



Characteristics of speaker models for Japanese university students

Kenta Yamanouchi ^a *

^a *Nagoya Gakuin University, Graduate School of Foreign Languages,
4-1-1 Sakae, Naka-ku, Nagoya-shi, Aichi-ken, 460-0008, Japan*

Abstract

In the research area of English as an international language, there are numerous studies about appropriate language norms and language models, but few investigations of attitudes about people whom students consider models as speakers of English (henceforth, speaker models). And, most studies of speaker models dealt with the linguistic characteristics of the speaker models. To extend this research, the present study investigated students' attitudes about what characteristics led students to see someone as a speaker model. Nine Japanese university students participated in semistructured interviews, and their comments were analyzed. Results show that although the participants were learning English as a foreign language and their goals for learning English were to achieve native-like competence, they mainly had Japanese teachers of English in mind as speaker models. Although it is not necessary to have native-like English in order to be seen as a speaker model, it is necessary for students to observe the speaker model using English for communicative purposes. These findings suggest that further studies need to investigate characteristics of speaker models without limiting their scope to accent and grammar, and need to investigate what other non-linguistic characteristics are important for speaker models.

© 2015 EJAL & the Authors. Published by EJAL. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>).

Keywords: English as an international language; native speaker of English; nonnative speaker of English; language model; speaker model; English education in Japan

1. Introduction

Traditionally, in English language teaching (ELT), native speaker (NS) English has been used as the language norm and the language model, and NSs of English have been used as speaker models (Cook, 1999; Seargeant, 2009). However, due to the growing number of users of English all over the world, ELT is at a critical stage in discussing the appropriate norms and models for students. Crystal (2003) noted that the majority of speakers of English in 1960s were using English as a first language (L1), but now there are more people who are using English as a second language (ESL) or English as a foreign language (EFL). Crystal estimated that, if ESL and EFL speakers were combined, the ratio of NSs to nonnative speakers (NNSs) of English would be around 1:3, and he pointed out that the percentage of NNSs is steadily increasing. Graddol (1999) also suggested that the percentage of NSs was decreasing,

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +81-52-678-4076
E-mail address: kentayamanouchi@hotmail.com
<http://dx.doi.org/>

while the proportion of the world population who are NSs of English would decrease from more than 8% in 1950 to less than 5% in 2050. Moreover, Canagarajah (1999) stated that four out of five teachers of English all over the world are NNS English teachers. These statistics suggest that there will be more opportunities for learners of English to communicate with other NNSs in English in the future. Accordingly, there have been criticisms of the traditional NS-based norm and models, and discussions about the introduction of NNS-based norms and models into ELT have begun.

Previous studies (e.g. Cook, 1999; 2005; Jenkins, 2007; Kirkpatrick, 2007) suggested that NNS teachers be used as speaker models for students for statistical, sociolinguistic, cognitive, and attitudinal reasons. As for statistical reasons, on the basis of the increasing numbers of users and learners of English all over the world and the reality that NNSs communicate with other NNSs in English as a *Lingua Franca* (ELF) successfully, it has been argued that it is not necessary to learn NS English when learners are planning to use ELF with other NNSs, and therefore NNSs are more appropriate speaker models than NSs (Jenkins, 2007). As for sociolinguistic reasons, on the assumption that all varieties of English are equal and linguistically valid, Kirkpatrick (2007) suggests that “multilingual local teachers who are expert users of English” (p. 196) are appropriate speaker models because English changes its form under the influence of local languages and cultures. Jenkins (2007) also suggests that “the local teacher whose accent incorporates both the core feature [*Lingua Franca* Core] and the local version of the non-core items” (p. 25) should serve as a speaker model. For cognitive reasons, Cook (1999) suggests that second language (L2) learners would benefit from using multilingual L2 users as speaker models rather than monolingual NSs because multilingual L2 users are distinct from and superior to monolingual NSs in terms of language processing and cognitive process (see also Cook, 2005). Regarding attitudinal reasons, it has been argued that those who have learned English as an L2, even with effort and struggle, cannot become NSs according to the traditional definition of an NS (Cook, 1999), and that the use of the NS-based norm and models creates inferiority complexes for NNSs as speakers of English (Golombek & Jordan, 2005), issues of L2 identity (Jenkins, 2007), and attitude issues toward NNS teachers (Amin, 1997).

The issue of speaker model is related to teaching methods and goals. In response to criticism that traditional ways of teaching English in East Asian countries emphasized grammar, reading, and writing too much, the governments of some Asian countries recently set the acquisition of good oral communication skills as a primary goal for ELT (Butler, 2007). In Japan, new curriculum guidelines are concerned with foreign language education at the primary and secondary levels, but there is an increasing concern about students’ acquisition of communicative skills at the tertiary levels as well. This major shift from a grammar-translation approach to a communicative language approach changes the major role of Japanese teachers of English from teaching students how to analyze English to training students to communicate in English. Under the new guidelines, Japanese teachers are more and more encouraged to communicate with students in English in the classroom (Ministry

of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, 2008a; 2008b). With this change in emphasis, Japanese teachers' role as speaker models for students becomes more important.

The positive influence of models on students' learning English can also be inferred from discussions outside of the field of L2 learning. According to Oga-Baldwin and Nakata (2013), in the social cognitive theory of human learning, findings from empirical studies have suggested that students learn new behaviors through imitating teachers and peers. In the area of language, empirical studies have also shown that learning occurs through imitation in L1 learning.

Although there have been increasing discussions about speaker models for learning English (e.g. Cook, 1999; 2005; Jenkins, 2007; Kirkpatrick, 2007), there are few investigations of learners' attitudes about speaker models (He & Zhang, 2010; Jordan, 2010; Sifakis & Sougari, 2005; Timmis, 2002). In the few studies that there are, the focus of discussions and investigations was limited to linguistic characteristics of speaker models. To gain a broader understanding of speaker models, the present study aims to document students' attitudes about what characteristics lead students to see someone as a speaker model without limiting its scope to the linguistic characteristics. This leads to my research question: "What characteristics are needed for someone to be considered a speaker model by Japanese university students?"

Below, I discuss results of previous empirical studies relevant to attitudes about speaker models. Although attitudes of both students and teachers have been investigated in previous studies, only the studies of student attitudes that are related to the purpose of this study are reviewed here.

1.1. Previous studies related to attitudes about speaker models

Studies related to speaker models have been conducted as part of attitude studies of varieties of English. For instance, Timmis (2002) investigated the preferred linguistic (accents and grammar) characteristics of students' goals for learning by using the survey questions listed in Table 1. For accents, students were asked to choose whether they would prefer to have Student A's "native-speaker competence" or Student B's "accented international intelligibility" (p. 242). Regarding grammar, they were asked to choose whether they would prefer to have Student C's "stable and consistent interlanguage", Student D's "control of the written-based grammar traditionally presented in ELT materials", or Student E's "native-speaker control of both formal and informal grammar" (p. 244). Results showed that a majority of the student participants perceived NS English as the ideal in both cases. As for the reasons for their preference for NS accented competence, it was noted that NS accent was "a benchmark of achievement" (p. 242) and they were motivated to learn NS accents. On the other hand, those who preferred accented international intelligibility noted that although it was ideal for student participants to be speakers of English with NS accents, it was impossible for them to become like NSs. Those with a

preference for NS control of both formal and informal grammar observed that NSs' grammar was authentic and a "benchmark of achievement" (p. 245).

Table 1. Timmis's (2002) Survey questions regarding linguistic characteristics of students' goals for learning.

Student A: 'I can pronounce English just like a native speaker now. Sometimes people think I am a native speaker.'

Student B: 'I can pronounce English clearly now. Native speakers and non-native speakers understand me wherever I go, but I still have the accent of my country.'

Please underline one answer.

Would you prefer to be like Student A or Student B?

Student A **Student B**

Student C: 'I can say everything that I want to say. Native speakers and non-native speakers understand me wherever I go, but I use English my own way and sometimes I say things which native speakers think are grammar mistakes.'

Student D: 'I know all the grammar rules I need so that I can say anything I want. I use these rules correctly, but sometimes English people use grammar that isn't in the grammar books and I don't want to learn this.'

Student E: 'I use all the grammar rules that native speakers use, even the informal grammar native speakers use when they speak to each other.'

Please underline one answer.

Would you prefer to be like Student C, Student D, or Student E?

Student C **Student D** **Student E**

As a follow-up study of Timmis (2002), He and Zhang (2010) investigated Chinese university students' preferred linguistic (accents and grammar) characteristics as their goals for learning through questionnaires, follow-up interviews, and matched-guised tests. For the questionnaires, He and Zhang used the same survey questions used in Timmis (2002). As for attitudes about grammar, they found that NS control of both formal and informal grammar was preferred by a majority of the student participants, which was similar to the result of Timmis's study. However, with regard to attitudes about accents, accented international intelligibility was preferred by 58.2% of the student participants and NS competence was preferred by about 41.6% of them. Regarding the reasons for their preference for accented international intelligibility, it was noted that it was not necessary for them to be able to speak with NS accents because English was just a tool to communicate with both NSs and NNSs, that their own NNS accents were important for identifying them as Chinese, and that it was impossible for them to speak English with NS accents because of the influence of their L1. Regarding the reasons for their preference for NS control of both formal

and informal grammar, the participants mentioned that an ability to control NSs' formal and informal grammar makes students become more effective communicators, and it is better for students to learn “[s]tandard/perfect/good English” (p. 779). Moreover, the result from the matched-guise tests was that although the student participants did not show very negative attitudes toward Chinese accented English, they tended to show a strong preference for NS accented English.

In order to understand the appropriateness of Japanese speakers of English as speaker models in the Japanese EFL setting, Jordan (2010) conducted a study of students' attitudes toward the accents of three Hollywood actors from different backgrounds. Based on responses of 184 Japanese university students to a questionnaire, it was found that the participants held a perception that the Japanese actor's accent was comprehensible and achievable but less attractive, compared with accents of the American and British actors. Moreover, from the participants' comments, it was found that the participants desired not to sound Japanese when speaking English, and that they set achieving NS accents as their goals even if they thought it was unattainable.

While the results of these studies indicate that some learners believe it is not necessary for them to be able to speak with NS accents for international communication and that it is important for them to keep their own accents of English as a marker of their L2 identity, the attitude exists among the general population that acquiring NS-like English is idealistic goals for learning English, and that those who can speak NS-like English are ideal speaker models. This ideal of NS English was also found in previous studies into varieties of English (Chiba, Matsuura, & Yamamoto, 1995; Matsuda, 2003).

These studies indicate that a person has to be able to speak NS-like English to be seen as a speaker model, but are linguistic ones the only necessary characteristics for someone to be a speaker model?

It seems that previous empirical studies (He & Zhang, 2010; Jordan, 2010; Sifakis & Sougari, 2005; Timmis, 2002) have paid attention exclusively to attitudes about linguistic characteristics of speaker models on the assumption that a person has to be able to speak the variety of English (accent in particular) that is favored or accepted in order to be considered a speaker model. This idea is found in the descriptions of speaker models. For example, Phillipson (1992) wrote:

The native speaker serves as the model who can personify the native speaker abstracted and reified in works on standard grammar and vocabulary and in ‘received pronunciation’, and which teaching materials and sound-recordings seeks to reanimate. The teacher who is a native speaker is the best embodiment of the target and norm for learners. (p. 194)

In similar vein, Jenkins (2007) writes: “The model, then, is not the LFC [Lingua Franca Core] but the local teacher whose accent incorporates both the core feature and the local version of the non-core items.” (p. 25) In addition, Jenkins foresaw that if an additive ELF norm which reflects the actual uses of ELF among NNSs were

established and introduced in ELT, NNS teachers would be able to serve with confidence as pronunciation models to be imitated by students—The additive indicates Jenkins' position that students should have another option about language norms for learning English, so that students can choose one from another based on the students' expected future interlocutors instead of being prescribed to see NS English as the language norm. Moreover, various terms have been used to refer to speaker models in previous studies, for example, language model (Mahboob, 2004), model (Philipson, 1992), model for imitation (Jenkins, 2007), pronunciation role model (Jordan, 2010), role model (He & Zhang, 2010; Kirkpatrick, 2007; Sifakis & Sougari, 2005), and so on. However, these terms seem to cover speaker models judged only on linguistic characteristics (accent in particular). Thus, previous studies have been conducted on the assumption that having linguistic characteristics that are consistent with appropriate language norm is a necessary characteristic of a speaker model. However, previous studies do not show what students perceive as necessary characteristics for someone to be considered a speaker model other than linguistic ones.

In studies of attitudes about characteristics of NS and NNS teachers as English teaching professionals, it has been reported that one of the advantages of NNS teachers as English teaching professionals is that they can serve as role models for students because they have gone through the same L2 learning experience that students experience (Braine, 1999; Kamhi-Stein, Aagard, Ching, Paik, & Sasser, 2004; Nemtchinova, 2005; Brutt-Griffler & Samimy, 1999). However, the definition of the role model in this area of study seems to be different from that of the speaker model that the present study is concerned with. A speaker model in this study is someone whom students consider a model as a speaker of English when learning English, and the primary focus is on speaking English. On the other hand, a role model is someone whom students use as a model for learning English in general, and this term does not include a specific focus on speaking. Thus, although it was found that NNS teachers were considered to be qualified teachers and good role models on account of their L2 learning experiences, they were not considered ideal speakers of English, according to questionnaire responses. These responses included many positive comments about NS teachers as speakers of English, but many negative comments about NNS teachers as speakers of English (Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2005; Ma, 2012). Thus, the role model in attitude studies about the characteristics of NS and NNS teachers is not identified with the speaker model in the present study. Although it may be interesting to investigate how L2 learning experience of NNS teachers is associated with the concept of the speaker model in this study, research findings do not demonstrate any link between them.

1.2. The present study

Although one might assume that students would consider someone whose English is NS-like to be a speaker model for learning English, are linguistic characteristics the only characteristics for someone to be considered a speaker model? As an exploratory

study, the present study addresses the research question, “What characteristics are needed for someone to be considered a speaker model?” In order to answer this research question, this study conducted semistructured interviews with nine Japanese university students. It is considered that the results of this study will offer important insights for future discussions about speaker models for EFL students.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

On the assumption that students who study English as their primary or secondary subject at university have a desire to be able to speak English, 10 undergraduate students of the faculty of foreign studies at a Japanese university were asked to participate in a face-to-face interview, and nine of them agreed to participate in the study without compensation, yielding a participation rate of 90%. Of the nine, four were male, and five were female. All had Japanese nationality and used Japanese as an L1. The range of the participants’ age was from 19 to 21 years old, with an average age of 20.1. Eight participants were English majors, and one was majoring in International Culture and Cooperation. The nine participants included one freshman, two sophomores, three juniors and three seniors. The years of English learning experience ranged from 7 to 16 years, and the average was 10.1 years. In terms of English proficiency level, six out of the nine participants had taken the TOEFL, and had scores ranging from 430 to 557, with an average of 469.5. Seven of the nine had taken the TOEIC, and their scores ranged from 360 to 745, with an average of 513.6. Six of the nine participants had experienced staying in an English speaking country such as the US, the UK, Canada, Australia or New Zealand for the purpose of homestay or study abroad, and the length of their stay ranged from two weeks to six months, and took place when they were 16 to 21 years old.

2.2. Materials and procedure

At the beginning of the each interview, the general purpose and the procedure of the interview were explained, and each participant signed a consent form. The length of the interviews ranged from 50 minutes to 1 hour 55 minutes with an average length of 1 hour 20 minutes, and all interviews were recorded with two IC recorders. All the interviews were conducted in Japanese, and the data collection continued until the data reached saturation (Dörnyei, 2007).

In order to elicit the students’ attitudes about characteristics for someone to be considered a speaker model, this study conducted interviews with questions which covered the following topics: (a) the participants’ goals for learning English; (b) the people whom the participants wanted to be able to speak English like; and (c) the characteristics of the people. The participants continued to be asked about the second and the third topics until they could not name anyone else whom they had wanted to be able to speak English like.

In analyzing the data, I conducted tape analysis, a method which has been described as “taking notes while listening to the recordings, possibly marking parts of the data [...] that warrant more elaborate subsequent analysis.” (Dörnyei, 2007: 247) Then I coded and categorized the notes into themes repeatedly until I gained a general picture of the participants’ attitudes about speaker models.

3. Results

The participants’ responses showed their goals for learning English and their attitudes about speaker models. In connection with the goals, the participants described their expected future interlocutors and the linguistic characteristics of their goals for speaking English. In connection with attitudes about speaker models, they described people whom they considered their speaker models and the characteristics of those speaker models (Table 2).

Table 2. Analytical framework for interview data.

Goals for learning English
Expected future interlocutors
Linguistic characteristics of goals for speaking English
Attitudes about speaker models
People considered to be speaker models
Characteristics of speaker models
Linguistic characteristics
Behavioral characteristics

3.1. Goals for learning English

Each participant mentioned two to four goals for learning English. These were things related to speaking English—in fact, the second most frequently mentioned goal was to get a high score on standardized tests such as the TOEIC and the TOEFL in order to prove objectively their communication ability in English. In the descriptions of the goals related to speaking English, two themes emerged: (a) their expected future interlocutors; and (b) the linguistic characteristics of their goals for speaking English.

3.1.1. Expected future interlocutors

The description of their goals related to speaking English mostly included information about their expected future interlocutors. A majority of the participants envisioned their expected future interlocutors to be NSs (see Table 3). For instance, NS future interlocutors appeared in comments such as “I would like to become real friends with NSs, and would like to be able to fight with them in English,” and “I think it’s good for now if I could talk not to Japanese but to NSs in English on an equal basis for my job. This is my goal.” (translated from Japanese) One participant

said that she was hoping to become a flight attendant, an interpreter, or a translator that works with NS customers. Another student mentioned that he would use English when he travels to Europe or sees people from different countries in Japan in the future. Another participant mentioned that he was planning to be a teacher of English in Japan, and his interlocutors would be his future Japanese students. These indicate that the majority of the participants were learning EFL but not ELF, in that they were learning English to be able to communicate mainly with NSs but not with other NNSs.

Table 3. Expected future interlocutors.

	<i>n</i>	%
NSs of English	6	67
People from different countries	1	11
Japanese students	1	11
Not specified	1	11
Total	9	100

3.1.2. Linguistic characteristics of goals for speaking English

The description of their goals related to speaking English included information about linguistic characteristics of the goals. A majority of the linguistic characteristics were related to NS competence. (Table 4)

Table 4. Linguistic characteristics of goals for speaking English.

	<i>n</i>	%
NS competence	6	67
Intelligibility to NNSs	2	22
Not specified	1	11
Total	9	100

A majority of the participants commented that they would like to acquire NS level competence—the same or a very close level to what they have in their L1s, a level where they are treated as an NS by NSs, a level at which they could work with NS co-workers on an equal basis, or at which they would be understood by NS customers without any problems. A typical comment was:

My ideal is, including dirty words appearing in movies, something that doesn't make my interlocutors feel a sense of incongruity. [...] My speech shouldn't be something that makes my interlocutors feel that my English is a foreign language. Natural, on an equal basis, the same level that makes the

interlocutors forget about that [the fact that my English is a foreign language]. It would be good if my English could achieve the level that the interlocutors forgot about the fact that my mother tongue was Japanese. (researcher's translation)

However, the participant felt that NNSs were unqualified for evaluating the adequacy of NNSs' English, and that it was difficult for NNSs to achieve NS-like English. This sense of powerlessness was expressed in the following comment: "It's just an intuition of NSs, so I guess it's not something I can judge. I don't know how to say... I guess, in order to achieve a fluency level where they don't notice that I am an NNS, it would take so many years." (researcher's translation) These comments indicate that although the participants are aware that setting NS level English as the goal is considered to be unrealistic, they still hold ideal for acquiring NS level competence.

On the other hand, some participants had being intelligible to other NNSs as their goal. For instance, after mentioning that he would go to Germany in the future, one participant talked about the linguistic characteristics of the English he wanted to acquire:

When I take a trip, not only in Japan but also anywhere, there are many opportunities to be spoken in English. In these situations, my English doesn't have to be perfect. But if I were able to say what I wanted to say in English, I think that it wouldn't mean that I had acquired English but that I had achieved the level where I could use English. (researcher's translation)

Another participant who was planning to be a high school teacher of English in the future expressed his opinion regarding both NS competence and intelligibility to NNSs from the standpoint of a teacher of English. After mentioning that his goal for speaking English was to be able to conduct his class in English, he stressed that it was of greater importance to be intelligible to his future students than to acquire NS competence:

I want to be able to speak British English which is the origin of English or the American English that is often used in Japan, but from the standpoint of a teacher, because it would be difficult for students to understand British and American English even if I could speak English like NSs, I want to be able to speak simple English that Japanese students can understand easily. (researcher's translation)

This comment shows the participant's view that although NS-like English is ideal on the one hand, it is important for Japanese teachers of English to be able to speak simplified English that is different from NS English on the other.

3.1.3. Conclusion about goals for learning English

All of the participants had goals for learning English that were related to speaking English, and in the descriptions of their goals, they mentioned their expected future interlocutors and linguistic characteristics of their goals. Although some participants

imagined NNSs as their expected future interlocutors and thought of being intelligible to NNSs as the desired linguistic characteristics of their goals, a majority of the participants were learning EFL but not ELF in that they expected to communicate with NSs in the future but not with other NNSs, and they had goals related to NS competence. However, one of the latter expressed a comment indicating that although she was aware that setting NS competence as her goal for learning English was unrealistic, she still held ideal for acquiring NS-like English.

3.2. Attitudes about Speaker Models

After describing their goals for learning English, the participants described people whom they already knew and wanted to be able to speak English like. In this section, (a) the people considered speaker models, and (b) the characteristics of the speaker models are discussed.

3.2.1. Participants' speaker models

Each participant mentioned two to five people whom they wanted to be able to speak English like. The participants mentioned 32 people in total. (In some cases, the same person was mentioned by different participants because the participants were from the same university.) Those mentioned included: Japanese teachers of English; classmates; senior students; and a Japanese teacher of other subject. (Table 5) The Japanese teachers of English were not only from the university but also from high schools and English conversational schools. More importantly, those who were considered to be speaker models were all NNSs.

Table 5. Participants' speaker models.

	<i>n</i>	%
Japanese teachers of English	20	63
Classmates	6	19
Senior students	5	16
A Japanese teacher of other subject	1	3
Total	32	101

3.2.2. Characteristics of speaker models

After describing those whom they considered their speaker models, the participants described characteristics of each speaker model in detail. In their descriptions, two types of characteristics emerged: (a) linguistic characteristics; and (b) behavioral characteristics.

3.2.2.1. Linguistic characteristics

The participants mentioned linguistic characteristics of the speaker models such as fluency, intelligibility, speaking speed, complexity of English, pronunciation, coolness,

sounding confident, and tone of voice. Linguistic characteristics such as fluent English, fast English, “cool English”, confident-sounding English, English with lower tone of voice were mentioned when describing linguistic characteristics of NS-sounding speaker models, and linguistic characteristics such as intelligible English, slow and clear English, and simple English were mentioned when describing linguistic characteristics of NNS-sounding speaker models. (Table 6)

Table 6. Linguistic characteristics of speaker models.

	<i>n</i>	%
NS-sounding English	13	41
NNS-sounding English	13	41
Not specified	6	19
Total	32	101

Furthermore, fluency that was described with Japanese adjectives such as “*pera-pera* [fluent],” “*sura-sura* [fluent],” and “*ryuchou-na* [fluent]” was frequently mentioned as a linguistic characteristic of NS-sounding speaker models. Many participants explained that speech with connected sounds of English words sounded fluent, and that this kind of speech also sounded like NS English, as exemplified in the following comment:

It could seem funny to you if I said that the teacher is really like an NS because he is fluent, and he often speaks English with connecting sounds of words without taking any pause for every word, and speaks English really fluently. [...] Like he connected words and words, like speaking English so fluently. It was like an NS who was speaking. (researcher’s translation)

The same participant also expressed his opinion that speech in English with a lower tone of voice sounded like NS English.

Comments such as “American English and British English sound fluent, and sound like NS English to everyone, so I think these are cool” (researcher’s translation), indicated that NS-sounding English was perceived as fashionable by the participants. There was also a comment that those who can speak like NSs sounded confident in speech.

As for the linguistic characteristics of the NNS-sounding speaker models, intelligibility was frequently mentioned. Although there were comments that speech with connected sounds sounded like NS English as stated above, it was also noted that this way of speaking made it difficult for the participants to comprehend the speech. On the other hand, speech in which every word was pronounced clearly without connecting the sounds of words was felt to be Japanese-sounding English, and this was perceived as a positive linguistic characteristic of Japanese-sounding speaker

models. For instance, one participant used the word “beautiful” to describe the English of her two speaker models: A senior student at her university with NS-sounding English; and her university teacher of English with Japanese-sounding English. When asked to explain what she meant by “beautiful”, she said:

This beauty [of my senior’s English] means speaking English fluently. It isn’t like speaking every word one by one carefully because he speaks English fluently. I think his way of speaking English is like an American’s. [...] This beauty [of my teacher’s English] means speaking English that we can easily comprehend. I think it’s an accent that Japanese can easily listen to. It doesn’t sound like an American’s, and it really isn’t English for Japanese, but it is rather close to English for Japanese. (researcher’s translation)

This comment shows that while NS-sounding English was considered to be a positive linguistic characteristic in terms of fluency, Japanese-sounding English was also considered a positive characteristic in terms of intelligibility.

In sum, various linguistic characteristics were mentioned to describe the participants’ speaker models, but what students’ comments indicated was that not only NS-sounding English but also NNS-sounding English were acceptable for speaker models.

3.2.2.2. Behavioral characteristics

Besides linguistic characteristics, the participants frequently mentioned behavioral characteristics of the speaker models such as using English in front of the participants and telling the participants about events using English.

As an example of speaker models’ use of English in front of the participants, one participant talked about an event that motivated her to feel that she wanted to be able to speak English like a senior student at her university. At the university, there was a center called Kiso Kyoiku Center (Basic Learning Center) where junior and senior students who were good at English worked as teaching assistants (TAs). At the center, events in which the participant saw the TAs speaking in English to each other motivated her to feel that she wanted to be able to speak English like them:

At the Kiso Kyoiku Center, TAs talk with each other not in Japanese but in English when they joke or when they have something they don’t want other students to hear. When I saw something like this, with my own eyes when I saw that the TAs had studied abroad and had come back to Japan with communicative skills in English, I felt that indeed they are quite good and that I want to be able to speak like that. (researcher’s translation)

In the case of speaker models who were Japanese teachers of English, the participants mentioned behavioral characteristics such as explaining the contents of previous classes in English at the beginning of the day’s class, talking in English about something that was not in the textbook, conversing with assistant language teachers (ALTs) in English, rephrasing words that the participants could not understand into simple sentences in English.

Because Japanese teachers of English seemed to be important figures in the discussions of speaker models, the participants were asked to remember other Japanese teachers whom the participants had been taught by and had not named as speaker models, and to think whether or not the participant could see the other Japanese teachers as speaker models. The participants' responses were that they could not consider the other teachers to be their speaker models, and the general reason was that they had not seen the teachers using English. Talking about her Japanese teacher as one of her speaker models, one participant described one event that changed her perception toward the Japanese teacher as a speaker of English, which suggests that the actual use of English is a reason for an NNS teacher to be considered a speaker model.

When I saw him [her Japanese teacher] talking to a receptionist at the airport and to other teachers when I studied abroad, I thought that he could speak English well. [...] Before I studied abroad, I thought that he was not good at speaking English. I was taught [English] by him in Japanese, and he seldom spoke English in the classroom. And even if he gave us [students] quizzes and said the answers to the quizzes in English, I thought that he was not that good at speaking English. But after I saw and listened to that [the Japanese teacher speaking English] when I studied abroad, I thought that he could speak good English. (researcher's translation)

Also, some participants said that their teacher's retelling events in which the teacher had used English motivated the participants to consider the teacher their speaker model. For instance, one participant said that her Japanese teacher often told her about the teacher's own experience in using English, and this motivated her to consider the teacher her speaker model:

She often went to many places abroad and stayed there. It seemed like she had studied English since a long time ago, and [...] She often told me that sometimes she brought friends who she had met abroad to Japan and that she hung out with them. (researcher's translation)

In sum, the participants mainly considered Japanese teachers of English as their speaker models, but it was found that there were many other Japanese teachers who were not considered to be speaker models. The difference between the teachers who were considered speaker models and those who were not lay in whether or not students observed a teacher using English for communicative purposes or telling the participants about events in which the teacher had used English. The participants did not consider being a teacher of English as a proof of being a speaker of English.

4. Discussion and conclusion

The present study investigated the characteristics that were needed for someone to be considered a speaker model by Japanese university students. Interview results showed that although the participants were learning EFL and their goals for speaking English were mainly to acquire NS-like English, they saw Japanese people as their

speaker models. It was not necessary for the speaker models to have NS-like English, but it was necessary for them to give evidence of themselves as speakers of English to be considered speaker models.

What are the implications of this finding? The first implication is that people tend to hold idealistic goals at the linguistic level. In the present study, a majority of the participants wished to acquire NS competence. There was a comment indicating that although one participant was aware that it was unrealistic for her to set NS-level English as her goal, she still had a strong desire to acquire NS competence. The desire to acquire NS competence was related to their assumptions that NS English was ideal. This result is consistent with previous studies that indicated that students showed a strong preference for acquiring NS-like English over NNS-like English (He & Zhang, 2010; Jordan, 2010; Timmis, 2002). The ideal of NS English has also been reported in other studies such as Matsuda (2003) and Chiba, et al. (1995).

The second implication is that linguistic characteristics are not the only factor for someone to be considered a speaker model. Although all the participants had a strong preference for NS English in the present study, a surprising finding was that they all named Japanese teachers of English or other Japanese students as someone whom they wanted to be able to speak English like. As reasons for considering the Japanese to be their speaker models, the participants talked about the linguistic characteristics and behaviors of Japanese, and from their comments, it emerged that it was not necessary for the speaker models to be able to speak NS-like English, though it was necessary for the speaker models to give evidence of themselves as speakers of English to the participants.

On the basis of these implications, it becomes clear that future research on speaker models needs to broaden its scope and not only be concerned with linguistic characteristics. This is an important change in direction from previous studies in which the linguistic characteristics of speaker models have been the central concern (see Jenkins, 2007; Kirkpatrick, 2007) and have sometimes been treated as if they were the only characteristics for being a speaker model (see He & Zhang, 2010; Jordan, 2010; Sifakis & Sougari, 2005; Timmis, 2002). Because people hold ideal goals, it is not surprising that NSs have been considered appropriate speaker models in those research studies. However, investigations with a broader scope may show that NNS teachers are considered speaker models as shown in the present study.

In dealing with the issue of speaker models, some previous studies have attempted to add alternative/additive NNS-based language norms for learning English, in the hope that someday NNSs will be able to play important roles as speaker models. However, these attempts have shown that acceptance of the proposed NNS-based language norms is a challenge, due to people's strongly held attachment to NS English (Jenkins, 2007) and to the belief that NS English was the appropriate language norm for the present and future (Suzuki, 2011; Young & Walsh, 2010). Jenkins (2007) notes that people's attitudes toward NS English has not changed for a century. Although the majority of the participants in the present study also saw the

acquisition of NS English as their linguistic goal for learning English, NNS teachers were considered speaker models on non-linguistic grounds. These suggest that, at the attitude level, it is reasonable for ELT to recognize NNS teachers as speaker models and to take account of their non-linguistic characteristics for being speaker models.

As possible characteristics of speaker models, further studies can pay attention to the following two factors: (a) teachers' L2 learning experience; and (b) their instructional language choice. First, previous studies of attitudes about characteristics of NS and NNS teachers as English teaching professionals have reported that NNS teachers had important roles as role models because they had gone through the same L2 learning experience as students (Braine, 1999; Brutt-Griffler & Samimy, 1999; Kamhi-Stein et al., 2004; Nemtchinova, 2005). This L2 learning experience could be seen as one kind of qualification for being a speaker model. In previous studies, it was not clear as to whether the role model meant someone whom students considered a model of a speaker of English when learning English, or someone whom students saw as a model for learning English in general. However, in the present study, it was found that Japanese people were considered to be speaker models, and one participant described how seeing her speaker model's successful path as a learner/speaker of English made her imagine her own realistic future path as a learner/speaker of English. This suggests that relating L2 learning experiences may be one factor in a teacher's being perceived as a speaker model.

Second, based on the finding that Japanese teachers of English who had not used English in the classroom were not perceived as the participants' speaker models, it is crucial to pay attention to amount of NNS English teachers' use of English in the classroom as another factor in a teacher's being perceived as a speaker model. NNS teachers' infrequent use of English in the classroom was reported to be one of their weak points as teachers of English (Benke & Medgyes, 2005; Reves & Medgyes, 1994), but on the other hand their use of L1 was reported to be one of their advantages (Cheung & Braine, 2007; Kamhi-Stein et al., 2004; Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2005; Ma, 2012; Reves & Medgyes, 1994; Samimy & Brutt-Griffler, 1999; Seidlhofer, 1999; Tang, 1997), indicating that an ability to use both L1 and L2 is an important characteristic for teachers of English. However, the connection between NNS teachers' use of L2 in the classroom and their being perceived as speaker models has not been discussed nor investigated in previous studies.

The present study dealt only with Japanese learners of English. It would be useful to conduct a similar study with learners from other L1 backgrounds. This might show whether the results here reflected some cultural tendency. It would also be useful to conduct a similar attitude study with NNS teachers. Investigating from different perspectives would lead us to a better understanding of issues regarding speaker models.

As an exploratory study, this study has raised issues for future discussions about speaker models. It is expected that future research will lead us to a better understanding of issues regarding speaker models, and eventually to a better learning

and teaching environment in which NNS teachers will be able to play the role of speaker model.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my appreciation to Dr. Phillip Morrow, Dr. Chi Cheung Ruby Yang (associate editor), and anonymous reviewers for their insightful comments and suggestions.

References

- Amin, N. (1997). Race and the identity of the nonnative ESL teacher. *TESOL Quarterly*, 31(3), 580-583. <http://doi.org/b6xqcx>
- Benke, E., & Medgyes, P. (2005). Differences in teaching behaviour between native and non-native speaker teachers: As seen by the learners. In E. Llurda (Ed.), *Non-native language teachers: Perceptions, challenges and contributions to the profession* (pp. 195-215). New York, NY: Springer.
- Braine, G. (1999). From the periphery to the center: One teacher's journey. In G. Braine (Ed.), *Non-native educators in English language teaching* (pp. 15-27). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Brutt-Griffler, J., & Samimy, K. K. (1999). Revising the colonial in the postcolonial: Critical praxis for nonnative-English-speaking teachers in a TESOL program. *TESOL Quarterly*, 33(3), 413-431. <http://doi.org/dzbxmxz>
- Butler, Y. G. (2007). How are nonnative-English-speaking teachers perceived by young learners? *TESOL Quarterly*, 41(4), 731-755.
- Canagarajah, A. S. (1999). Interrogating the "native speaker fallacy": Non-linguistic roots, non-pedagogical results. In G. Braine (Ed.), *Non-native educators in English language teaching* (pp. 77-92). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Cheung, Y. L., & Braine, G. (2007). The attitudes of university students towards non-native speakers English teachers in Hong Kong. *RELC Journal*, 38(3), 257-277. <http://doi.org/b5cbt6>
- Chiba, R., Matsuura, H., & Yamamoto, A. (1995). Japanese attitudes toward English accents. *World Englishes*, 14(1), 77-86. <http://doi.org/dvm77d>
- Cook, V. (1999). Going beyond the native speaker in language teaching. *TESOL Quarterly*, 33(2), 185-209. <http://doi.org/brp2vw>
- Cook, V. (2005). Basing teaching on the L2 user. In E. Llurda (Ed.), *Non-native language teachers: Perceptions, challenges and contributions to the profession* (pp. 47-61). New York, NY: Springer.
- Crystal, D. (2003). *English as a global language* (2nd ed). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Dörnyei, Z. (2007). *Research methods in applied linguistics: Quantitative, qualitative and mixed methodologies*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Golombek, P., & Jordan, S. R. (2005). Becoming "black lambs" not "parrots": A poststructuralist orientation to intelligibility and identity. *TESOL Quarterly*, 39(3), 513-533. <http://doi.org/csvfpc>
- Graddol, D. (1999). The decline of the native speaker. *AILA Review* 13, 57-68.
- He, D., & Zhang, Q. (2010). Native speaker norms and China English: From the perspectives of learners and teachers in China. *TESOL Quarterly*, 44(4), 769-789. <http://doi.org/fqsx9j>

- Jenkins, J. (2007). *English as a lingua franca: Attitude and identity*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Jordan, E. (2010). A Hollywood English pronunciation for Japanese Students? An exploration of Japanese university students' attitudes towards Japanese English pronunciation. *The Journal of Asia TEFL*, 7(1), 363-387.
- Kamhi-Stein, L. D., Aagard, A., Ching, A., Paik, M. A., & Sasser, L. (2004). Teaching in kindergarten through grade 12 programs: Perceptions of native and nonnative English-speaking practitioners. In L. D. Kamhi-Stein (Ed.), *Learning and teaching from experience: Perspectives on nonnative English-speaking professionals* (pp. 81-99). Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press.
- Kirkpatrick, A. (2007). *World Englishes: Implications for international communication and English language teaching*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Lasagabaster, D., & Sierra, J. M. (2005). What do students think about the pros and cons of having a native speaker teacher? In E. Llorca (Ed.), *Non-native language teachers: Perceptions, challenges and contributions to the profession* (pp. 217-241). New York, NY: Springer.
- Ma, L. P. F. (2012). Advantages and disadvantages of native- and nonnative-English-speaking teachers: Student perceptions in Hong Kong. *TESOL Quarterly*, 46(2), 280-305. <http://doi.org/vsk>
- Mahboob, A. (2004). Native or nonnative: What do students enrolled in an intensive English program think? In L. D. Kamhi-Stein (Ed.), *Learning and teaching from experience: Perspectives on nonnative English-speaking professionals* (pp. 121-147). Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press.
- Matsuda, A. (2003). The ownership of English in Japanese secondary schools. *World Englishes*, 22(4), 483-496. <http://doi.org/ffjf5v>
- Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology. (2008a). *Chugakkou gakushuu shidou youryou kaisetsu: Gaikokugo hen* [Junior high school curriculum guidelines: Foreign languages]. Tokyo, Japan: Kairyudo Publishing.
- Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (2008b). *Koutougakkou gakushuu shidou youryou kaisetsu: Gaikokugo hen eigo hen* [High school curriculum guidelines: Foreign languages and English]. Tokyo, Japan: Kairyudo Publishing.
- Nemtchinova, E. (2005). Host teachers' evaluations of nonnative-English-speaking teacher trainees: A perspective from the classroom. *TESOL Quarterly*, 39(2), 235-261. <http://doi.org/cnnd77>
- Norton, B., & Tang, C. (1997). The identity of the nonnative ESL teacher: On the power and status of nonnative ESL teachers. *TESOL Quarterly*, 31(3), 577-580. <http://doi.org/brmxtx>
- Oga-Baldwin, W. L. Q., & Nakata, Y. (2013). Native vs. non-native teachers: Who is the real model for Japanese elementary school pupils? *The Journal of Asia TEFL*, 10(2), 91-113.
- Phillipson, R. (1992). *Linguistic imperialism*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Reves, T., & Medgyes, P. (1994). The non-native English speaking EFL/ESL teacher's self-image: An international survey. *System*, 22(3), 353-367. <http://doi.org/fmqjxj>
- Samimy, K. K., & Brutt-Griffler, J. (1999). To be a native or non-native speaker: Perceptions of "non-native" students in a graduate TESOL program. In G. Braine (Ed.), *Non-native educators in English language teaching* (pp. 127-144). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Seargeant, P. (2009). *The idea of English in Japan: Ideology and the evolution of a global language*. Bristol, UK: Multilingual Matters.

- Seidlhofer, B. (1999). Double standards: Teacher education in the expanding circle. *World Englishes*, 18(2), 233-245. <http://doi.org/b2nvm5>
- Sifakis, N. C., & Sougari, A.-M. (2005). Pronunciation issues and EIL pedagogy in the periphery: A survey of Greek state school teachers' beliefs. *TESOL Quarterly*, 39(3), 467-488. <http://doi.org/cpwpsw>
- Suzuki, A. (2011). Introducing diversity of English into ELT: Student teachers' responses. *ELT Journal*, 65(2), 145-153. <http://doi.org/d9rhq7>
- Timmis, I. (2002). Native-speaker norms and international English: A classroom view. *ELT Journal*, 56(3), 240-249. <http://doi.org/crnwqc>
- Young, T. J., & Walsh, S. (2010). Which English? Whose English? An investigation of “non-native” teachers' beliefs about target varieties. *Language, Culture and Curriculum*, 23(2), 123-137. <http://doi.org/cd4fjn>

Copyrights

Copyright for this article is retained by the author(s), with first publication rights granted to the Journal.

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (CC BY-NC-ND) (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>).