

Inroads to Student Motivation in the Language Classroom: J-Pop

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ABSTRACT

As English is taught as a foreign language in Japan, the issue of whose English should be taught, how it should be taught and by whom are just a few of the questions that educators must decide when implementing a foreign language program. The answers to those questions then often have a direct influence on the learner and how their identity is shaped through learning English. Additionally, integrating pop culture materials that students are familiar with into the EFL classroom is useful as a means of addressing the concept of “cool” and globalization. This paper will review and draw on the ideas of globalization, identity, code switching and performativity-the way in which we perform acts of identity through cultural and social interactions or performance (Pennycook, 2003, p. 528), previously used to research about hip-hop culture in Japanese language and culture while broadening the focus to include Japanese pop (J-pop) and rock music. It will also examine the recent increase of English used in popular Japanese music and attempt to draw conclusions about the reasons why that is, the effects that it has on Japanese culture, especially in determining what is cool, and how it can be utilized in the EFL classroom.

INTRODUCTION

For better or worse, popular culture across the world has changed concurrently with the spread of English and globalization. The issues of whose English should be taught, how it should be taught and by whom are just a few components connected to the complexity of shaping one’s identity through the usage of English in modern day Japanese culture. In the late 20th century, English usage was separated by Kachru (1986) into three circles: the inner circle, areas that use English as their first language and national language (England, America, and Australia), the outer circle which is comprised of those countries that speak English as a second language or as the dominant language in government and business situations (India

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and the Philippines), and finally the expanding circle, made up of countries that do not use English as a main language (Japan and Korea) (as cited in Hornberger & McKay, 2010). While this model is informative, it is an outdated model of English usage for the 21st century which does not account for what Pennycook (2003) calls “Global Englishes” nor acknowledge the role that English plays in the creation of culture and identity in the outer and expanding circles. Today, the idea of “global flow” is not in the concentric nature of the three circles but rather in the fluid nature of the boundaries “separating” each circle (Pennycook, 2003). Additionally, Pennycook (2010b) suggests that one way to address globalization is to engage with “pop-culture” in language classrooms. The spread of English in culture, more specifically pop culture, has created an aura of cool as it has crossed borders and immersed itself in various cultures around the world. Maher (2005) explains that, “cool is not the same as fashion and popularity. Cool includes a perceived ability to see the flip-side or alternative side of things...Cool is quirky, innovative and tolerant. Cool is an attitude of hope” (p. 83). With this idea of cool in mind, this paper will focus specifically on the role English plays in the creation and performance of music in Japan. Recently, a variety of research has focused on English usage in Japanese hip-hop and hip-hop culture (Hiwatari, 2004; Pennycook, 2004, 2010), however this paper will focus on the broader aspect of Japanese popular music and culture.

The use of English in Japanese music is not a new phenomenon and has been present in Japan long before the occupation at the conclusion of World War II. However, in the past twenty years, the number of artists that use English in their music is steadily increasing. Sometimes it is just one word that is borrowed from English to create impact. Conversely, it could be *wasei-eigo*, a word that has become so common that it is used as Japanese. In some cases, it is the whole song that is written and sung in English, but more often than not, it is an elaborate usage of code mixing between English and Japanese phrases, ideas and feelings designed to solidify a certain identity that expands beyond the borders of Japanese pop music. This can be seen through the usage of English loan words, the choice of written script within the lyrics, and the usage of anglicisms interspersed throughout a single song. This idea of using English in Japanese music shows the pliability of identity and as Pennycook (2003) says, “the way in which we perform acts of identity as an ongoing series of social and cultural performances rather than the expression of a prior identity,” (p. 528). This creation of a new identity shows that the usage and interaction with Global English in Japanese music works as a catalyst for shaping one’s identity.

This paper will review and draw on the ideas of globalization, identity, code switching and performativity, previously used to research about hip-hop culture in Japanese language and culture and then broaden its focus to include J-pop and make connections to how it can be used in the EFL classroom. The increase of English used in Japanese pop music and how it is used will be analyzed and conclusions will be drawn as to why it is used and the effects that it has on Japanese culture and the concept of what is cool. The first section of the paper will examine the ideas of globalization, identity, and code switching and then give an overview of English in Japanese music and performativity. It will then analyze and discuss how those ideas are present in Japanese music today, in both Japanese hip-hop and pop music. The paper will then conclude with a discussion about the effects this has had on the utilization of English in Japanese music and the effects it could have on the usage of English in EFL classroom culture.

Using Language to Build an Identity through Music in Today’s Global World

The idea of globalization encompasses a wide variety of definitions and is frequently considered to be a loaded term. The idea of globalization can be broken down into many

subcategories including globalization “as internationalization,” “as liberalization,” “as universalization,” “as Westernization,” and “as deterritorialization.” McKay & Bokhorst-Heng, 2008). While these subcategories are not new ideas, too often the term implies a one-way transfer of western culture, beliefs and ideas to other countries rather than a two-way or multifaceted exchange of cultures, beliefs and ideas. However, through music, the idea of globalization has become more fluid than the one-way flow of exchange it was once believed to be. It is now seen as a more pliable concept that does not create the disparity that once existed. This leveling of the playing field can be attributed to the advancement of technology and the increased spread of culture. According to McKay and Bokhorst-Heng (2008), “the global and the local are constantly interacting with one another...neither one should be afforded a dominant position,” (p.2). This supports Pennycook’s perspective on globalization as neither homogenous nor heterogeneous but rather, “a fluid mix of cultural heritage...and popular culture..., of change and tradition, of border crossing and ethnic affiliation, of global appropriation and local contextualization” (Pennycook, 2003, p.10). He further explains:

There is a constant neutrality of English, a position that avoids all the crucial concerns around both the global and local politics of language. Furthermore, by focusing on the standardization of local versions of English, the World Englishes paradigm shifts the locus of control but not its nature, and by so doing, ignores power and struggle in language. (Pennycook, 2003, p.8)

The spread of music across the globe works as a perfect example to show why globalization can neither be just homogeneous or heterogeneous rather it is a more abstract concept of fluidity, with malleable and pliable edges. An example of this concept can be seen in the spread of hip-hop music in Africa. N'Dongo D from Senegalese group Daara J explains, “in Africa you will find Portuguese, Spanish, French, English all mixed together in the culture in the same continent’ (Pennycook, 2010, p.70). Higgins' (2009) analysis of Tanzanian hip-hop culture supports Pennycook’s belief of globalization as a means of border crossing as well. Higgins (2009) states culture doesn’t flow from the center outward but rather it is a “two-way cultural flow” (p. 96). This cultural flow moves in such a way that peoples’ identities are being shaped from a variety of new and complex ways.

Popular music ‘remains an important cultural sphere in which identities are affirmed, challenged, taken apart and reconstructed’ (Connell & Gibson, 2003, p. 117). Hornberger and McKay (2010) say that, “the ways in which languages are being mixed and changed present new possibilities for identities that have little to do with national identifications” (p. 65). This idea of shaping one’s identity through popular music then has a profound impact not only of the performer but the listener. Omoniyi (2006) explains that identities are changing due to the “inevitable mixes, integration and assimilation,” (p. 195) that occurs through the spread of music. In Japan, Maher (2005) says that recently, metroethnicity has become the new cool. In his study, he interviewed various young people of Ainu descent as well as people of Korean descent living in Japan regarding their perceptions of self and heritage. The consensus was that growing up many of the participants were ashamed or at the very least embarrassed by their cultural heritage, however, a shift has been seen recently and it is now considered “cool” to be multiethnic. According to Maher (2005), “metroethnicity is a reconstruction of ethnicity: a hybridized ‘street’ ethnicity deployed by a cross-section of people with ethnic or mainstream backgrounds who are orientated towards cultural-hybridity, cultural/ethnic tolerance and a multicultural lifestyle in friendships, music, the arts, eating, and dress” (p. 83). However, this concept of cool does not only belong only to multiethnic people. According to Maher (2005), this idea of cool belongs to anyone who chooses to embrace their personal beliefs and be self-sufficient.

The shaping of identity through music is not unique to Japan alone, another example can be seen in the language choice of song lyrics. Auzanneau (2002, as cited in Hornberger &

McKay, 2010) explains that Gabonese artists in Libreville, “‘are inserted into large networks of communication that confer on them a plurality of identities’, using a wide ‘diversity of languages with their variants, along with their functioning as markers of identity (of being Gabonese, African, or an urbanite)’” (p.70). Nigerian hip hop culture also provides an example of globalized yet localized identity creation. Omoniyi’s (2006) analysis of the culture and identity expression on display in Nigerian hip hop noted the use of global hip hop utterances such as “yeah” and “yo,” within a blend of local languages. Additionally, there was an exclusion of gangsterism and misogyny, as well as limited mention of sex in the Nigerian lyrics. Furthermore, some examples of words from Haitian and Jamaican Creole that have become well known and incorporated into hip hop globally are *ganja* for marijuana, *rude bwoy* for aggressive youth, and *popo* for police (Pennycook, 2010). These words have become accepted language in everyday hip hop lyrics and their meaning is understood by people not only in the countries of origin, but also around the world, due to the popularity of hip hop culture and identity.

Using language as a means to build identity has been the focus of many articles in the 21st century (Hiwatari, 2004; Moody, 2006; Omoniyi, 2006; Pennycook, 2003). In the aforementioned articles one common theme is the importance of word choice in music, specifically the usage of English in song lyrics. Some examples of English usage include borrowing a specific word or phrase from English rather than the local language equivalent for a variety of reasons. Another example is that some artists choose to perform songs entirely in English despite it not being the main language of the area. However, the most common usage is the borrowing of just a word or two from English to create a certain impact or feel, other times it can be that the whole song is written and sung in English, but more often than not, it is an elaborate usage of code mixing of English and Japanese to create elaborate sounds and patterns that may be only clear to the artists themselves. Codeswitching, Omoniyi (2009) argues, “needs to include not just language but modes of dressing, walking and other patterns of social behavior” which this article attributes to the creation of identity (Pennycook, 2010, p.71). Omoniyi (2009, as cited in Pennycook, 2010), further explains that in Weird MC's *Ijoya* [Yoruba: Time to dance), we find various examples of English mixed with Yoruba, Igbo, and Pidgin languages.

We find in one stanza English juxtaposed with Yoruba: We own the dance/*Awa la ni ijo* [Yoruba: we own the dance] Ah trust us, we OWN dis dance/*Awa la ni ijo* [Yoruba: we own the dance]; and Pidgin with both Yoruba and Igbo: *Na we getam* [Pidgin: We own it]/*Awa la nigini* [Yoruba/Igbo: We own what?]/*Awa la ni ijo ijo* [Yoruba: we own the dance] (Omoniyi, 2009, as cited in Pennycook, 2010, p.71)

This example provides an excellent look at how codeswitching is used in a song as well as the influence language can have on culture. Weird MC is known worldwide for her creative mix of language, even though her music career began in Nigeria.

Globalization and the influx of technology has helped to spread music across the world, and this unique mix of language, culture and identity have had a profound impact on music and other cultures across the globe. Through globalization music has found a way to spread across the globe and immerse itself into new cultures and has commandeered English to help create a whole new subculture.

English and its Effect on the Japanese Music Scene

Globalization has and continues to be a catalyst for English seeping into Japanese language and culture. The acquisition of English into Japanese culture has a long past. The first contact Japan had with English is believed to date back to the 1600s when a British sailor named William Adams arrived on the shores of Oita (Stanlaw, 2004). From that time

Japan has appeared to have a love-hate relationship with English that continues even today. Despite the rocky past that Japan has shared with English, it is gaining a stronger hold on popular culture than ever before. This can be seen in advertising and street slang as well as popular music across a variety of Japanese genres. Stanlaw (2004) goes as far as to say that, “English in Japan is like air: it is everywhere. It is not clear if English is a ‘problem,’ a ‘puzzle,’ a ‘barrier to communication,’ something ‘fashionable,’ or some kind of pollution” (p.1) but despite whatever label it is given, English is here to stay.

Stanlaw (2004) claims, “English is a creative-and necessary force in Japanese sociolinguistics and artistic dynamics” (p.2). He also says that Japan has created its own version of Japanese English that is used for Japanese purposes and that it is used to express the “experiences and desires of...young people,” (Stanlaw, 2004, p.101). Stanlaw (2004) explains that there are eight different ways in which English is used as a device in Japanese pop songs. He says the devices are the following:

- (i) The use of English as an ‘audacious’ device; (ii) as a ‘symbolic’ device; (iii) as a ‘poetic’ device; (iv) as an ‘exotic’ device; (v) as a means of creating ‘new structural forms’; (vi) as a means of ‘relexifying’ and ‘re-exoticizing’ the Japanese language; (vii) the use of English to express aspects of modern Japanese consumer culture; and (viii) use of English words to express images of domestic life in Japan (p. 104).

This shows just how versatile English has become in the realm of Japanese music. It also shows that conscious choices are being made about language use in songs and that English is not just randomly put into a song just to be there.

One example of English being audacious can be seen in the duo Wink’s song 『涙を見せないで』 or *namida wo misenai de*. The song uses a repeated chorus of “Boys don’t cry” and “sick-sick-sick” in their song about being dumped. In an interview conducted by Stanlaw (2004), his interviewee said that she believes the lyric to be in English because the duo is trying to express a more Western ideal of females initiating a break up and being strong after the fact, versus the traditional sad, helpless image of women that many *enka* songs portray.

Another example of English being mixed into a song can be seen in Japanese hip-hop group Rip Slyme’s song Tokyo Classic (McKay, 2010; Hiwatari, 2004). One section of the lyrics is written as

“錦糸町出 Freaky ダブル Japanese”
[*kinshichode Freaky daburu Japanese*].

The literal translation of the lyrics is a “freaky double Japanese born in *Kinshicho*”.² Not only the choice of language but also the integration of the three different writing styles should also be noted. The writer made not only a conscious decision to write each word the way he did, but also to convey specific meanings. First, 錦糸町出 [born in *Kinshicho*] is written in *kanji* characters while the word ダブル [double] was written in *katakana* characters which implies a Japanese pronunciation of double as three *moras*, or Japanese phonemes, *do/bu/ru* rather than the English two syllable pronunciation. It should also be noted that there is continued discussion on the more recent use of *double* used to explain mixed ethnicity versus the more tradition use of *half* or ハーフ in Japanese (Kosaka, 2009; Oshima, 2014; Udagawa, 2017). The term *double* is said to carry a more positive connotation and is a more inclusive word than *half* which is often seen negatively as lacking or missing something.

² Kinshicho is a neighborhood in Tokyo.

In a recent study about mixed ethnicity girls born and raised in Japan, Kamada (2011), found that while being challenged in recent years there still exists an idea of “Japaneseness, regarding nationality, race, ethnicity and looking Japanese. Someone who does not look Japanese, must then be a foreigner, an outsider” (p.9). She further explained that the girls in her study at times both embraced and rejected their mixed heritage depending on the situations and the people involved. Kamada’s research also showed that “a majority Japanese children and adults are continuing to position mixed-ethnic people as marked and foreign, in spite of their conflicting awareness of the value of newer, globalizing discourses of diversity” (2004, p.13). Considering Kamada’s research, one reason that Rip Slyme chose to use the word Japanese to describe the ethnicity of the person rather than the kanji for 日本人 [*nihonjin*] could be because the Englishization of the term is more inclusive than the traditional kanji characters.

SMAP (Sports Music Assemble People), a group that has been considered to be one of the most popular idol groups in Japan, lyrics were also examined for English language choice. SMAP’s lyrics often incorporate a mix of English and Japanese which according to Darling (2004), adds “an aural and cultural hybridity to their songs,” (p. 363). An example can be seen in SMAP’s song entitled “Touch Me Kiss Me” that uses English to express the idea of missing someone, a concept that does not have a Japanese equivalent.

“I miss you どんな時でも [*donna toki de mo*]
Baby touch me touch me
I’ll be there for you
I need you どんな場所でも [*donna basho de mo*]
Baby kiss me kiss me
I will wait for you”

The phrase “I miss you” could loosely be translated into Japanese as ‘I’m lonely,’ ‘I want to see you,’ or ‘I am sad without you here,’ but there is no expression that matches the English of ‘to miss someone.’ The use of “baby” as a term of endearment is also another word that has been borrowed from English and found a place for itself as part of Japanese English that is used today, especially among the younger generation (Baby, n.d.).

Concerning code ambiguation, Moody and Matsumoto (2003) found that artists use two different techniques when incorporating English into their songs. The first is lyrical code ambiguation wherein the listener is not clear whether the lyrics used are actually in English or Japanese. The second form, performance ambiguation, is defined as a situation in which the vocalist purposefully takes on an English-like quality to their pronunciation.

The Southern All Stars readily use code ambiguation in both English and Japanese as a means of expression.

“I, I, I, I, Tender”
-from “*Atto Iu Mano Yumeno Tunaito*” [In an Instant Dream Tonight]

“Skipped Beat, Skipped Beat”
-from “*Skippu Biito* [Skipped Beat]

The above examples, as cited in Moody and Matsumoto (2003), are two examples of English used to create a meaning in Japanese (p.14). The first example: “I, I, I, I, Tender” sounds like the Japanese expression *aittendaa* meaning I love you in Japanese. The second example “Skipped Beat, Skipped Beat” however carries a lewder meaning as it sounds like the Japanese word *sukebe* or pervert.

On the opposite end of the spectrum, Japanese can also be used in lyrics to represent English sounds and meanings. Moody and Matsumoto (2003, p. 14) cite the following examples:

“*Ima nimo yuugata* Hold on me”
-from “*Yuugata* Hold on Me” [You’ve got a hold on me]

“*Imamade aimaina* Be your love”
-from “*Yuugata* Hold on Me” [You’ve got a hold on me]

The first example above, “*Ima nimo yuugata Hold on me*” has a literal translation of “Even now at night, hold on me” however the implied meaning is meant to have the Japanese *yuugata* used to mean the English for “you got a” or “you’ve got a.” The second example is taken from the same song, however the phrase *aimaina* meaning ambiguous in Japanese is actually used to express the English phrase “I might not.” This mixing of code is not used at random and without looking directly at the lyrics the meaning is ambiguous. However, it also “demonstrates both a playfulness with the language and a relatively sophisticated understanding of pronunciation and expression in both languages” (Moody & Matsumoto, 2003 p. 13).

Performance ambiguation can be seen in the Englishization of Japanese within the performances of the unit Love Psychedelico. Moody and Matsumoto (2003) analyzed 18 of their songs for the following five features:

- 1) aspiration of stops and affricates
- 2) /u/ deletion
- 3) /ə/ substitution for /u/
- 4) approximant substitution for Japanese /r/, and
- 5) deletion of /i/ in clusters of /ai/, /ei/, and /oi/

All five of the above Englishizations were found to be used within the 18 songs analysed (Appendix). Performance ambiguation provides an example of performativity or as Pennycook (2003) explains, “the way in which we perform acts of identity as an ongoing series of social and cultural performances rather than the expression of a prior identity,” (p. 528). Love Psychedelico (Appendix) uses pronunciation as a means expression in their performances.

Student Motivation in the Language Classroom: J-Pop

Through my experience as a language instructor, one of the main reasons many of my EFL students claim they want to study English is because they would like to acquire the skills needed to watch movies without subtitles and to understand the lyrics to their favorite artist’s songs. This fascination with pop culture is not a new trend, nor is it unique to Japan. However, educators can use this student interest as an opportunity to integrate music into the language classroom and build student motivation for language study.

Medina (2002) states that it is important for educators to be conscious that the meaning of each activity is clear and that sound pedagogical practices are being implemented when using music in the language classroom. Keeping that in mind, it is not difficult to find ways to incorporate music into various classroom practices. Music can be integrated into all four of the main skills areas with activities promoting: listening competency (scrambled lyrics, fill in the gap, changed lyrics), reading competency (analyzing lyrics for specific grammar and vocabulary, idioms practice), writing competency (add a verse, tell the story in your own words) as well as speaking competency (karaoke competition, stress practice). Murphy (1992) states that pop songs can “offer short, affective, simple, native texts with a lot of familiar vocabulary” (p. 773). He also adds that the music is “dialogic and engaging auditorily.” (p. 773).

However, as aforementioned, English does not belong to only native speakers and upon careful analysis, songs that are not sung by native English speakers could also prove to

be useful learning tools as well as motivational tools for English language learners, this would include music written and recorded in Japan by Japanese artists. Many of the song lyrics that vocalist Hosomi Takeshi wrote for his band Ellegarden were written largely in English. Below is an example of a section of the lyrics from the song “Red Hot”

Wake me up before you leave
I've got an interview today
I wanna job so don't forget to lend me
Some for train

While there are a few grammatical inconsistencies, they do not detract from the clarity and meaning of the lyrics. Another example of an all English song is written by the popular Japanese-American artist, Utada Hikaru. Her single entitled “Come Back To Me,” ranked third on the Japanese Billboard Top 100 chart, and sixty-ninth on the U.S. Billboard Pop 100 chart. The chorus from the song is as follows:

Baby come back to me (come back)
I'll be everything you need (come back)
Baby come back to me (come back)
Boy, you're one in a million (come back)
I'll be everything you need (come back)
Baby come back to me (come back)
You're one in a million (one in a million)

For junior and senior high school students who like these artists, incorporating their songs into the classroom could serve as a motivational catalyst for further English study. For learners with higher ability levels, a dialogue used to discern the minor grammatical infelicities could also be used as a classroom activity. Additionally, one way to minimize student anxiety over their English ability would be through incorporating songs written and sung by native Japanese speakers of English into the classroom, allowing the students to see firsthand that Japanese people are capable of mastering and using English outside of the classroom. This realization can in turn inspire and motivate learners to believe that they too can also become proficient in English.

CONCLUSION

This paper has attempted to show how the world has changed with the spread of English and concurrently through globalization, with an in depth focus specifically on English language usage in Japanese lyrics and culture. Through the spread of English, new identities and an aura of cool have been born not only in Japan but around the world. With the rise in popularity of World Englishes and globalization the acquisition of English has been on the rise in Japan as more and more Japanese artists are using English in their music. According to Oricon's top 50 songs in 2000, two-thirds of the songs incorporated Japanese lyrics, the current percentage of songs that use some form of English is above 75% (Moody, 2006). While it may be just one word that is borrowed from English to create impact, and at other times it may be that the whole song is written and sung in English; however, more often than not, it is a deliberate choice that artists make, mixing English and Japanese phrases, ideas and feelings designed to solidify a certain identity that expands beyond the borders of Japanese pop music.

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Appendix

Love Psychedelico Songs Used in Moody and Matsumoto's Study

Album: The Greatest Hits Tracks:

- 1) Lady Madonna ~*Yuuutsunaru Supaidaa*~ [*~Meloncholic Spider~*]
- 2) Your Song
- 3) Last Smile (extension mix)
- 4) Moonly
- 5) I Miss You
- 6) *Notsutarujikku '69* [Nostalgic '69]
- 7) These Days
- 8) Low (ver. 1.1)
- 9) A Day for You

Album: Love Psychedelico Orchestra Tracks:

- 1) Standing Bird
- 2) Free World
- 3) Dry Town
- 4) I Will Be with You
- 5) Days of Days over You
- 6) You Ate It
- 7) Waltz
- 8) Life Goes On
- 9) California