

# Autonomy and emancipation of linguistic norms in international English

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## Aŭtonomiĝo kaj liberigo de lingvaj normoj de la angla lingvo internacia

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Kiel oni scias, la angla lingvo havas historie escepte tre specialan rolon kaj funkcias kiel preskaŭ unusola komunikilo inter malsamlingvanoj en la mondo, kaj la fakto grandigas maljustecon en komunikado, foje eĉ subfosas la bazon de homrajto. La aŭtoro klarigas ĉi tie la mekanismon de la fenomeno de novaj vidpunktoj, kritikante disvastigatajn diskutojn pri "la internacia-angla". La baza problemo estiĝas kiam oni miksas "la interna-angla" kaj "la internacia-angla." La du malsamaj anglaj ne devas kunhavi samajn lingvaj normojn, kaj per severe distingi la du normarojn, la uzantoj de la internacia angla povas teni lingvan aŭtonomion. Sen la distingo anglalingvanoj ĉiam teni privilegian sociolokon kun monopolia povo pri lingva normo, maljusta komunikadosituacio daŭros ĉie esti trovebla. Fine la aŭtoro montras konkretajn solvmanierojn, nome povigado de neanglalingvanoj kaj malpovigado de anglalingvanoj por realigi komunikadon inter malsamlingvanoj kun plena justeco.

**Keywords:** international English, domestic English, microaggression, linguistic human rights, linguistic discrimination, assimilationism, social exclusion, appropriation of diversity

### 1. The locus of the issue

When considering the issues of inclusion and exclusion surrounding language, one cannot ignore the impact of English. With the hegemony of nation-states within the English-speaking world, accompanied by the expansion of quasi-English-speaking regions, English, which is just one of the Germanic languages, has become the predominant language for interlingual communication among non-native speakers. Its status as the predominant language in the world needs no statistical confirmation here. Consequently, proficiency in English has acquired socioeconomic significance beyond mere language ability, and this trend shows no sign of weakening. For instance, it is exceptionally rare in regions with well-established educational systems to pursue higher education without having learned or acquired English at some stage of primary or secondary education<sup>1)</sup>. Similarly, attaining a professional position without tertiary education and achieving a socioeconomically advantageous position without higher education is typically difficult (hence, exceptional success garners attention). Recent research has highlighted the disadvantages faced by non-native English speakers in the scientific community, where publishing research findings in English is virtually a requirement<sup>2)</sup>. Similar data could be obtained across various fields where English is the standard language, showcasing the disadvantages experienced by non-native speakers, regardless of the academic world.

As the proficiency in English, as a single language, increasingly impacts the distribution of individuals' socioeconomic resources on a global scale, the inclusion in and exclusion from English-mediated communication are now recognized as socio-economic issues. It has become difficult to remain indifferent to the reality that proficiency in English, or the lack thereof, significantly influences the distribution of various advantages and resources.

In light of such circumstances, the asymmetrical relationship between the supposed English native speakers, or first language speakers, and non-native speakers of English becomes a significant issue<sup>3)</sup>. In general, English native speakers, who are considered to have sufficient proficiency in English, are often regarded as superior to non-native speakers in terms of English language proficiency. However, language proficiency also depends on educational level and learning ability, therefore it is possible for non-native speakers to surpass native speakers in certain cases. The issue arises when comparing native and non-native speakers. Non-native speakers who acquire English after another first language acquisition are positioned as unable to provide or guarantee the basis of English language norms as native speakers do — this is often seen as the position where descriptive linguists recognize them as informants. In reality, it's believed that non-native speakers cannot occupy this position. Expressions such as "that's incorrect" "wrong" "I don't understand" "not beautiful" "we don't say that" from English native speakers are considered to provide the

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basis for English norms, whereas if non-native speakers make the same statements, they are often dismissed as simply reflecting linguistic incompetence or baseless judgment. This decisive asymmetry between native and non-native speakers is what creates problems within the aforementioned societal context. Despite the influence of English on the distribution of socioeconomic resources, if there is an asymmetrical relationship among English users, it will be directly replicated into socioeconomic asymmetry. When English is used as the medium of communication among speakers of different languages worldwide, native English speakers can enjoy a socially and economically advantageous position over non-native speakers, and this position is often monopolized. This relationship, which undermines socioeconomic opportunities and equality of outcomes, contradicts the fundamental values of modern society and is perceived as unjust and a violation of equal rights. Thus, English becomes a social issue. The aim of this paper is to consider what has not been examined or addressed in discussions surrounding English as a social problem and to present new perspectives necessary for understanding this issue.

## 2. From English assimilationism and imperialism to the third possibility, *Setuei*

The approach to understanding English as a social problem is not new, and since the latter half of the 20th century until the present, there has been considerable debate on how to perceive and address this issue. Much of this discussion can be categorized into two opposing currents. One current accepts the situation surrounding English as an irreversible given and seeks to adapt to it. This stance aims to emulate English native speakers as models, with the goal of approaching their level of proficiency. Arguments advocating for the officialization of English or the promotion of English usage in non-English-speaking regions fall within this current. Here, the emphasis is on thorough assimilation into the international community, where English dominates as the predominant language for interlingual communication, achieved through enhanced English education not limited to public education, the development of more effective teaching methods, and increased awareness of English learning, all with the aim of maximizing socioeconomic benefits or minimizing disadvantages resulting from English's overwhelming hegemony. Significant criticisms and proposals for fundamental improvements to current English education

persist because it is perceived as unsuccessful, yet this current continues to thrive, contributing to the growth of the English education industry. Those driving this current believe that correcting socioeconomic injustices can be achieved through a higher level of English proficiency among non-native speakers. However, attaining high-level English proficiency poses a significant challenge, requiring substantial learning even for those whose first language is linguistically close to English. Looking at Japanese society, where children's English classes and English programs in the private sector have proliferated for decades without yielding any positive results, it is evident that achieving fairness by rectifying injustices through this strategy is impractical for non-English speakers. Even if successful attainment of high-level English proficiency is possible, the issue of the unilateral burden of language learning costs cannot be ignored. The idea that more equitable interlingual communication among non-native speakers can be achieved through linguistic assimilation overlooks the phenomenon of exclusion perpetuated using such assimilationist approaches. It is totally failing<sup>4)</sup>. The lack of widespread recognition of this reality is perpetuated by the education industry, English teachers in public education, and their training institutions, in collaboration with education administration, which collectively reinforce and disseminate the discourse that "past English education has failed, so we need better and more English education"<sup>5)</sup>.

Another perspective is known as English imperialism, which views the dominant position of English as unjust and criticizes its unethical nature. Acquiring English proficiency equivalent to that of native speakers through learning is extremely challenging. Moreover, the feasibility of acquiring English proficiency is determined by factors such as the distance between one's native language and English, as well as the availability of economic and cultural resources for learning. As a result, equal communication in English between native and non-native speakers is not achievable, leading to socioeconomic inequalities between them. In this perspective, strengthening English education is criticized as perpetuating linguistic imperialism that results in inequality.

The theory of English imperialism compellingly exposes the unethical nature of English occupying a position of overwhelming linguistic dominance. However, in today's world, where it is almost impossible not to choose English as the lingua franca for intercultural communication among non-native speakers, this theory faces the challenge of

not providing concrete policies or practical methods for individuals to change this current situation. Consequently, there arises a resignation that, despite recognizing the unfairness of English's international use, acceptance is the only viable option. Ultimately, this resignation tends to lead back to the former perspective, advocating for the improvement and promotion of English education and linguistic assimilation into English<sup>6</sup>.

The third possibility, named "*Setuei*" in Japanese, presents an alternative approach to the pressing social issue of how non-English speakers should navigate their relationship with English, which holds the de facto position of an international lingua franca<sup>7</sup>. This perspective advocates for a moderate engagement with English. Within this framework, it is acknowledged that English will likely maintain its dominant status for the foreseeable future. Therefore, rather than completely abandoning English learning, individuals are encouraged to reap the benefits of language acquisition while also being mindful of the communication barriers and social injustices that may arise from the predominance of English as a medium of communication. The concept proposes strategies for engaging with English in a balanced manner, minimizing reliance on English when possible. It emphasizes the recognition of the drawbacks of dependency on English and advocates for the complementary use of English while promoting other linguistic or non-linguistic communication methods. While the *Setuei* provides groundbreakingly practical guidance for individuals in their language practices, it does not directly address the fundamental question of how interlingual communication mediated by English should ideally be conducted<sup>8</sup>.

When communication occurs among speakers of different languages, the choice of language is always inevitable. Given the overwhelming dominance of English today, the options are limited, and it is difficult not to use English. In such a scenario where the choice of not using English is not available, what actions are necessary in the immediate context, and what has not been done so far?

### 3. Repositioning International English

The situation surrounding English has been approached positively by acknowledging the diverse modes of existence of English worldwide and advocating for a departure from English assimilationist learning by detaching English from its native speakers and English-speaking communities.

In addition, there have been arguments proposing the repositioning of international English as a global common asset, distinct from "ethnic English," aiming to advocate for English as merely a tool. However, these discussions have not fully captured the issues of injustice and exclusion from communication that exist in the context of modern English.

For example, in the context of Japan, the following assertions are made: "We must consider the logic that 'Japanese-style English is acceptable,'" "The more non-native speakers use English with each other, the more it will be de-Americanized," and "Japanese also need to recognize their own English as part of non-native speaker English<sup>9</sup>". These claims are indeed quite valid and are also echoed in the concept of *Setuei*. However, as we will see below, these discussions have significant omissions.

English spoken by native speakers as a primary language within an English-speaking community is referred to here as "domestic English," while the English used for communication between speakers of different native languages is termed "international English." What kind of relationship exists between these two types of English?

International English does not precede domestic English. Domestic English-speaking communities already exist, and their language norms and practices are referenced, learned, and utilized as a medium of communication to become international English. The starting point for the language norms, pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, etc., of international English is the domestic English used by English native speakers, and it cannot originate from any other source. International English emerges as non-native English speakers learn and adopt domestic English, using it widely. Typically, this international English is heavily influenced by learners' first languages and becomes distinct from domestic English.

This section examines what happens in such international English communicative situations, where speakers of domestic English may also be present. It is common for domestic English speakers to react in some way to the international English of non-native speakers of English. Especially when there are communication barriers, the English used by international English speakers may be viewed as "violating language norms," "incorrect," "poorly executed," or "incomprehensible" by domestic English speakers. This criticism may not always be explicitly verbalized but can manifest through expressions of bewilderment or confusion. If communication fails, the responsibility is often attributed to non-native speakers who

struggle with English. Conversely, native speakers are not held accountable in the same way. When attempting to assess the validity of international English used in a particular context, non-native speakers are typically excluded from participation or voicing objections. This is because authoritative judgments, such as “Native speakers wouldn’t express it that way” or “Native speakers wouldn’t pronounce it like that,” are made without allowing input from non-native speakers, rendering native speakerhood an uncontested power in the validation process.

Furthermore, even in communication settings where English native speakers are absent, such as when Korean and Japanese native speakers interact in international English, it may seem that such issues would not arise. However, this is not always the case because non-native speakers may act as proxy native speakers. Often, speakers who have acquired domestic English at a relatively high level may assume the role of surrogate native speakers when interacting with those who have not. They may assert authority over English validation based on the exclusive status of native speakers by stating phrases like “Native speakers wouldn’t say that,” “It’s not in the dictionary,” or “I don’t understand,” acting as representatives of native speakers.

The unfairness of targeting “insufficiently acquired international English” for negative evaluation or sanctions is widely recognized and described in sociolinguistic research on international English. However, the current state of affairs is that such recognition remains largely theoretical. Discussions surrounding international English lack concrete proposals and practices aimed at elucidating the mechanisms behind these issues and devising strategies for resolution. Consequently, injustices in communication mediated by English continue to be perpetuated.

#### 4. English and microaggressions

As seen in the previous section, there exists a structure wherein non-native speakers have their autonomy in judging language usage compromised when domestic English is employed as international English. Non-native speakers cannot establish the criteria for correct English or the English to be accepted. When linguistic autonomy is denied or stripped away, individuals are inevitably stifled. This experience is common among language learners. This stifling leads to communication breakdowns and exclusion from social interactions, resulting in socioeconomic losses for non-native speakers and expanded benefits for

English native speakers. Moreover, the responsibility for communication failures is often attributed to the perceived inadequacy or reluctance of non-native speakers, further entrenching the acceptance of the resulting disadvantages as an unavoidable reality. Presently, society continues to tolerate and perpetuate this negative cycle as if it were inevitable.

The role played by the inherent advantage of being a native English speaker in maintaining this one-sided relationship can be conceptualized as microaggressions, subtle acts of violence. While the concept of microaggressions has been extensively studied in the context of racism and gender discrimination, it is widely applicable to all societies when a group is relegated to a second-class status and marginalized<sup>10</sup>. In the discourse surrounding English, those relegated to second-class status and marginalized are non-native English speakers. While native English speakers may be a numerical minority in terms of population, the power allocated based on nativeness treats non-native speakers as a vast minority<sup>11</sup>. Microaggressions, due to their subtlety, are easily overlooked and therefore repeated frequently over the long term. The negative effects on groups not benefiting from power distribution accumulate over time. Pointing out deviations from the norms of non-native speakers’ language can sometimes be interpreted as an expression of goodwill from native speakers, leading to responses like “there’s no need to make such a fuss.” As a result, behaviors resembling past instances of sexual harassment — specifically, the repeated subtle disparagement of English by non-native speakers — become normalized. While overt actions such as explicit corrections or revisions of non-native speakers’ speech or writing may be avoided, imbuing interactions with negative evaluations is not considered problematic<sup>12</sup>. This normalization resembles judgments like “it’s okay to touch someone a little to express intimacy or to correct their bad posture,” illustrating the prevalent dynamics of English as a mediating language in interlingual communication.

The microaggressions in English communication described above take the form of depriving non-native speakers of autonomy in language usage and excluding them from communication. Learning a foreign language inherently involves a sense of having one’s autonomy taken away and being rendered powerless. Language norms are complex habits accumulated over a long period, and while they may change, such changes are perceived to occur only within native speaker communities or through

their collective acceptance, with non-native speakers not recognized as having the right to participate in the process of change. Even if learners point out the irrationality of the language norms they are learning and propose changes, they are often dismissed with a laugh. While it may not be problematic to exclude non-native speakers considering that everyone has some native language and considers it a component of their identity, this exclusionary practice is unacceptable for English, which has become widely used as a lingua franca in intercultural communication worldwide. Due to historical circumstances, English has acquired functions and roles that other languages do not possess and cannot easily change in the short term.

When norms of language within the English native speaker space, namely those of domestic English, are upheld and the privileges assumed to be held by English native speakers regarding English language norms are exercised, communication injustice occurs, and fundamental rights violations occur when the autonomy of non-native speakers in judging English language norms is denied<sup>13)</sup>.

It's commonly observed that learners aspiring towards linguistic assimilation into English-speaking communities often welcome actions based on the privileges of English native speakers to facilitate their own assimilation. Actively seeking out native speakers for communication and striving for linguistic proximity to them are common strategies in language learning. For those intending to learn, study, or live within English-speaking communities, such approaches are highly effective and reasonable methods for learning domestic English<sup>14)</sup>. However, in situations where English serves as a medium of international communication among non-native speakers, denying the autonomy of non-native speakers regarding linguistic norms can be considered ethically unacceptable, akin to microaggressions or language discrimination.

## 5. What should be done: liberation of language norms

When considering English as the inevitable medium of communication among speakers of different languages, what specific measures are necessary to prevent injustice, namely rights violations or exclusion from communication, based on the way language is used? Here are several points to consider:

### 5-1. The necessity to bifurcate English

Firstly, it is imperative to make a sharp distinction between domestic English and international English. The

coexistence of these two in communicative contexts can result in the imposition of domestic English norms onto international English, leading to the subordination, intimidation, or exclusion of the latter's users. To prevent this, it must be clarified that English native speakers can only enjoy their privileged status within domestic English settings, and crossing over into the realm of international English should be explicitly recognized as discriminatory. Furthermore, these principles need to be socially shared as ethical guidelines to prevent rights infringements. Additionally, as discussed in the discourse of World Englishes, merely affirming the existence of diverse Englishes distinct from domestic English holds little significance if hierarchies are established between them or if groups not counted as members of World Englishes are excluded<sup>15)</sup>. Acts, behaviors, or implications that promote or affirm such hierarchization must be classified as microaggressions or linguistic discriminatory acts, with the perpetrators identified as practitioners of discriminatory behavior.

The demarcation between domestic and international English signifies the liberation of linguistic norms in international English for its entire user base. The question of "who owns English internationally used" has long been debated, with only one plausible answer: "it belongs to all its users." This assertion underscores the right of all participants in international English usage to engage in the reproduction and reconstruction of linguistic norms. International English users acquire and adopt linguistic norms from various English varieties, including domestic English, utilizing English not as a native tongue but as a means of international communication. Within this context, the concern is solely whether communication occurs as intended or not; questions of correctness or legitimacy are rendered meaningless. The absence of universal grounds for establishing correctness underscores the impossibility of attributing legitimacy based on any singular criterion.



A notice found in a highway service area restaurant in Japan (photographed by the author in February 2023).

The figure represents an example of international English. While the origin of the linguistic norms adopted by the creator remains unclear, considering contextual factors beyond language, "Please Eat quietly" sufficiently facilitates communication in English. To dismiss this as "nonstandard" English would constitute a microaggression stemming from referencing domestic English norms.

Such international English labeled as deviant based upon domestic English norms is often the subject of ridicule in everyday casual communication. A well-known Japanese comedian, Akasiya Sanma, for instance, used the typical Japanese English phrase "I am orange juice," spoken by his colleague comedian, as a comedy bit. Similarly, in the 1990s, the author encountered anecdotes, now outdated and quite vulgar, where multinational non-native English speakers would laugh at individuals who could not distinguish the pronunciation of "erection" and "election"<sup>16)</sup> at drinking parties<sup>17)</sup>. These instances represent a type of linguistic microaggression.

A Japanese sociologist, EHARA Yumiko, conducted a detailed analysis of the mockery directed towards the women's liberation movement as early as 1981<sup>18)</sup>. She asserts that fundamentally and structurally, words of mockery claim to be "play" towards the audience, while presenting to the target of mockery a universal, anonymous, and self-evident assertion. Through this dual semantic designation, the mocker gains superiority over the target of mockery, and the language of mockery is able to make assertions about the actions or attributes of the target of mockery. As for the case above concerning English, for example, the mocker presents the lack of drawing a distinction between erection and election as "play" by anticipating laughter while simultaneously establishing it as a universally and self-evidently valued judgment that it should be mocked as English. Even if the target of mockery is not present, the group of mockers mutually confirms their judgment, leading to the mix-up of norms between domestic English and international English or the normalization of the denial of independent norms for international English itself. Furthermore, mockery, taking the form of humor, conceals the intention of attack or sanction behind laughter and can also be used as a means of confirming intimacy or expressing kindness, saying that it helps those who are made fun of to improve their behavior. Therefore, protesting against it is structurally difficult. These dynamics are directly observable in the mechanisms of microaggressions

involving English.

The liberation of language norms for all international English users, essentially democratization, will promote further diversification of international English, possibly leading to instances where communication may fail to materialize. For example, failure to exclude international English that contradicts the norms of domestic English, such as "The thief will immediately call the police"<sup>19)</sup>, could lead to confusion in international English communication. However, this is a cost to be borne for ensuring fairness in communication, a necessary confusion. Resorting to exclusionary actions to avoid this would be a serious reversal of priorities.

## 5-2. Pretended linguistic diversity

It is likely that current discourse in the field of international English studies is advancing towards acknowledging and affirming the diversity of English worldwide. However, the following judgment may approximate a general consensus among scholars in international English studies:

"Of course, accepting all forms of diversity in English raises the difficulty of determining where to draw the line on what constitutes "English." Therefore, while acknowledging diversity, there remains a dilemma in advocating for the diversity of English, as not everything can be fully embraced."<sup>20)</sup>

"From the perspective of international English discourse, which treats all varieties of English as equal, any variety of English that is closer to Standard English can serve as a model of English education. However, it is necessary to ensure that the international comprehensibility of that variety is sufficiently maintained without absolutizing it."<sup>21)</sup>

What does limited diversity, which does not accept everything, signify? Are those whose English is not considered acceptable within the limited diversity forced to endure exclusion from English-mediated interlingual communication? Who determines what is classified as 'English'? Who is placed in the position of deciding 'not everything can be acknowledged'? Is it acceptable to exclude international English that is not deemed to have sufficient international utility?

These statements reserve the possibility of exclusion by implying that varied international English must conform to the standards of native speakers and dominant domestic English norms; it's nothing short of an appropriation of diversity<sup>22)</sup>. The stance of immediately adding restrictions right after mentioning diversity and equivalence is a paradoxical attempt to appear as if acknowledging diversity while actually denying it. This approach may stem from an intention to acknowledge any incremental progress towards diversity, reflecting a forward-looking intention and a conscientious attitude. However, this is essentially akin to praising the capricious mercy of colonialists or the arbitrary tolerance of discriminators and amounts to nothing more than endorsing discriminatory practices. As various movements against discrimination have highlighted over time, the challenge in international English discourse lies in how to confront the "mask of benevolence" as articulated by Harlan Lane<sup>23)</sup>.

### 5-3. Discriminatory practices in international English

In communication using international English, when one party cannot comprehend the other party's English, rather than dismissing it as "not English," efforts should be made to convey the areas of misunderstanding. There is no other alternative to continuing communication. If communication still fails, both parties bear the responsibility for its failure. However, if there is a socioeconomic power imbalance between them, the responsibility must be disproportionately assigned to the more powerful party<sup>24)</sup>. This effort is necessary for fair communication among users of different first languages. Native English speakers or those with relatively high proficiency in English should not overlook this effort and should not insist on referring to the norms of domestic English to achieve efficient communication only for themselves. Taking actions or adopting attitudes critical of insufficient effort in studying domestic English constitutes discriminatory behavior that leads to the exclusion of relatively weaker participants in international English communication.

The crucial element lacking in traditional discourse on international English is the clear recognition that the intrusion of domestic English into international English, without a distinct boundary between the two, constitutes microaggressions and linguistic discrimination. SUZUKI Takao, who advocated for the distinction between

"international English and ethnic English" and wrote that "the struggle for citizenship rights of international English shares the same structural characteristics as the history of the Black Movement in the United States<sup>25)</sup>," exhibited keen insight<sup>26)</sup>. It has been almost 40 years since his arguments were presented, and fundamentally, there has been no progress. This is because there has been no equivalent movement to the Black Liberation Movement<sup>27)</sup>. It is important for the discriminated, namely non-native English speakers, to seek technical innovations, such as lowering the cost and enhancing the efficiency of English learning, and cognitive shifts, embracing the idea that "Japanese-style English is acceptable," to alleviate their discriminatory situations. However, relying solely on these measures will only defer the problems. Furthermore, without a clear distinction between domestic and international English, there is an increasing risk of assimilationist discrimination, advocating for further English proficiency with the aim of assimilating into native speaker norms, which ignores the "glass ceiling" created by native speakerness<sup>28)</sup>. The phenomenon of domestic English norms transcending boundaries is not limited to face-to-face communication between individuals. For instance, in English texts or books intended for international circulation beyond domestic English circles, demanding adherence to the norms of domestic English approved by native speakers can also be considered a form of linguistic discrimination. For example, the author once heard of a narrative from an international English advocate who mentioned his experience at a symposium of a certain academic society. He shared that when submitting a manuscript to an academic publication in the UK, linguistic revisions were made; however, "the editors showed a willingness to respect the original English text" written by the non-native English speaker "as much as possible." This experience should not be narrated in a positive light but interpreted as a typical example of discriminatory behavior under the mask of benevolence. The accumulation of experiences of continued discrimination robs individuals of their autonomy and often involves assimilation or enslavement to the framework of recognition held by discriminators. Despite being subjected to rights violations, individuals feel grateful for such treatment, a phenomenon that has a tragic twist.

5-4. The international English discourse as an anti-discrimination movement towards the disempowerment of English native speakers

Summarizing the discussion thus far, it is imperative to distinguish and avoid conflating international English and domestic English. Also necessary is establishing the prohibition of transgressing boundaries by incorporating domestic English linguistic norms into international English as a communicative ethical standard. Even if international English norms are rooted in domestic English in origin, we should not acknowledge the privileged status of English native speakers but rather liberate the linguistic norms of international English for all speakers. What sets this apart from existing discourse on international English is its direct interrogation of the awareness and actions of English native speakers when considering objections raised by non-native speakers, such as “the use of English as an international lingua franca is unjust.” Primarily, English native speakers or their proxies, shielded by the notion of exclusive monopolization of linguistic norms by native speakers, deprive non-native speakers of autonomy over international English, thereby excluding them from communication through international English. This phenomenon, where English native speakers infringe upon the communication rights of non-native speakers, must be perceived as linguistic discrimination. This discrimination is propagated by English native speakers, and its perpetration is independent of attributes related to non-native English speakers. Therefore, the responsibility for addressing and eliminating this discriminatory phenomenon lies solely with native speakers and their advocates<sup>29)</sup>.

Arguments like “Japanese-style English is acceptable” or *Setuei* are entirely valid as an emergency survival strategy for the discriminated. If *Setuei* were to become a global trend, English would lose its dominant position, and international English would become a thing of the past. However, during the considerable period before such a shift occurs, exclusionary phenomena caused by English native-speakerhood will persist. From another perspective, these long-term strategies may be seen as complicit in discrimination by neglecting to address the short-term resolution of countless microaggressions and discriminatory acts currently taking place. Therefore, in addition to these long-term strategies, there must be concurrent efforts to confront discriminators directly by explicitly identifying current discriminatory acts as such. Focusing on the actions and thoughts of discriminators and revealing the mechanisms and injustices of their conscious and unconscious discriminatory behavior, as well

as seizing opportunities to demand correction directly from the perpetrators of discriminatory acts, are aspects lacking in existing discourse on international English and *Setuei*. While it is often acknowledged that “native speakers also need to make efforts to accommodate non-native speakers’ English<sup>30)</sup>,” such a discourse on international English has failed to critically examine the quantity and quality of these “efforts” and has left the perpetrators untouched, who constitute the unfair reality.

Generally, when considering the elimination of existing discrimination, it is necessary to establish two vectors, which are empowerment, i.e., restoration of self-esteem, and disempowerment, i.e., deprivation of privilege<sup>31)</sup>. Discriminated individuals are often compelled to perceive the social and economic disadvantages and experiences of exclusion they face under discriminatory conditions as their own responsibility alone. In this line of thinking, being excluded from communication through international English is attributed to one’s own responsibility for inadequate English learning. Affirming Japanese-style English and *Setuei* can alleviate such self-blame and encourage non-native English speakers. This constitutes empowerment.

When aiming for empowerment in non-native English-speaking societies, it becomes a challenge for international English studies to address the unethical nature of assimilationist behavior among many English education stakeholders who fail to or refuse to present stances other than “learn English harder.” Such assimilationist attitudes hinder empowerment. The mask of benevolence of English education stakeholders is also a result of their failure to differentiate between international English and domestic English, leading to confusion in their educational practices. They too may be victims of disempowerment through linguistic assimilationism. English education should be developed by clearly distinguishing between materials, methods, and practices for international and domestic English, respectively<sup>32)</sup>.

Empowerment must be accompanied by the disempowerment of those benefiting from exclusion. This includes actions such as English native speakers’ intervening in the language norms of international English, behaving as if they hold the same exclusive status in international English as they do in domestic one, and failing to acknowledge responsibility for communication breakdowns in international English. These actions should be consistently criticized as microaggressions. Naturally,

there will be significant resistance against relinquishing the privileged status of the native speakers, who may lose the source of socio-economic benefits, i.e., the very cash cow. Various rationalizations can be expected to emerge. Users of international English who adhere to norms different from domestic English may face stigmatization.

For instance, reflecting on the resistance and rationalizations faced during past instances of sexual harassment allegations or *Buraku* liberation movements can provide valuable insight<sup>33)</sup>. Studying past anti-discrimination movements and their outcomes can also contribute to envisioning the ideal state of international English. This process presents one of the challenges in international English studies.

Furthermore, considering the history of English as an international lingua franca, which has also been a history of microaggressions and exclusions, it is necessary to recognize that the ethical norms mentioned above may not be sufficient. For instance, English native speakers may inadvertently intimidate participants in English communication settings simply by being present, even without making any statements or expressing any attitudes. This is because the presence of native speakers can lead to their intervention in evaluating or judging the norms applied to the English spoken there, which may result in the erosion of autonomy for non-native speakers. All English native speakers inevitably carry the negative historical baggage of linguistic discrimination and exclusion, which can give rise to a sense of impending violence. It is important to recognize that the mere presence of a male individual, for example, can potentially intimidate non-males, particularly those who have experienced harm originating from masculinity. To develop such sensitivity is the ethical norm that should be imposed on English native speakers, who have continued to benefit from the accumulation of microaggressions.

**Intent of use:**

(D.E.) Participation in linguistic spaces constituted by native English speakers

(I.E.) Achieving communication between speakers of different languages

**Rationale of linguistic norms:**

(D.E.) Depends on the linguistic practices and judgements of native English speakers.

(I.E.) Depends on the practice and judgement of all communication participants, except native English speakers. It is confirmed and built upon by the mutual action of the moment.

**Oriented value:**

(D.E.) Securing privileged status against non-native speakers

(I.E.) Guaranteeing rights and maintaining autonomy over language norms

Table: Characteristics of domestic (D.E.) and international English (I.E.)

## 6. Conclusion

This paper presupposes the ongoing status quo, wherein English serves as the predominant lingua franca in interlingual communication, and has explored what is necessary for achieving fair communication in this context. It delineates the trajectory that international English discourse valuing accusations against English imperialism and the realization of diversity should take. It is acknowledged that this discourse primarily addresses the hegemony of English, and should another language replace it in the future, similar scrutiny will be required for that language. The democratization of access to language norms for all users may introduce confusion into English language norms, yet it is deemed a necessary process. Embracing this confusion and actively positioning oneself within it underscores the enormity of the intent to transform a single language held by native speaker groups into an exclusive medium of communication in international contexts while simultaneously aiming for equitable and democratic communication<sup>34)</sup>.

## Notes

<sup>1)</sup> For example, in Japan, it's widely known that even in the entrance exams for art universities or sports universities, English is a requirement, and universities offering options other than English are extremely limited.

It's not uncommon for English to be compulsory from the elementary education level onwards. While some countries allow students to choose languages other than English from secondary education and complete their education up to university level, they are required to specialize in the language itself or in academic fields specific to that region, which limits career opportunities.

<sup>2)</sup>Tatsuya, Amano et al., "The manifold costs of being a non-native English speaker in science", *PLOS Biology*, 2023. <https://journals.plos.org/plosbiology/article?id=10.1371/journal.pbio.3002184>

<sup>3)</sup>If we consider even slightly multilingual societies or lifestyles, it becomes apparent that the category of English native speakers or first language speakers is not clearly defined and cannot be definitively categorized. The boundaries are always fluid. Even arguments suggesting that a mother tongue or first language can change are not immediately dismissible. cf. Davies, Alan, *The Native Speaker: Myth and Reality*, 2003, Skutnabb-Kangas, Tove, *Linguistic genocide in education or worldwide diversity and human rights?*, 2000, p.105ff. etc. However, this paper acknowledges the existence of English native speakers, or first language speakers, and of English-speaking communities where these individuals consider English as part of their identity and use it as their everyday language. It also recognizes the inherent nature of first language acquisition, which cannot be acquired later in life by non-native speakers. The arguments presented in this paper are based on this recognition.

<sup>4)</sup>The problematic nature of promoting linguistic assimilation is clearly elucidated in my paper, "Gengo ken kara keikaku gengo e (From Language Rights to Planned Language)" in MASIKO H.(ed.) *Language/Rights/Discrimination: Liberation of Information Disadvantaged from the Perspective of Language Rights*, 2006/2012, Sangensya, Tōkyō, pp.121–124 (All texts are in Japanese). In a section of this paper, titled "Does English bring equality?" I have demonstrated the inherent issues associated with linguistic assimilation. Its Esperanto version, "Planlingvo kiel unu el la konsekvencoj de lingva rajto: el lingva rajto al planlingvo" is also available online. <https://tsuyama-ct.academia.edu/HidenoriKadoja>

<sup>5)</sup>The lack of understanding among English education stakeholders regarding the inherent contradictions, akin to the advertising of laundry detergents that continually promote "better new products," is likely due to the same reasons of vested interests. Much like detergent advertisements, tools and methods for English education have already been extensively developed. It's high time to realize that the main reason for the lack of visible progress in English education cannot solely be attributed to English education itself.

<sup>6)</sup>At the same time, the stance of strengthening English education may not be viewed as effective. For instance, it is not easy to accurately assess the English proficiency of Japanese native speakers. However, based on our lived experiences and numerical data, it is evident that English proficiency has not improved as much as expected, as seen in the distribution of English scores in high school and university entrance exams. Therefore, the effectiveness of enhancing English education is questionable.

<sup>7)</sup>KIMURA Gorō Christoph, *Setuei no susume: Datu eigōizon koso kokusaika, Gurōbaruka taiō no kagi! (Towards Reducing the Use of English Decreasing Dependence on English is the Key to Responding to Internationalization and Globalization)*, Yorozu syōbō, Tōkyō, 2016. 'Setu' means 'moderate' or 'reducing' and 'Ei' means English.

<sup>8)</sup>KADOJA H. "Book review: 'Setuei no susume': setuei to yū hikaeme de radikaru na ēi (setuei, a reserved yet radical endeavor)", *Syakai gengogaku (Sociolinguistics)*, XVII, 2017, pp.147–156.

<sup>9)</sup>HON'NA Nobuyuki, *Eigo wa sekai o musubu (English bridges Asia)*, Tamagawa daigaku syuppanbu, 2006, p.44.

<sup>10)</sup>Derald Wing Sue et al., *Microaggressions in Everyday Life*, Wiley, 2020

<sup>11)</sup>Indeed, in this regard, the structures of gender discrimination, which marginalize women despite comprising half of the population, exhibit similarities to the marginalization of non-native English speakers.

<sup>12)</sup>The significance of the concept of microaggressions lies in its ability to highlight the subtlety of phenomena that are dismissed with phrases like "just a little." In this regard, attention to such elements is necessary not only in the context of English but also in general exclusionary phenomena in communication.

<sup>13)</sup>Microaggressions that deny autonomy can also take the form of praise because they are essentially exercises of unequal power distributed in unalterable ways. Statements like "Your English is excellent, your pronunciation is perfect, or you sound like a native speaker from an

English-speaking country" also constitute discriminatory acts by revealing the locus of evaluative power concerning the dominant language. Just as comments like "You're beautiful / feminine" directed at women can be seen as acts of approval or evaluation, reminding us of how they can easily turn into harassment.

<sup>14)</sup>In a given context, there may be women who feel joy and encouragement when complimented with "you look beautiful" and derive motivation from it. However, the fact that such instances exist without inherent issues does not contradict the premise that the utterance is generally considered harassment. This scenario shares a similar structure.

<sup>15)</sup>"...presenting 'Indian English' while also generating English judged to deviate from 'Indian English' for individuals who are Indian themselves..." (Shibata M., Naka K., Huziwaru Y., *Eigo kyōiku no tame no kokusai eigo ron: eigo no tayōsei to kokusai kyōtūgo no siten kara (International English Theory for English Education: From the Perspectives of English Diversity and International Lingua Franca)*, Taisyūkan syoten, 2020, p.7). This is one example of such a phenomenon.

<sup>16)</sup>This anecdote has long been widely recognized in both informal discussions about English and formal academic contexts, similar to the well-known difficulty of distinguishing the pronunciations of expressions such as "rice/lice" and "right/light".

<sup>17)</sup>These individuals are serving as proxies for English native speakers. They are akin to the colonial elites who acted as vanguards of colonial rule.

<sup>18)</sup>EHARA Yumiko, "Karakai no seizigaku", *Sisō to site no feminizumu* ("politics of mockery", *Feminism as Thought*), Keisōsyōbō, 1985, p.178ff.

<sup>19)</sup>This is the English translation shown below the Japanese text that says, "Theft is a crime. If found, it will be reported to the police immediately," on an attention-grabbing poster in a household appliance retailer. [twitter.com/lsa\\_rentacs/status/1654618805002473472](https://twitter.com/lsa_rentacs/status/1654618805002473472)

The poster creator, likely a non-native English speaker, presents this text as acceptable English, perhaps using an automatic translation site. Criticizing, mocking, or excluding it as a deviation from language norms would be discriminatory. However, for example, deviations from standard Japanese found in signage, tattoos, T-shirts, etc. outside Japan may be seen as unusual by native Japanese speakers. Even if they were to critique, exclude, or mock such deviations, it would not necessarily be considered discriminatory. This is because Japanese is not overwhelmingly dominant as a language used among non-native speakers worldwide.

<sup>20)</sup>Sibata, Naka, Huziwaru, *op.cit.*, p.7. Translated by the author.

<sup>21)</sup>Siozawa, Tadasu et al. '*Kokusai ēgo ron' de kawaru nihon no ēgo kyōiku (Changes in Japan's English education under the international English discourse)*, Kurosio syuppan, 2016, p.21. Complimentarily translated by the author.

<sup>22)</sup>The importance of ensuring diversity lies in its role as one of the necessary conditions to prevent fundamental rights violations. Imposing limitations on diversity would be tantamount to restricting rights protection.

<sup>23)</sup>Lane, Harlan, *The Mask of Benevolence: Disabling the Deaf Community*, San Diego, DawnSignPress, 1999.

<sup>24)</sup>For instance, in communication between an individual lacking socioeconomic resources and an organization possessing such resources, if the failure of communication leads to a violation of the individual's rights, then all responsibility should be attributed to the organization.

<sup>25)</sup>SUZUKI Takao, *Buki to site no kotoba (Words as a weapon)*, Sintyōsya, 1985, p.148.

<sup>26)</sup>He argues that idiomatic expressions and similar linguistic elements that exacerbate the burden of learning English should be prohibited for international English use. In this context, it implies the need to eliminate the intrusion of domestic English norms into international English. However, Suzuki's arguments have been largely overlooked, at least in Japan. While his long-running bestseller, which has undergone numerous reprints, seems to have been widely read by English educators in Japan, it has been completely ignored. He has also failed to advance the discussion to the next stage, which involves recognizing such intrusions as acts of discrimination and pressing for corrective action against the discriminators.

<sup>27)</sup>In cases of gender discrimination, racial discrimination, and similar issues, specific instances have been litigated, raising social awareness through the objection of the discriminated individuals, thereby advancing social movements. However, concerning international English, the nature of its transcending national borders and the difficulty for individuals not directly involved with English to recognize exclusion present challenges to a similar development.

<sup>28)</sup> No matter how much emphasis is placed on learning domestic English, it is rare for non-native speakers to reach the proficiency level of native speakers. Moreover, the associated learning costs and missed opportunities are immense. Even if they were to achieve such proficiency, they could not break the privileged monopoly of language norms held by native speakers. Even if discriminated individuals aim to become like the discriminators, they will never truly be the same, and they will continue to be categorized as “those who were originally different,” potentially facing sudden exclusion.

<sup>29)</sup> The “women’s issue” is a men’s issue, the “black issue” is a white issue, and the root of the “English issue” lies with English native speakers.

<sup>30)</sup> Siozawa et al., *op.cit.*, p.73

<sup>31)</sup> This perspective is essential when envisioning universal design to minimize exclusion from communication. My article, “Sikizi / zyōhō no yunibāsaru dezain to iu kōsō — sikizi, gengoken, syōgaigaku (The concept of universal design for literacy/information: literacy, language rights, and disability studies),” published in *Kotoba to syakai: tagengo syakai kenkyū (Language and Society: Studies in Multilingual Societies)* in 2012, pp.141–159, discusses this approach.

<sup>32)</sup> Just as in Japanese language education, delving deeply into

international English education could lead to the conclusion that it is not necessarily essential to teach English. In his article, “Kokusai kyōtūgo to site no eigo kyōiku no ‘kabe’, *Azia Eigo Kenkyū*, 20, 2018, pp.80–98 (The ‘wall’ of English education as an international lingua franca,” *Asian English Studies*), NAKA Kiyosi explores the essentialism of English education and the theoretical inability to establish linguistic models that English education is supposed to achieve. The current English education system exhibits a de facto contradiction, emphasizing diversity while denying it. What English education stakeholders can immediately do is to cease the deception of diversity and international English and instead temporarily retreat to domestic English education.

<sup>33)</sup> <http://www.bll.gr.jp/en/index.html>

<sup>34)</sup> The immense difficulty in achieving this goal testifies to the significance of considering the option of not using languages, such as English, which are associated with native speaker groups, as the standard medium of communication in interlingual contexts. It guides us towards the significance of adopting communication norms — not to use such languages but a planned language unrelated to native-speakerness.

Final remark: the content of this text was originally generated and published in Japanese, critically arguing the communication structure and ideologies around international English. The author is seriously conscious that the very act of writing and publishing in English itself reinforces the unjustifiable domestic-English-centered structure that this text seeks to criticize. As can readily be inferred from the prevailing norms and ideologies of translingual communication that English serves as the primary medium, the mere fact that the text is not written in English provides a strong justification for native speakers of English and their representatives to disregard it, even when it is addressed to them. Placed under these contradictory conditions, the author was compelled to render the text into English despite the conviction that translingual communication should resist English-centrism and instead conform to universal justice, respecting both linguistic and communicative human rights. Forcing the less powerful to suffer a unilateral double bind lies at the very core of discrimination.