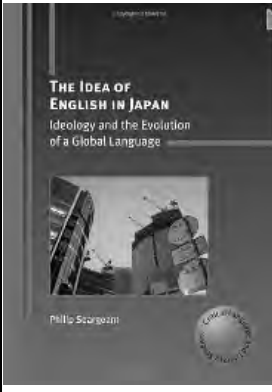


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<p align="center"><b>The Idea of English in Japan: Ideology and the Evolution of a Global Language</b></p>		
Author:	Philip Seargeant (2009)	
Publisher:	Bristol: Multilingual Matters.	
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Pp. xv + 188.	ISBN 978-1847692016 (paper)	\$44.95 U.S.



There has been much discussion about the status of English and English language teaching in Japan in recent decades. Yet even in the midst of this discussion and repeated government initiatives, by all accounts, average English ability within Japan has not improved. Philip Seargeant, a lecturer in Applied Linguistics at the Open University’s Centre for Language and Communication, has extensively investigated the study of world Englishes, partially through his time working in Japanese higher education. In the nine chapters of *The Idea of English in Japan*, Seargeant explores how English, as “language which is not interpreted as language” (Seargeant, 2009, p. 134), is used throughout contemporary Japanese society. Although Seargeant’s book is not strictly related to language teaching, Seargeant’s thesis and findings are potentially important for helping language teachers in Japan, and possibly elsewhere, understand their teaching context.

The basis of Seargeant’s theoretical approach is “language ideologies,” that languages always already exist within an ideological system (Silverstein, 1979 in Seargeant, 2009, p. 27), which Seargeant asserts is a perspective missing from much discussion of World Englishes or English as a Lingua Franca. Seargeant investigates the discourses on English within Japan by examining official pronouncements, academic discussions and curriculum designs, along with promotional texts and organizational practices of public and private educational organizations, such as universities and language schools, and the use of English within artistic and popular culture. In doing so, Seargeant attempts to straddle and balance the divide he notes in studies on World Englishes between focusing on languages and the social practices they inhabit, but in doing so, bringing the balance back towards ‘language’ proper.

In examining the profusion of English in Japan after World War II, Seargeant describes it as a kind of “glocalization” (Robertson, 1995), where English “is absorbed into a pattern of Japanese social expression” (Seargeant, 2009, p. 73). This is exemplified through the ubiquitous use of English ‘loanwords’, though these are often indigenous in origin, and the ‘ornamental’ use of often non-standard, idiosyncratic English in apparel and advertising.

Seargeant also tackles the discourses of “authenticity” of English-language study in Japan. He specifically focuses on the continued prevalence of and preference for native speaker-modeled English, as well as the simulated authenticity in English-study environments, such as conversation schools and “British Hills,” a British countryside-themed park with native English-speaking staff. In both cases, the foreign is domesticated, yet remains “forever foreign” within these “purpose-built enclaves” (p. 104).

The final purview of Seargeant’s investigation into the role of English in Japanese culture, and one of the two involving empirical, qualitative research, is the often-gendered aspirational aspects of English study in Japan. In looking at goals linked to English mastery in both conversation school advertising and in magazines geared towards women, who constitute a majority of post-secondary English language students in Japan, promoting study abroad, both emphasize English as a key to opportunities currently lacking in everyday Japanese society. In particular, the examples of women whose study abroad opened up career opportunities that would otherwise have been denied them play both on contemporary images of empowered women, but also upon the place of “fantasy English” (McVeigh, 2002) in Japanese society today.

Seargeant (2009) distills these twin desires towards English as an instrumental motivation towards personal gain, for instance a higher salary, and an integrative motivation, allowing the subject to transcend social barriers (p. 123). This framework is then used to analyze email interviews with five Japanese informants (four women, one man) with tertiary English study and experience living abroad about their attitudes towards English. Many informants noted their English ability as a key factor in their current employment, though one did state that a friend of hers with considerable English ability was working in the manufacturing section of a company where her language skills were not used. Some informants also discussed language study and life abroad as a means to better learn their own culture; in other words, rather than breaking barriers between Japan and the rest of the world, English makes the differences more distinct. Moreover, the female respondents confirmed prior studies noting that, for Japanese women, English is a more liberatory language than Japanese in that English requires less consideration of social atmosphere and hierarchy.

Seargeant closes his investigation by looking at what does and doesn’t count as English, with both a small-scale diary survey with eight participants of how much English they noticed on a daily basis over the course of two months, and the popular interpretation of English as an “impossible language” in popular TV shows. The former study involved the eight participants noting what English they saw in their diary; contrary to Seargeant’s expectations, the only English noted was from specifically foreign—in these cases, British and American—sources, such as letters from overseas friends, or British and American pop songs. Similarly, a Japanese TV variety show in which the bilingual American TV host attempts to elicit a humorous anecdote in English from an ‘average’ non-bilingual Japanese man. The laughs at this attempt come from the simultaneous subtitles, translating both the hapless subject’s intended meaning and a strict interpretation of what he is actually saying to a native English

speaker's ears. However, Seargeant analyzes the humor of this, which supposedly shows that Japanese just can't speak English, nevertheless relies on the audience understanding basic rules of English sentence structure and vocabulary. In both the TV show and the survey, Seargeant shows a phenomenon of "ideological erasure," that although, concurring with Yano (2001) that English will likely never have a communicative function in Japan itself except when communicating with non-Japanese, English nevertheless serves a distinctive and significant function within Japanese culture.

Although Seargeant takes a wide-ranging, heterodox approach to his subject, his attempts at empirical investigation through interviews and surveys cannot be considered conclusive due to inadequate methodological documentation in the text. From the information given, both sample sizes appear too small for any meaningful quantitative data, and neither is deep enough for a qualitative study. However, if viewed as pilot studies, both do point the way to potentially more valid investigations. Moreover, Seargeant avoids the pitfalls noted in other studies looking at ideologies of foreignness in Japan, specifically McVeigh (2007 & 2002), which rely heavily on secondary, non-academic sources.

In closing, although *The Idea of English in Japan* is not necessarily a language-teaching book, it is relevant to those who work in EFL settings for further investigation and conscious pedagogical compensation. Seargeant closes this volume by arguing that the case of Japan shows the weaknesses of the Lingua Franca model in that it is impossible to separate the international functions of English from the intranational roles it plays, as in Japan (p. 165). Teachers may therefore be able to use segments from the book, or adapt similar studies, to prompt students to notice the uses of English in their native environment. Such uses of English can be brought out from erasure and seen, not as deviant samples to be forever corrected in comparison to an always inaccessible native-speaker standard, but as variants valid within their own culture, though not necessarily understandable elsewhere.

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