English in the Environment:
An Ecological Model

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ABSTRACT

Although English appears prevalent in many areas of Japanese life, particularly in popular culture and in education, it has been argued that English inside the classroom and English outside the classroom are considened clearly distinct from one another. The current study explored this relationship utilizing the Ecological Systems Model, borrowed from the work of developmental psychologist Urie Bronfenbrenner. Participants were drawn from the Department of Education at Doshisha University in Kyoto. Although findings indicated little relationship between the "two Englishes", there remains the potential for English outside the classroom as a teaching resource given the relative popularity of English-language media among university-age learners.

INTRO

The English language occupies an unusual position in Japanese society. Japan is most often characterized, both internally and externally, as a monolingual, mono-cultural nation; however, English is pervasive in many areas of Japanese life, from billboards to newspapers, from television to movies and magazines. As observed by Stanlaw,

> "Anyone who has ever even had an airport layover in Tokyo – or even
> a cursory exposure to Japanese people – will instantly realize that
> English in Japan is like air: it is everywhere" (2004, p. 1).

Perhaps most importantly, English can be a gateway for younger Japanese to greater success in education, and subsequently in the job market. Despite this distinction, Japanese learners have demonstrated great difficulties in developing their English language abilities.

It has been argued by many (Kobayashi, 2001; Reesor, 2003; McVeigh, 2005) that English in Japan is sharply divided between that found inside the classroom (i.e., as an academic discipline) and that found outside the classroom (e.g., in popular culture and as a communicative tool). As a native English-speaker living and teaching in Japan, this disjuncture seemed curious: *How was it possible that English appeared in so many facets of Japanese life without having a greater impact on learners? And why were learners not able to connect English inside and outside the classroom?* From a teaching perspective, it seemed distinctly possible that strengthening (or at least establishing) connections between the "two Englishes" could increase learner motivation as they became more aware of the subject situated within a concrete, "real world" context.

The current study was conceived to explore the relationship between English inside and outside of the classroom, to develop a more holistic understanding of the perspective of the Japanese learner. The study adopts an *ecological* approach and employs a theoretical model adapted from more general developmental research; thus, the project should be viewed as experimental in design and not intended to definitively prove or disprove a particular hypothesis. Although it may, at points, appear to stray from the immediate concerns of the classroom, the underlying goal was to better understand the learning environment, ultimately to the benefit of both teachers and students.

BACKGROUND

English in Japan

The presence and popularity of English in Japan has ebbed and flowed from the time of the Meiji Restoration (1868-1912). Emerging from a period of cultural isolation, the country embraced English, and many other aspects of "Western" culture (e.g., music, fashion, etc.), with great fervor (Loveday, 1996). However, periods of strong nationalism, prior to both World War One (WWI) and World War Two (WWII), saw the popularity of the language wane. Ultimately, the crushing loss and catastrophic events that closed WWII had an indelible impact upon the Japanese with regard to English (Stanlaw, 2004). The language became firmly entrenched during the American Occupation (1945-52) and has enjoyed a steadily expanding presence since that period.

The current language contact environment can certainly be characterized as "English rich". In fact, English has become so pervasive that it would be clearly evident even to a casual observer with little knowledge of the Japan. The clearest indications of this phenomenon can be found in popular culture. The number of foreign films released in Japan consistently exceeds those by Japanese companies (MPPAJ, 2006) and English blockbusters frequently take up half (or more) of the screens at major theatre chains. Although domestic music, particularly *J-pop*, has a strong following in Japan, English music is equally in demand. In addition, many Japanese singers and bands have Anglicized names and the song titles appear in English. This particular use of English by Japanese singers has appeared as the focus of multiple studies (Kachru, 1992; Tobin, 1992; Craig, 2000; Stanlaw, 2004). Although English television programs make up only a fraction of those found on basic cable channels, they have recently become popular as DVD rentals and satellite

TV, which offers much greater access to English programming, has enjoyed rapid expansion as well (NHK, 2005).

English has also made inroads into the Japanese language in the form of loanwords. In a study looking at English terms from the popular dictionary *Gendai-yougou*, Loveday found 75% of marketing, 67% of engineering, and 99% of computer terms were English-based (Loveday, 1996). Tomoda (1999) analyzed the Nihongo-daijiten dictionary and found that loanwords composed up to 10% of Japanese vocabulary, or over 13,000 terms. Despite the empirical evidence offered by these studies, it is still difficult to convey the full impact of English on everyday Japanese use. Matsumoto Toru, author of *The Random Dictionary: A Glossary of Foreign Words in Today's Spoken Japanese,* offers the following observation to demonstrate the utility of English in daily Japanese speech:

> At this moment, I am watching beisu-booru ('baseball') on terebi ('television'). My wife is out shopping at a depaato ('department store'), and later she will stop at a suupaa ('supermarket') to get pooku choppu ('pork chops'), pan ('bread'), bataa ('butter'), jamu ('jam'), and perhaps some sooseiji ('sausage') for breakfast. My daughter has gone to the byuutii saron ('beauty salon') to get a paama ('permanent'). Oh, the terehon ('telephone') is ringing. We [the Japanese] cannot live a day in Japan without these loanwords (cited in Stanlaw, 2004, p. 1).

Given that school-age Japanese encounter the language on a consistent basis as a classroom subject, as well as in their surrounding environment, it seems reasonable to assume this group may be the most strongly affected by English. In the current

educational environment, many Japanese learners begin English study from the first year of elementary school. In 2001 legislation was passed to provide English lessons for all elementary students nationwide (MEXT, 2003), although there is some debate as to the extent to which this initiative has been successfully implemented (Reesor, 2003; McVeigh, 2004). English is also critical for junior high school and high school students since gaining entry to a high profile university is viewed as imperative in Japanese society (Kobayashi, 2001; Gainey & Anderssen, 2002; McVeigh, 2004). For those learners who are accepted to post-secondary study, English is generally required for at least the first two years of university programs, regardless of the discipline studied. In the near future, it is conceivable that the majority of Japanese university graduates will have had 14 years of English study by the time they complete their post-secondary education.

Despite the significant presence of English in many areas of daily Japanese life, younger learners have, on the whole, struggled to successfully develop their language skills. This assertion, although seemingly general, is supported by data from two principle sources: 1) standardized tests (e.g. TOEIC, TOEFL) and 2) reports by teaching professionals with considerable experience in the country. Reesor (2002) provides the 1997 TOEFL results where Japan finished 180th out of 189 countries that participated. In the 2001-2 TOEFL rankings released by ETS (Educational Testing Service - the institution administering both TOEFL and TOEIC), Japanese students finished 143rd globally on the computer-based TOEFL exam (ETS, 2003, pp. 8-9). They finished 29th out of 30 countries in Asia, ahead of only North Korea and behind Bangladesh, Cambodia, and Myanmar. Japanese test takers also had difficulty with TOEIC ending up 10th out of 11 countries in Asia and significantly trailing China, South Korea, and Taiwan (ETS, 2004, p. 5).

The communicative abilities of Japanese learners have also been cited as puzzlingly weak. Empirical evidence is difficult to produce with regard to communicative proficiency; however, a good deal of anecdotal evidence is available from researchers and other professionals engaged in English education in Japan. Tsuneyoshi (2005), in her examination of study abroad programs at Japanese universities, observes that, "[t]he Japanese are known for their lack of communicative English skills" (p. 67). She goes on to say, "Japan's English education has been the target of criticism for decades, as the Japanese wonder how it is possible for students to learn English for six to ten years, and yet fail to speak simple English" (p. 67). Kobayashi (2001) also states that, "[t]he number of Japanese people who attain an intermediate or higher level of English proficiency is limited. Visitors from overseas have a hard time finding a Japanese person on a street who can handle simple English" (p. 26). An article by Reesor (2003), in the *Nagoya University Journal of Language, Communication, and Culture,* is particularly unambiguous in its title "Japanese Attitudes to English: Toward an Explanation of Poor Performance." In the article, Reesor observes that, "[f]or many years, Japan has been held up as a poster child for industrialized countries that have been largely unsuccessful in regards to English language education" (p. 57). McVeigh (2004) also questions the effectiveness of English education in Japan, adding that, "[h]undreds of thousands of Japanese students every year attempt to master English, not just in formal schools, but in commercial school…[d]espite all the time, effort, expertise, and money poured into acquiring English, few actually do" (p. 212). Although Stanlaw (2004) feels that the phenomenon of English in Japan is much more complex than it may appear, he observes that, "[e]ven today, among ESL teachers, the inability of Japanese students to be able to actually speak English – in spite of half a dozen years of study – is taken as fact, and commonly joked about" (p. 276).

Ecological Systems Model

Given that environmental factors have received little attention in previous SLA/FLA research, it was necessary to draw upon a theoretical model from outside the immediate field. The *Ecological Systems Model,* originating from the work of Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979) in developmental psychology (specifically child development), was selected as most appropriate. Bronfenbrenner's model emphasizes a more holistic perspective of the learning environment and has been previously applied to research into (first) language acquisition for children (Noro, 1987; Goelman, 1988).

The Ecological Systems Model acknowledges the strong interconnection that exists between the developing individual and their surrounding environment. Bronfenbrenner stated that, "the developmental processes taking place in the immediate settings in which human beings live, such as family, school, peer group, and workplace, are profoundly affected by conditions and events in broader contexts in which they are embedded" (Bronfenbrenner, 1988, p. x). To address this concern he conceived a model of concentric circles representing ecological settings (Figure 1), each nested within the next outlying level. The settings were defined as the *microsystem*, the *mesosystem*, the *exosystem*, and the *macrosystem*.

Figure 1 – The Ecological Systems Model
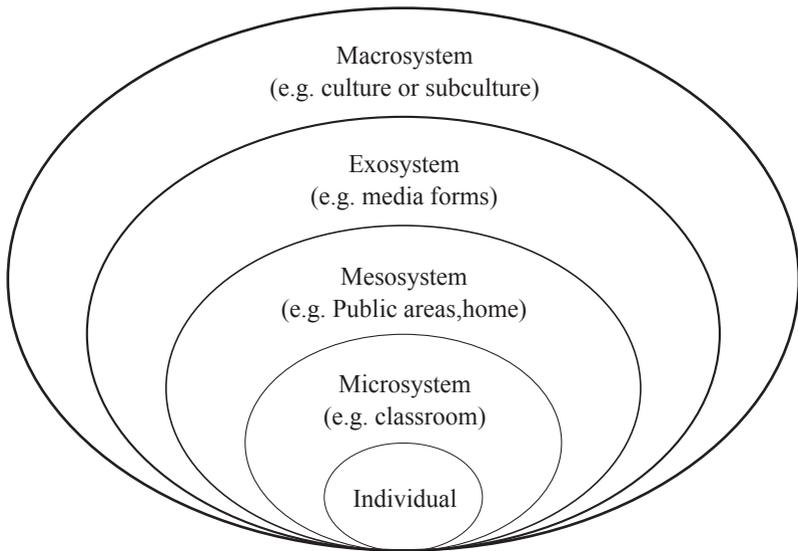
With the individual learner in the center, the layer immediately surrounding was defined as the *microsystem.* This level included activities, roles, and interrelationships in which the individual might engage with a direct impact upon development. With regard to English language acquisition for Japanese learners, the critical developmental setting is most often the classroom. However, for some students in Japan, additional study could occur in *juku* (commonly known as "cram schools"), *eikaiwa* ("English conversation schools"), or with a private tutor.

Circumscribing the microsystem, Bronfenbrenner identified the *mesosystem* as interrelations between environmental settings in which the learner was actively participating that could impact development. He clarified this definition adding, "other persons who participate actively in both settings, intermediate links in a social

network, formal and informal communications [could be included]" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 25). In Japan, classmates who attend public school and either *juku* or an *eikaiwa* school together would constitute an interrelation between microsystems. Conversation in English with classmates outside of the school setting, or with family members in the home setting, could also be significant. Although not explicitly cited by Bronfenbrenner, the mesosystem could potentially include exposure to English media as a component. Listening to English music, reading English books, and watching English movies could constitute a link between the language studied in the classroom and the language encountered out of the classroom, although the extent to which the learners *consciously* recognize this connection would be debatable. It is also possible that students engage in these activities with their classmates (e.g., attending an English movie together or discussing the lyrics to an English song), which would also fulfill the criteria for inclusion in the mesosystem.

The next level defined was the *exosystem*, which contains factors that do not immediately engage the learner but may still have an *indirect* impact upon the individual or upon the microsystem. In his original monograph, Bronfenbrenner recognized the role of television as an exosystem factor (1979, p. 242); however, with the changes in technology that have occurred since that time, particularly with regard to computers and access to the Internet, it is arguable that the way in which learners interact with modern forms of media has become much more *direct*.

The outermost stratum of the Ecological Systems Model is the *macrosystem*. Bronfenbrenner cited the influence of the macrosystem as originating at a broad social or cultural level and filtering down through all other levels (1979, p. 258).

One final area of significance with Bronfenbrenner's work was the attempt to incorporate the individual's subjective perception of their surroundings. Although many factors appear "measurable" (e.g., hours of TV watched, number of English words on a page, etc.), Bronfenbrenner repeatedly stressed the importance of considering the "perceived" along with the "objectively-defined" conditions of the environment. Citing what he felt may be "perhaps the only proposition in social science that approaches the status of an immutable law," he offered, "If men perceive situations as real, they are real in their consequences" (Thomas and Thomas, as cited in Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 23). He argued that the individual's perception could have either a negative or positive impact upon development, dependent on that individual's particular interpretation.

METHOD

The research design for this study was heavily influenced by the theoretical rationalization of the Ecological Systems Model. To investigate the relationship between levels of the model, a questionnaire was designed to gather data from as large a group of Japanese learners as possible. In addition, a qualitative component was included to better understand how Japanese learners see (or do not see) English in the environment.

Participants

The participant group for this study was drawn from the Department of Education at Doshisha University in Kyoto. 99 students (45 male, 54 female) in an English translation course responded to the questionnaire. 40 students were freshmen, 53 in their second year, and six in their third year. This particular group was selected given that they were still actively engaged in the study of English, had already gained

a significant amount of experience with the language, and were in the age range most readily associated with exposure to English language media (Stanlaw, 2004; Loveday, 1996; Moeran, 1989). For the interview section, students were asked to voluntarily participate, remaining behind after completing the questionnaire. Five interviews were subsequently conducted with four female participants and one male.

Questionnaire

In designing the questionnaire for this study, the greatest focus was placed upon *English in the environment*, a consideration not included in previous research with Japanese learners. Given the constraints of time and limited access to the participant group, the number of questionnaire items dedicated to other areas of interest was significantly limited.

The questionnaire included 50 multiple choice items covering the following areas: personal information (BACKGROUND), experience with English study (STUDY), relationships involving English (RELATIONSHIPS), exposure to English language media (EXPOSURE), awareness of English use in the Japanese media (AWARENESS), attitude toward English (ATTITUDE), differentiation between script forms (PERCEPTION), and English language ability (ABILITY). Table 1 presents the questions associated with each variable.

Table 1 – Questionnaire variables

Variable	Questions
BACKGROUND	1, 2, 3
STUDY	4(a-c), 5(a-c), 6(a-c), 7(a-c), 8(a-c), 9(a-c)
RELATIONSHIPS	11, 12, 12a, 13, 14

EXPOSURE	10(a-c), 15, 17, 18, 19, 20, 22, 24
AWARENESS	16, 21, 23, 25, 27
ATTITUDE	26, 28
PERCEPTION	29, 30, 31
ABILITY	32, 33, 34, 35

Further elaborating upon the categories most relevant to the current study, EXPOSURE (see Appendix A) referred to media sources with an English presence such as television, movies, music, books and magazines, and the Internet. The majority of the questions were derived from previous studies examining the influence of media on language development (Kobayashi, 2001; Jordan, 2004; d'Ydewalle and Van de Poel, 1999). AWARENESS referred to the appearance and use of "English-derived terms" (Stanlaw, 2004) by native-Japanese speakers on television, in music, in magazines, and on websites. This category was intended to explore the lived experience of participants with regard to English in their environment (as explicitly stated by Bronfenbrenner). Items in the category PERCEPTION, dealing with the distinction between *katakana* and *romaji* in written form, also served the same purpose. The questions were modeled around Loveday's more comprehensive study of the social reception of English in Japan (1996).

Within the category ABILITY four measures were included: university English grades, finishing high school English grades, highest level of *Eiken* achieved, and highest score in the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC). These were utilized to offer a range of possible indicators of English ability and because it was not known how many participants had completed cach standardized test prior to administering the questionnaire.

Interviews

Interviews were conducted on a one-to-one basis between participant and native Japanese-speaking research assistant. A semi-structured format was selected to establish a general framework while providing variability for the interviewer to gather the richest data possible (Bernard, 1988). Questions primarily focused upon participant awareness of English outside of the classroom and determination of English vs. Japanese in terms of script form (e.g., chocolate vs. *chocoreto*). Script form was considered because it was unclear if Japanese speakers considered *katakana* forms (i.e., loanwords) as English or as Japanese-a distinction which would clearly affect how much English learners would identify. During the interview, participants were shown flashcards with different script forms and websites that mixed English and Japanese. All interviews were recorded and later transcribed and translated from Japanese to English by the project assistant.

FINDINGS

Questionnaire

Although data was collected from a broad range of variables, only the sections related to *English in the environment* (i.e., the variables EXPOSURE and AWARENESS) are presented below given the constraints of space and since these are most relevant to the primary focus of the study.

For exposure to English media, respondents were asked to select their answers from a 5-point Likert scale ranging from *never* = 1 to *very often* = 5. *Listen to English music*, returned the highest mean score at 3.18, with a SD = 1.213. The least popular option was *read English books or magazines* at 1.85 with a SD = 0.896. Table 2 presents the questions with the associated rank, number of respondents, mean, and standard deviation.

Table 2 – Exposure to English Language Media

Question	Rank	N	Mean	SD
Q15 – watch Eng movies or TV programs	5	99	2.24	.991
Q17 – see Eng movies at the theatre	3	98	2.61	1.136
Q18 – rent Eng movies	2	99	2.79	1.172
Q19 – listen to Eng music	1	98	3.18	1.213
Q20 – buy Eng music	4	99	2.40	1.332
Q22 – read Eng books or magazines	7	99	1.85	.896
Q24 – visit Eng Internet websites	6	99	2.09	1.031

Awareness of English use in Japanese media used the same 5-point scale. *Often hear Japanese singers use English lyrics*, revealed the highest mean score at 3.78 with a SD = 1.197. *Often see Japanese speak English on TV*, received the lowest mean score at 2.15 with a SD = 0.882. Table 3 provides the results for this section.

Table 3 –Awareness of English use in Japanese media

Question	Rank	N	Mean	SD
Q16 – see Japanese speak Eng on TV	4	97	2.15	.882
Q21 – hear Japanese singers use Eng lyrics	1	98	3.78	1.197
Q23 – see Eng in Japanese magazines	2	99	3.17	1.204
Q25 – see Eng on Japanese Internet sites	3	99	3.22	1.255

With regard to English ability, *high school English grade, university English grade and Eiken level* proved to be the most accessible measures. The majority of participants (83%) indicated that they had never written TOEIC, so this measure was dropped.

To explore the relationship between English in the environment and English ability, items from the category EXPOSURE were combined and items from the category AWARENESS were combined to form aggregate measures. A reliability analysis, calculating Cronbach's Alpha, was also conducted with both scales demonstrating fairly strong internal consistency (EXPOSURE=0.814, AWARENESS=0.745). Pearson product-moment correlation was then conducted with both measures (Table 4). Neither revealed a significant correlation with any of the ABILITY measures. However, the relationship between EXPSOURE and AWARENESS was modestly correlated with r = 0.333, p = 0.001. In viewing the correlation results, it is worth noting that correlation between individual factors in second/foreign language studies is often low given the complexity of the process. As explained by Skehan (1989), "second language learning studies yield correlations whose maximum values rarely approach +1, and are more likely to be of the order of 0.30 to 0.60…reflecting the multi-causal nature of language learning success" (p. 13-4).

Table 4 – Correlation Results for EXPOSURE, AWARENESS, and ABILITY

Variable		Q32- university	Q33- high school	Q34 - EIKEN level
EXPOSURE	Correlation	.089	.057	.198
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.388	.578	.053
AWARENESS	Correlation	.130	.139	-0.14
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.208	.178	.893

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The next set of procedures was intended to explore the relationship between the system variables (i.e. *microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem*) from Bronfenbrenner's model and English ability. To achieve this measure, index items were selected

for the micro- and meso- levels of the Ecological Systems Model. The variable STUDY represented the microsystem level, which was defined as a primary learning environment (i.e., the classroom). Thus, the *number of years of study in elementary school, middle school, and high school* were summed for each individual to determine total number of years of in-school English study. The variable RELATIONSHIPS represented the mesosystem (i.e., settings and relationships that served to connect primary developmental settings). After consulting the correlation matrix, the item *Often speak English with friends* was selected as the index for RELATIONSHIPS since most participants rarely or never spoke English with family members or others outside of the classroom. The aggregate measures for EXPOSURE and AWARENESS were included as exosystem factors, those that *do not directly engage* the learner but may still impact development. ATTITUDE and PERCEPTION did not represent a layer of the systems model, but factored in at the level of the individual (refer to Figure 1).

A multiple regression procedure was conducted to determine the overall impact of the above mentioned factors on English ability. University English grade and Eiken level were selected to represent English ability. High school grade was dropped from further analysis given that the majority of the participant group had completed study at this level and many of the factors would no longer be relevant. Setting *University English grade* as the dependent variable and entering independent variables from each level of the Systems Model returned a value of $R^2 = 0.157$. This suggests that the model, as a whole, has a relatively low predictive ability for University English grade. The F-score did indicate that the model was statistically significant with F = 2.739, p = 0.017. The only independent variable with a significant effect on the dependent variable was ATTITUDE with t = 2.874, p = 0.005. Table 5 summarizes the data output.

Table 5 – Regression Output for System Variables and University English Grade

Model	R^2	F	Sig.
1	.157	2.739	.017

	B	Std. Error	t	Sig.
(Constant)	1.439	1.018	1.413	.161
STUDY	.106	.103	1.026	.308
RELATIONSHIPS	.243	.154	1.580	.118
EXPOSURE	-.018	.018	-1.036	.303
AWARENESS	.019	.033	.569	.571
ATTITUDE	.281	.098	2.874	.005
PERCEPTION	-.069	.094	-.730	.467

With *Eiken Level* as the dependent variable, the regression procedure returned an identical $R^2 = 0.157$. Again, the model was overall significant with F = 2.739, p = 0.017. The variable ATTITUDE also factored significantly within this model yielding t = 2.194, p = 0.031. Table 6 summarizes the data output.

Table 6 – Regression Output for System Variables and Eiken Level

Model	R^2	F	Sig.
1	.157	2.739	.017

	B	Std. Error	t	Sig.
(Constant)	-.045	1.315	-.034	.973
STUDY	.206	.133	1.546	.126
RELATIONSHIPS	.272	.199	1.368	.175
EXPOSURE	.024	.023	1.050	.297
AWARENESS	-.041	.042	-.956	.342
ATTITUDE	.278	.127	2.194	.031
PERCEPTION	-.157	.122	-1.286	.202

Interviews

To reiterate, interviews were primarily included in this study to gain a better understanding of the envinoment from the learners' perspective. Participants were asked to identify where and how often they encountered English in their daily lives and to differentiate between script forms as being either English or Japanese. Multiple respondents indicated that *frequency of use or a feeling of familiarity* was more important than the type of script. In other words, an English term that was encountered frequently (e.g., in store windows, in newspapers, on TV), such as SALE or COFFEE, *felt* more like Japanese than English. Similarly, if an English term had been adopted with *katakana* pronunciation and the term was used often in daily speech, such as *chocoreto* (chocolate) or *takushi* (taxi), it was considered Japanese rather than English. Thus, much of the English that was present in the surrounding environment went unnoticed by the respondents: "*If I see it [English terms on signs or in advertising] all the time, I don't notice it that much*" (Participant B); *"Japanese people may speak an English word often, but I only hear Japanese"* (Participant D); *"English seems far away from me, so I don't think about it...except if I am in my English class or maybe watching an English movie"* (Participant E). Although the interviews were limited in number, the participants presented a much different conception of English in Japan, perhaps better characterized as "English-poor" than "English-rich", than was previously assumed.

DISCUSSION

The underlying motivation for this study was to explore the relationship between English inside and outside the classroom. The questionnaire component revealed that learners with greater exposure to English language media did not demonstrate stronger academic English ability. Neither did those with greater awareness of

English use in the Japanese media. However, exposure was moderately correlated to awareness. From this, it may be inferred that Japanese who *enjoy* various forms of English language media – "enjoy" being an appropriate characterization since these activities (e.g., watching movies and television, listening to music, reading books and magazines, and using the Internet) are generally voluntary – have greater ability to *recognize* English in the surrounding environment. This association appears unrelated to academic English ability, which is presumably motivated by another set of factors. This would lend support to the assertion that English taught in school remains distinct from English in the environment (Kobayashi, 2001; Reesor, 2003; Tsuneyoshi, 2005).

The evidence suggesting a continued divide was somewhat surprising in the current English environment evident in Japan. Framed in a historical context, it is not entirely difficult to see from where this division arose. English skills in Meiji-era Japan were originally required specifically for translation and the Japanese have long been cautious regarding the integration of foreign elements (Reesor, 2003; McVeigh, 2004; Seargeant, 2005). However, given the current popularity of English language media, particularly with younger Japanese, and the *value* of English skills (e.g., for entry into university, foreign study opportunities, job opportunities, and travel) in the modern setting, those barriers no longer seemed as though they would remain relevant. Findings from exposure to English language media supported the observation that movies, music and the Internet are quite popular among the university-age participants. They also indicated a very positive attitude toward English in different forms of media, most specifically with regard to television and movies.

Despite the persisting disjuncture between the "two Englishes", that found outside of the classroom could still prove a useful resource for teachers in Japan. Encouraging learners to *notice* English in their immediate environment and connecting this to in-class study could prove useful for increasing enjoyment and improving motivation. As indicated by the questionnaire findings, the university students included in this study did indicate enthusiasm and a positive attitude toward different forms of English language media. These sources are readily available in Japan and provide a real-world connection to incorporate into lessons. The English that is currently taught in the Japanese public school system has been frequently criticized as out-of-date and lacking in practical function. Thus, it seems reasonable that utilizing media, popular among younger Japanese, as a teaching tool could be beneficial.

Finally, turning to the appropriateness of the Ecological Systems Model as a tool to explore the broader language learning environment, the findings may be viewed as incomplete. None of the levels (micro-, meso-, and exo-) of the model returned significant results when measured against academic English ability. However, Bronfenbrenner did not explicitly identify *which* factors were to be included at each system level, with the exception of the microsystem as the primary learning environment. Each of the factors incorporated into this study was drawn from previous research with Japanese learners; however, there are many others which could have been explored, such as general aptitude for academics (i.e., current G.P.A.), other foreign languages previously or currently studied, hours of out-of-class study (e.g. homework), parents/peer group attitude toward English, and negative experiences with English, to cite but a few.

CONCLUSION

In summary, the study identified little or no relationship between English in the environment and English ability. In fact a strong division between English as a school subject and English in the environment appears to endure, despite the popularity and increasing presence of the latter. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Model did prove useful as a theoretical base for the study, but further, more in-depth research may be necessary to adequately explore the complex environment in which Japanese learners attempt to develop their English language skills.

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APPENDIX A – Questionnaire items for EXPOSURE and AWARENESS

*Responses for the items below were given along a 5-point Likert scale with 1=Never, 2=Rarely, 3=Sometimes, 4=Often, 5=Very often

AWARENESS

15) How often do you see English programs or movies on TV?

17) How often do you see English movies in a theatre?

18) How often do you rent English movies?

19) How often do you listen to English music?

20) How often do you buy English music? (CD, MP3, or others)

22) How often do you read English books or magazines?

24) How often do you visit English Internet websites?

EXPOSURE

16) How often do you see Japanese people use English on TV?

21) How often do you hear Japanese singers use English in songs?

23) How often do you see English in Japanese magazines?

25) How often do you see English on Japanese websites?