

The sociocultural landscape of English: The discursive constructions of attitudes toward English among Japanese undergraduates on a study English abroad program

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English as a global phenomenon has been discussed variably in recent scholarly literature. In parallel, research on ELT continues to abound. However, the scope of ELT research in the Japanese context has been focussed upon the teacher perspective of how pedagogical practices can best enhance learners' acquisition of the language. Meanwhile, the sociocultural landscape of ELT as subjective realities shared among learners themselves has been underexplored. This paper addresses this gap by tapping into attitudes toward the English language as discursive constructions emerging out of expository-type writing among Japanese undergraduates.

The paper presents a discourse analysis of 32 participants' text about the sociocultural significances of English, from local to global level. Passages of the text elicited from the participants were coded into three theoretical categories of attitudes: positive, negative, and neutral (non-evaluative). An overarching theme that has been identified in each of these categories – English as resource, English as agitator, and English as ornament – is discussed.

The study holds, among others, pedagogical and methodological implications for ELT and ELT research. By tapping into language learners' views of English in their written discourse, the study enables itself to observe the consciousness that individuals bring with them through which sociocultural particularities of their learning context may be visualised. While psychometric attitude research confines individual attitudes within the researcher's theoretical framework as evaluations oriented to attitude objects, this discourse-analytic study demonstrates that evaluations and attitude objects are discursively intertwined, and the contemporary phenomenon of English is variably constructed therein.

Abstract Summation

This paper reports a thematic discourse analysis of 32 Japanese undergraduates' text that they wrote about sociocultural significances of the English language from local to global level. Three overarching themes that have been identified – English as resource, English as agitator, and English as ornament – are discussed.

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