

COMPLETION REPORT

The Intelligibility of Japan Accented English to Listeners from ASEAN Nations

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Previous work on the intelligibility of Japanese English have focused on how intelligible Japanese speakers are to listeners from Inner Circle countries according to Kachru's three circle classification (Kachru 1988). This study extends the work as it investigates the responses of ASEAN listeners to Japanese English in terms of intelligibility as well as attitudes of the ASEAN listeners to the speakers. It was felt that the study is important as ASEAN is Japan's second largest trading partner and Japan is the second largest non-ASEAN investor in the ASEAN region (Mission of Japan to ASEAN 2015) as there are a number of Japanese staff working in Japanese organizations that are based in ASEAN countries. In addition, the close cooperation between Japan and the ASEAN countries in education as well as in the social and cultural arenas necessitate much interaction between their people with English often used as the lingua franca.

Three listeners from each ASEAN country, namely Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam (total of thirty listeners) transcribed recordings of three female Japanese speakers talking in English about their memorable holidays. The Japanese speakers were all university graduates employed in professional positions in Thailand. The listeners had all studied to tertiary level. The listeners also completed a questionnaire to rate their opinions regarding the status and intelligibility of the English used by the Japanese speakers based on a Likert scale of one to five where five indicated that the listeners agreed the most with the statement and one indicated the least amount of agreement. The transcriptions were analyzed and the number of correct words transcribed for each speaker was counted and converted into percentages for ease of comparison. Comparisons were done following Kachru's Three Circles model (Kachru 1988) which divides World Englishes into three categories following the function, types of spread and patterns of acquisition of English where the Inner Circle countries comprise countries where English is traditionally used as a native language such as UK, Australia and the United States of America, Outer Circle countries where English is a second language such as Philippines and Singapore and Expanding circle countries where English is a foreign language such as Laos and Vietnam.

The ASEAN listeners viewed the status of the Japanese speakers positively as seen in the median scores of ratings for each of the statements presented in the questionnaire. It implies that ASEAN listeners are accepting of the accent and variety of English used by the Japanese speakers despite their distinctive accent.

The results of this study indicate that although the ASEAN listeners found Japanese English to be intelligible, the ASEAN listeners from Expanding Circle countries, namely Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam found Japanese English less intelligible compared to listeners from Outer Circle ASEAN countries which comprise Brunei, Malaysia, Philippines and Singapore. This implies that Japanese speakers need to take greater effort to improve the intelligibility of their English when interacting with people from Expanding

Circle ASEAN countries. Japanese organizations that send personnel to Expanding Circle ASEAN nations might also want to take action to ensure the intelligibility of English used by their personnel so that they will be able to function more effectively. We were unable to pinpoint the actual patterns of difficulty faced by listeners from each specific ASEAN country due to the small number of listeners from individual countries and future research could pay attention to this. The focus of Japanese speakers when communicating in English with ASEAN listeners should be to on fluency and clarity rather than minimizing their Japanese accent.

Kachru, B. (1988). The sacred cows of English. *English Today* 16:3-8.

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