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THE EXPANDING ROLE OF ENGLISH IN ASIA: A PEDAGOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

Olha Luchenko[1], Yevhen Chervinko[2]

1. PhD in Professional Education,
Associate Professor at the Department of East Asian Studies
Comenius University in Bratislava, SLOVAKIA
ORCID ID: 0000-0002-2844-0441

2. PhD in Methods of Teaching Foreign Languages,
Associate Professor at the Department of Humanities, Section of Languages
Ukrainian National Music Academy (Kyiv), UKRAINE
ORCID ID: 0000-0002-2567-2773

The number of individuals who use English as a second or non-native language has surpassed that of native speakers. Asia, in particular, now has the largest population of English speakers worldwide. In Asia, English serves various functions, such as acting as an official or semi-official language, functioning as a lingua franca (ELF) [1], being the medium of instruction (EMI), and being taught as a school subject [2]. As Cheng (2012) observes, this shift challenges traditional notions of 'majority' and 'minority', as well as 'central' and 'peripheral' in relation to the English language. It also questions the relevance of 'native-speaker norms' since native speakers are no longer the benchmark [3]. Today, English is owned by those who speak and use it, regardless of their native language.

The influence of English is further demonstrated by the increasing number of transliterated words across various languages, emphasizing its impact on global communication. Gu and Manan (2024) studied the incorporation of English into non-Latin script environments through transliteration. Their research examines how English, when phonetically represented in scripts such as Cyrillic, Arabic, or other writing systems, becomes integrated into the local linguistic landscape, blurring linguistic boundaries and sometimes even being perceived as part of the local language rather than as a variety of World Englishes [4]. The study raises the question of whether these trends represent new forms of local languages or whether global English varieties are emerging [5].

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In the Japanese context, foreign language education largely refers to English instruction, reflecting English's status as the dominant global lingua franca and its central role in international communication [6, 7]. Rowland's (2015) study on societal multilingualism highlights the growing influence of English within the Japanese linguistic landscape [8]. The integration of English words into Japanese is a notable trend, with the number of *gairaigo* (loanwords) increasing annually. Out of the total number of loanwords from various languages, now constituting over 10% of the entire vocabulary, a significant majority (94.1%) originates from English [9]. Due to the linguistic differences between Japanese and English, these loanwords often undergo phonological changes to make them easier for native Japanese speakers to pronounce and use.

Regarding the teaching of Japanese as a foreign language, Champ (2014) supports the idea that *gairaigo* facilitates language comprehension and production, similar to the role of cognates in other languages. Champ also underscores the importance of teaching the transliteration process and identifies previously overlooked factors that influence teachers' use of *gairaigo*, including their confidence in using English and the extent to which their *gairaigo* usage reflects current trends [10].

Teachers' command of English plays a crucial role in determining the quality of language input, classroom communication, and students' learning experiences in the EMI classes [11]. Previous studies on the use of EMI/ELF in teaching Japanese as a foreign language have revealed that students' and teachers' English proficiency is one of the main concerns among instructors [12]. Moreover, the quantitative findings revealed differences in EMI implementation among instructors (both native Japanese speakers and non-native speakers) with varying levels of English proficiency. The most notable positive trend was observed among teachers with C1–C2 or higher levels of English proficiency (i.e., near-native), the majority of whom reported using English for 30% to 100% of their instructional time [13]. Interestingly, the findings also revealed a notable difference in the use of English by native Japanese-speaking teachers working abroad compared with those teaching in Japan, with a larger proportion of teachers abroad (in non-Anglophone countries) using English as the primary language of instruction [14].

Summing up, the growing role of English in Asia reflects a broader transformation in global linguistic and educational landscapes. As English continues to function as a lingua franca, a medium of instruction, and a source of lexical innovation, its influence extends beyond communication to shape local languages, educational policies, and teaching practices. In Japan, this is evident not only in the widespread incorporation of English-derived loanwords into everyday language but also in the central position English occupies within foreign language

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education. These developments have important implications for the teaching of Japanese as a foreign language, where English increasingly serves as a pedagogical resource that can facilitate vocabulary acquisition, comprehension, and classroom interaction. At the same time, the effective use of English as a support language depends largely on teachers' own English proficiency. Previous research consistently demonstrates that teachers with higher levels of English competence are more likely to implement EMI and use English strategically during lessons. Differences between native and non-native Japanese-speaking instructors, as well as between teachers working in Japan and those teaching abroad, further illustrate how educational contexts shape instructional language practices. Rather than viewing English solely as an external influence on Japanese, it should be recognized as an integral component of contemporary multilingual education. Future research should continue examining how English-mediated pedagogical approaches can enhance Japanese language instruction while balancing the benefits of English support with the need to maximize meaningful exposure to Japanese. Such investigations will contribute to more effective and context-sensitive language teaching practices in increasingly multilingual learning environments.

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