Conversation' as the Main Objective in Learning English

Another notable feature observed in the current data set was that no microposts mentioned other skills, such as reading and writing, as important aspects of learning the foreign language. We can see that many people perceive 'English daily conversation' as the main objective in learning English（microposts 8 and 9). Even though 'English daily conversation' cannot be defined clearly, as pointed out by Lummis （1976), Bailey（2006), Seargeant（2009), and others, *eikaiwa* or 'English conversation' is pursued in Japan as if it can be easily defined. Micropost（8）

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says that 'listening comprehension' and 'native pronunciation' are the most important aspects of learning 'English conversation'. This statement gives the impression that listening to something spoken in English and learning 'native pronunciation' develop the ability to understand what is said and to construct phrases or sentences that the speaker wants to express.

Micropost (8)

English conversation for 6 minutes per day ［******* (Publisher's name)］ 'Listening comprehension' and 'native pronunciation', which are most important in English conversation, can be learned properly!

study-*******.jp.net/***/

#English learning application #English conversation #******* #native #recommended way of learning English #English conversation for 6 minutes per day #listening comprehension

Micropost (9)

Overseas TV dramas are made with only 350 words.

By reading this ［an image of an ad of English textbooks is shown at the bottom of this post］, I will be able to learn a lot... I think English is a lifelong study. Even though I live in the US and I am teaching English, there are lots of things that I do not know. However, I do not have enough time to do everything. I will do what I can do ♡

#kindle #book #English #English conversation #native

Both examples emphasise the ease of learning 'English daily

conversation'. Micropost (8) states that by engaging in 'English conversation' for six minutes per day, learners can learn 'listening comprehension' and 'native pronunciation' *shikkarito* (with certainty). Micropost (9) says that the dialogues in overseas TV dramas are written using only 350 words, implying that learning these 350 words will render learners fluent in conversation.

Ambiguous Definition of 'Native Speakers' – Achievable or Unachievable Objectives

The optimistic view of learning English mentioned above may stem from the overly pervasive idea of *neitibu*. The word *neitibu* is so common in discussions about learning/teaching English as if it is the latest and most advanced terminology. However, these discussions do not acknowledge that each person has a different and ambiguous definition of 'native speaker'. As can be seen in micropost (10) ('Before you know it, you will become a *neitibu*'), being *neitibu* is depicted as an achievable objective. In this case, becoming *neitibu* seems to mean 'being a fluent speaker of English'. It is worth reiterating that this example also states how easy it is to become *neitibu* by knowing some strategies for learning listening skills.

In micropost (11), however, *neitibu* is considered as an unachievable ideal. Here, it is defined as a group of people who were 'born in an English-speaking country', 'acquired English during childhood in an English-speaking family or environment', and/or speak 'English as his/her first language' (Medgyes, 1994, p. 10), which are oft-quoted definitions but are refuted by Medgyes (1994), who queries 'whether the native/non-native division is indeed no more than a myth' (p. 16).

Micropost（10）

Ambiguous Definition of 'Native Speaker' – Achievable Objective

Before you know it, you will become a *neitibu*（native)!? Easy preparation for listening

ameblo.jp/***********/e…

I have something to tell you, who are worried, thinking you are not good at English.

If you can hear and understand English, your world will change!

Ultimate attack methodology for listening, which 99% of people do not know

#preparation of listening #not good at English #native #easily done

Micropost（11）

Ambiguous Definition of 'Native Speaker' – Unachievable Ideal

It is said that for #non-native people who do not have #English as their mother tongue, it is impossible to pronounce as #native people do.

So, I think it takes people who are not neitibu（native) too much time and effort to be able to pronounce like neitibu（native) people. I do not think it is necessary to be able to pronounce like neitibu （native) people.

Negative Feelings Towards 'School English'

As shown earlier, people perceive 'English daily conversation'

as the main objective of learning English. From the analysis of the microposts, we can say that people think 'listening', 'pronunciation', and English 'colloquial expressions' are essential elements in learning 'English daily conversation'. When the desire to be able to have 'English daily conversation' with 'native speakers' from inner-circle countries remains unsatisfied, and there is less focus on instruction and practice of 'pronunciation', 'listening', and English 'colloquial expressions', people have 'negative feelings towards "school English"'. People seem to believe uncritically that 'English daily conversation' should be learnt, but they feel that they are unable to have effective 'English conversation' with 'native speakers'. This results in 'negative feelings towards "school English"', as in micropost (12).

Micropost (12)

When you are asked 'How are you?'

'I'm fine thank you!' is not used. Instead, use

・Great

・Good

・Fine

・Bad

・Terrible

I see. I learned a lot, today, too.

#native #English conversation

In this example, expressions to be used when asked, 'How are you?' are shown. They are 'Great', 'Good', 'Fine', 'Bad', or 'Terrible', but not 'I'm

fine, thank you'. Exchanges consisting of 'How are you?' and 'I'm fine, thank you' often appear in school textbook dialogues. Cynical discussions of how 'the Japanese' monotonously reply using 'I'm fine, thank you' often appear.

Discussion

In the section above, I have shown some microposts which indicate beliefs and opinions about learning or teaching English. I now discuss the concepts hinted at in the data set and their interrelationships, focusing mainly on how the power relationship between 'native speakers' and 'non-native speakers' is recreated in the discourse. As mentioned earlier, this discussion refers to some categories proposed by van Dijk (2004).

Two Actors Referred to With Value-Laden Expressions

In the collected data, two actors are often mentioned: 'native' and 'non-native' speakers of English. In today's world, where English is acquired or learned by people from diverse backgrounds and in diverse ways, if there is a need to categorise speakers, the labels 'native' or 'non-native' need not be used. In other words, categorisation can be done based on qualities other than nativeness. However, this is an example of 'Polarisation, Us-Them categorisation', meaning 'the categorical division of people in ingroup (US) and outgroup (THEM)' (van Dijk, 2004, p. 738).

Micropost (2) shows the polarisation of good/bad expressions. It mainly argues that it is not necessarily important for 'non-native' speakers who aim to gain 'native-like' pronunciation to pronounce

English words perfectly, based on the way 'real native people' (author's literal translation of words used in the micropost) pronounce English words. One notable aspect is how two actors are described in this text: 'native' speakers as the norm, and 'non-native' Japanese 'who are said to be bad at English pronunciation'. From this example, we cannot judge whether it intends to mean that many Japanese have difficulties in learning English pronunciation or, as a whole, the English pronunciation of Japanese nationals (or Japanese users, in this case, the expression of Japanese is ambiguous) is poor. In any case, it clearly assumes that Japanese people 'are said to be bad at English pronunciation'.

Institutional Authority on How to Perceive English (Learning/Teaching)

Another category that is evident in the data set is 'Authority' ('recourse to the fallacy of mentioning authorities', van Dijk, 2004, p. 735). Micropost (5), a post by a senior high school, shows the authority of an educational institution regarding English education. The headline, 'Experience English by "native speakers"', indicates that there are other Englishes, spoken by users other than 'native speakers', which are comparatively less good or desirable. Therefore, the presence of English by 'native speakers' in this event is highlighted. The fact that this was posted by a senior high school is also noteworthy. A previous study (Tsurii, 2019) exploring discourses in Japanese university prospectuses argued that universities are forging ideas on effective learning with the use of 'native-speaker' teachers in their prospectuses, as well as mirroring public opinions about learning English and illusions about 'native speaker' teachers to entice customers (high school

graduates and their guardians). Schools 'are active agents in the very construction of the social order and the dominant ideology' as stated by Macedo, Dendrinos, and Gounari (2003, p. 40). Based on the main tenet of CDA, that is, language use is viewed as a social practice, this post from a higher education institution provides some insight on how we should see or learn English.

Hegemonic Ideology Recreated by 'Ourselves'

Regarding the abovementioned polarisation of 'native speakers' and 'non-native speakers' with value-laden expressions, one crucial characteristic of the current data should be noted: all the texts discussed here were created by people who arguably can be categorised as 'Japanese' people, that is, the 'ingroup' in the context of Japanese society. According to van Dijk, overall strategies called 'ideological squares' are applied to reproduce political ideologies through discourse, meaning that ideological discourse often follows this pattern:

Emphasize *Our* good things
Emphasize *Their* bad things
De-emphasize *Our* bad things
De-emphasize *Their* good things. (van Dijk, 2004, p. 734, emphasis in the original)

On the contrary, the current data set emphasises *their* good things and *our* bad things. This negative description of *us* can also be seen in microposts (7) and (12), which involve using the category of 'Irony

(making accusations to derogate others without making them point-blank)' (van Dijk, 2004). Many microposts concern whether English expressions that were learned or used are actually used in other places, especially in the US or the UK, or by 'native speakers'. For example, people discuss whether the expression 'My name is …' is used among 'native speakers'. Some people insist that introducing oneself with the sentence 'My name is …' is old-fashioned and unnatural because they never heard it being used in the US or the UK or were laughed at by 'native speakers' of English. Even a cursory search on Twitter with the keywords '*neitibu*' and 'My name is …' yields many results which show how people talk about this expression in relation to the use of 'native' speakers. One example is:

I heard that fixed phrases and expressions for self-introduction used by Japanese people sound very unnatural. My name is xx, also, from the viewpoint of 'native', I heard that they sound like terms used by Samurai, or geeks. Is it too formal? (Author's translation)

Such debate is meaningless because it does not consider the register of language use.

Among the current data set, micropost (12) effectively shows 'Irony'. It says that expressions, such as 'Great' and 'Good', are better to use when asked, 'How are you?' According to this micropost, 'I'm fine, thank you', which Japanese people often use, is incorrect. Furthermore, micropost (7) says that the expressions Japanese people use are mistakes. With this use of irony, Japanese learners (or users) of English, and consequently,

English education in Japan, are described negatively.

The inverted 'ideological square' found in this data set, unfortunately, supports the contention made by Kumaravadivelu（2016, p. 66）. He concluded that 'more than a quarter century of the discoursal output has not in any significant way altered the ground reality of NNS［non-native speaker］subordination'. Based on Gramsci's work on hegemony and subalternity, he described the relationship between a 'native' and 'non-native' speaker in the field of TESOL in terms of a hegemonic power structure. In this structure, subordination is reinforced by cooperation. The inverted 'ideological square', that is, the negative description of *us* by polarisation in discourse, can be a manifestation of this subordination.

Subordinative cooperation can come from the reproduction of stereotypical images based on different races conjured up in our mind. Kubota（2018）clearly warned that to believe 'native-speakers' always signify Caucasian people can render true the opposite statement, that is 'non-native speakers' always signify people who are not Caucasian. Under this belief system, it is likely that we（the readers, most of whom are supposed to be speakers of Japanese who are learning English in Japan）become discriminated against（p. 74）. Native-speakerism is a pervasive ideology in ELT worldwide and is considered to be imposed by the 'Centre', as opposed to the 'Periphery'（Holiday, 2005）. From this inverted description of in/outgroups shown above, we can see how hegemonic ideology is recreated by 'ourselves'.

Naturalised Use of the Terms

Some scholars have proposed the use of alternative terms for

'non-native' speaker (e.g. Cook, 2008; Lee, 2005), while others have recommended its usage. For example, Braine (2010) stated that although '[t]he term "native speaker" undoubtedly has positive connotations' (p. 9) and '[t]he term "non-native speaker" was indeed a pejorative' (p. 6), with the surge in the use of the term 'non-native speaker' in research and since the establishment of the NNEST Caucus in 1998, it has become politically correct to use it. He opposed changing the NNEST Caucus's name when its status was being upgraded to 'an Interest Section' because removing 'non-native speakers' from the name might decrease the amount of research relating to it (p. 6). Nonetheless, I would like to argue that the terms 'native speakers' and 'non-native speakers' still create a division. As Holliday (2005, p. 4) argued, 'the use of "non-" usually signifies a disadvantage or deficit'. As we can see in this study's data, people generally use these terms unreflectingly. This might be a result of '[e]mploying easy acronyms [which] serves to professionally routinize, normalize or reify the native-non-native speaker distinction as a domesticated, thinking-as-usual professional routine' (Holliday, 2017, p. 4).

As mentioned earlier, a feature of data collection on social media platforms is that online conversation has become more searchable (Zappavigna, 2012). With the use of hashtags, researchers can relatively easily collect relevant content. From the user's point of view, one function of hashtags is 'attention seeking' (Lee, 2018, p. 1); they enable users to attract the audience's attention. The fact that *neitibu* and its derived words are used in many microposts by different people indicates that these terms are pervasive and have possibly been naturalised in discourse about English learning and teaching. Moreover, as Lee (2018)

noted, '*tags are texts*' and are themselves 'meaningful pieces of language' (p. 2). The act of tagging on social media can be considered a textually mediated and discursively constructed social practice in its own right (Barton, 2015). This function of social media tagging can facilitate the recreation of ideology, in this case, native-speakerism.

Idealised English Based on One-Nation-One-Language Ideology

Another point worth noting is the use of the strategies of 'Authority' and 'Evidentiality' to make statements or opinions sound plausible, although in the cases analysed in this paper, the result is a devaluing of *us*. As in microposts (2), (3), and (8) (for pronunciation) and (4), (6), (7), and (12) (for vocabulary), people talk about the English language (learning) as if there is an ideal, used by 'native-speakers', which should be achieved by learners/users. Ferri and Magne (2019) explored how L1 speakers of English are viewed by Lx speakers to investigate how Lx speakers have internalised the hegemonic view of the superiority of 'native' language speakers. They found that the 'non-native' speakers they interviewed had an idealised image of L1 speakers of standard English. From this study's data, we can see that people believe in the existence of and strive to learn an ideal variety of English that is owned by 'native speakers'.

Based on how the English language (learning) is described, it seems that people have a one-nation-one-language ideology. Micropost (3), which is about English pronunciation, reads: 'For both American and British people, we can see the difference in their pronunciation'. On English expressions, micropost (4) reads: 'only people in #New

Zealand #Australia use（#slang）［heaps of］'. This implies a belief in a monolingual environment in these nations. Examining beliefs about and attitudes towards linguistic diversity in these countries and Japan goes beyond the scope of this paper; further detailed exploration with more data is required. However, this monolingual mentality is not completely unrelated to the establishment of monolingual Japan, where a common language was created during the process of modernisation from the mid-1870s, involving the repression of other languages, such as the indigenous Ryukyuan and Ainu languages（Heinrich, 2012）.

Conclusions

Motivated to know 'how it［native-speakerism］operates' to 'disrupt, and eventually dismantle, the unfair native-speakerism dominance in ELT'（Kumaravadivelu, 2015, viii）, as mentioned in the Introduction section, this study is the first attempt to explore how deep-seated beliefs about English language learning/teaching are perpetuated in Japanese society. Through a thematic analysis of Twitter discourse, a story about English language learning/teaching was shown. Then, by adopting analytical categories from van Dijk's（2004）ideological discourse analysis, I discussed how relationships between two groups described in the story, namely 'native speakers' and 'non-native speakers', have been reproduced along with the ideology of native-speakerism.

In English language learning/teaching discourse, two distinct groups always seem to exist within social cognition, although they are not necessarily clearly defined. It seems that people are haunted by the differences between the two parties when they are talking about

learning English. However, the definition of 'native speakers' is not always clear. In some cases, being a 'native speaker' is an unachievable objective, and at other times it is talked about as if it is easily achievable. As for language use, it is sometimes discussed based on the belief that there must be ideals used by 'native speakers' and other varieties that are inferior, however correct they are.

I would like to emphasise here with this data that this has been created by *Ourselves*, not imposed by the *Other*. This can be a manifestation of the fact that the hegemonic view has already been embedded in our minds. If the distinction between groups of people exists at all, we, as 'non-native' speakers, may lower ourselves to the status of perpetual learners, subjugated by the 'native speaker' model. I would like to argue that this partly stems from the uncritical, blind use of labels for groups of people. In any field related to English language education, including research, foreign language education policy, and educational institution policy, the terms 'native' and 'non-native' are being used uncritically. As Holliday (2017, pp. 3–4) maintained, citing Kumaravadivelu (2016), this distinction can 'strengthen the hegemony of native-speakerism'.

The present study had some limitations. First, the data studied and analysed here contain a lot of information, and other aspects of it, such as language ideology, perceptions of 'English daily conversation (*eikaiwa*)', and illusions about English (daily conversation), could have been explored to deepen our understanding of phenomena related to English language learning and teaching in Japan. Although these were beyond the scope of this study, they could be examined in future research.

Another limitation relates to translation. The microposts used as data

were written in Japanese and translated into English by the author. In the process of translation, translators normally read and understand (which means having a representation in their mind) a text, interpret it, and create a new text in another language conveying the same (if possible, but in most cases, similar) messages. When translating, it is impossible to convey the same message precisely. Further, in this study, the author tried to translate each sentence or lexical item following the logical construction of the original, showing grammatical errors and inappropriate lexical usages. This way of translating sometimes complicates understanding the literal, logical meaning or the exact message the author of the original text intended to convey. The adoption of this strategy indicates that the translation differs depending on the degree to which the translator reflects the original author's intended meaning and the translator's own biases (e.g. interpretation bias).

Endnotes

[1] To differentiate Twitter messages from those published on other platforms, the word 'micropost' is used to refer to Twitter posts, following Zappavigna (2012, p. 195).

[2] All microposts studied and cited in this project were originally written in Japanese. They were translated into English by the author. The author tried to translate word by word without considering the implications of the concepts in original Japanese, which are often meaningless even in Japanese; it was, therefore, impossible to capture the exact meaning that the writer of the post intended to convey.

[3] To show the nuanced meaning in Japanese, some words or phrases in Japanese are shown as they are in italics. In these cases, a literal English translation is noted in parentheses.

[4] As explained in the Ethics section, parts that can reveal the identity of the poster are concealed for privacy protection.

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