

# Sociolinguistic Profile of English in East Asia

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**Abstract**-In modern world all spheres of people's life - politics, economy and culture - are under the influence of globalization process. People should have a common means of communication - a lingua franca - if they want to cooperate mutually beneficially in modern world. The English language is such lingua franca, a means of cross-cultural communication, for many nations of different cultural and ethnic background, as about 1.5 billion people speak English today. English, being a global language, gave rise to many varieties in different parts of the world, Asian Englishes among them. The article deals with sociolinguistic profile of English and history of its development in China, Japan and Korea. Users and uses of English in East Asia also have their own lingua franca, showing impact on East-Asian languages and attitude to it.

**Keywords**-*language variety, intercultural communication, China English, Japanese English, Korean English, English language proficiency*

## I. INTRODUCTION

The English language is in great demand in East Asia, as well as in other parts of the world. The number of students learning the language in East Asia has increased greatly in recent years. Only in China over 300 million people are learning English now. Japan has started an English-speaking project for native speakers. In Korea teaching programs for primary schools were launched some decades ago and have been successfully used in schools for many years already, as new national varieties of English are to emerge.

## II. ENGLISH IN CHINESE SOCIETY

### A. History

First contacts between English speakers and the Chinese were registered in 1637, when four British ships arrived in Macau and Canton during their expedition. It took the whole century for Chinese Pidgin English (later called "broken English", jargon, mixed dialect, or Canton English) to emerge as a lingua franca, being used by natives and foreigners in the ports of South China. [2] It was extensively used by Chinese merchants and foreign traders, who contributed greatly to its development. Later the Chinese government banned the communication between Chinese inhabitants and foreigners, denouncing such natives as traitors. [2] After the first Anglo-Chinese War (1839 - 1842) Chinese Pidgin English began to be widely used in such big port cities, as Shanghai, becoming the only lingua franca not only between local people and

foreign traders, but also among those Chinese who spoke different provincial dialects, difficult for understanding.

The Treaty of Tientsin of 1862 opened many places in China to western countries, though there had already existed long international contacts between natives and foreigners. Missionaries from the West started many schools throughout China, in which English was either taught or used as a medium of the learning process. At the beginning of 20th century Chinese English began to show social stratification in its educated and pidgin varieties. At that time in China appeared first writings in educated English by Lin Yutang and John Wu. This period lasted up to the end of the Qing dynasty and beginning of the Republican era.

The People's Republic of China was established in 1949. This event brought great changes in many spheres of people's life. School curriculum changed English into Russian as a foreign language, as the Chinese new government applied to the USSR for help and nation building project. [6] After Cultural Revolution failed in 1976, the English language returned its original position and popularity, as the new country modernization and economic development policy was announced.

### B. Current English Language Teaching Situation

For many Chinese students the English language is considered the most important language due to the possibility of international exchange and well-paid jobs. Even a primary school English textbook starts with the following preface: "English is usually used at international settings, and it is also a tool to grasp advanced scientific and technological information. In accordance with our country's reform and open-door policies, it is essential that we learn English properly". [4] It means that today Chinese government makes learning and teaching English very important for the renewed country's policy. Children start learning English in grade 3 at schools. All levels of education in China include the English language in their teaching programs as one of the most efficient subjects. Very many of such programs are shown on TV and broadcast on the radio. At the tertiary level of education students take national College English Test (CET) and get CET Band 4/6 Certificate, the results of which have high social value. Major Chinese Universities have already adopted the policy of "no CET 4/6 certificate, no graduation diploma". Every year more than 6 million students take this test. The China Public English Test System (PETS) certificate is also of a high value, as PETS

certificate is regarded as an official measure of English language proficiency. [11]

### *C. China English - not Chinese English*

At the beginning of the 21st century it became evident that Chinese varieties of English were rapidly developing as China became one of the most economically important countries in Asia, where English is in great demand.

English language specialists in China consider the term "China English" more linguistically friendly than "Chinese English", as they say that "Chinese" in this phrase sounds rather derogatory, like "Chinese Pidgin English". China English is considered to be an educated variety of English, which is rather difficult for Chinese speakers to reach and use to exercise their cultural norms and behavioral patterns. [8]

China English lexicon is of great interest, as it is characterized by an increasing appearance of Chinese words and expressions into English in China. Chinese newspapers "China Daily", "Shanghai Daily", "Beijing Today" have many of these expressions on their pages: "barefoot doctor", "great leap forward", "paper tiger", "reform through physical labor", "red guard", "to replace cadres with new cadres", "planned commodity economy", "iron bowl of rice", "one-family-one-child policy", "four modernizations", etc.

The concept "face" in application to personal's respect and identity in Asian countries is very essential, so word-combinations with the component "face" are often used in China English: "lose face", "face negotiation", "maintain face", "hold up the Chinese face to the world", "have no face left", "rather die to save face", "group face", etc. [7]

China English suits Chinese-based pragmatics perfectly, as Chinese discourse organization is "indirect and inductive" according to the traditional model of rhetorical structuring. [3]

These peculiarities of China English can sometimes be the cause of serious international and cross-cultural problems. So while teaching English to non-native speakers, we should take into account this diversity and cultural background.

## III. ENGLISH IN JAPANESE SOCIETY

### *A. History*

March, 1600 was the time when English was first introduced into Japan. English captain of a Dutch ship William Adams landed on the western coast of Japan after a shipwreck. William Adams lived in Japan for a long time and was even given a new name - Miura Anjin - in the Japanese fashion. His work was so successful that he managed to acquire Shogun Tokugawa Iyeyasu's personal trust and did much as a mediator for cooperation between the Japanese ruler and Great Britain's King James I. [12] However, Japanese officials did not learn English as a foreign language for a long time, because according to the national insulation policy Japan did not allow foreign

relations with any countries, except the Dutch. Only at the beginning of the nineteenth century, when the Dutch influence in the world lessened, shogunate understood the need of English as a source of getting international information. Practically, one of the first teachers of English in Japan was Jan Cock, a Dutch trade officer. Japanese samurai and other intellectuals were his first pupils. He used Dutch textbooks, which he brought, using Japanese and Dutch as languages of instruction. [10]

In the middle of the 19th century at the time of Meiji Restoration the government realized that the country could not do without English, if they need modernization in all spheres of life. So English language teaching was introduced at schools in major cities, English textbooks being brought from the United States and the United Kingdom and used in teaching not only English, but also other main subjects. Tokyo Imperial University invited foreign professors from many countries, who lectured there in their languages, later Japanese professors replaced their foreign counterparts.

After the World War II English language teaching was reinvigorated, and English was emphasized as an essential key for the global community.

### *B. Japanese English*

The greatest influence of the English language on the Japanese is on the lexical level, it makes many people believe that it will result in the decay of their national language. In 2003 the National Institute for Japanese Language suggested about one hundred Japanese words and word-combinations that might be used in Japanese context, among them: "access", "agenda", "analyst", etc. But it didn't work, as borrowed words denote new concepts that cannot be easily expressed in Japanese. In fact the Japanese need badly these foreign words to work efficiently in the global world. They even propose that the English language should become a second official language in Japan, as it is a language of international information, communication and cooperation. In some Japanese companies English has already become such a language, in others TOEIC English proficiency is a must for job promotion.

Japan is sometimes regarded as a closed nation, because of the information lack, as very little is sometimes known overseas about Japan. Much information is distributed in Japanese for domestic use only and little is prepared in English for international consumption. If business organizations want to attract international interest to their activities, they should use the English language to be understood everywhere in the world. [4] It is well known that it is sometimes very difficult for the Japanese to get a good command of English. The University of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology started the program to cultivate "Japanese with English abilities". The current aim of this program is to give the Japanese good proficiency in the English language.

Japanese English actually is a set of words and word-combinations Japanese speakers use in every day speech after years of classroom exercise. [5] Some of them are often used as Japanese-originated English: nighter (bargain), washlet, hot carpet or paper driver, etc. The use of my - as prefix - is considered a Japanese neologism: I have two my-cars; Did you come here in my-car? The use of -up/-down this year, etc.

Japanese speakers of English tend to choose patterns, which they find easy to use both structurally and functionally

#### IV. ENGLISH IN KOREAN SOCIETY

##### A. History

English language teaching in Korea has a long history, which goes back to the beginning of 20th century. But only at the end of 20th century it was introduced in all primary schools as an obligatory subject. Special attention in English language teaching is paid to communicative and practical proficiency.

High school graduates in Korea are required to take College Scholastic Ability Test (CSAT), if they wish to go to the university.

CSAT (College Scholastic Ability Test) includes:

- communicative competences;
- listening comprehension test;
- speech fluency over accuracy;
- no paper-and-pencil test of pronunciation or spelling.[9]

At the end of the 20th century there were calls on the government to make English a nation's second language, as it will promote Korea's national identity in the global world considerably, if the Koreans know English. In some companies English is used as the language of corporative communication.[13] Today young people are inclined to use English whenever they have such an opportunity.

##### B. Korean English

The intensive use of English in Korea gave rise to Konglish, the pattern Korean students tend to employ. There is even Morning Special radio program for English learners called "MS Konglish Dictionary". This program reflects how Korean users "struggle" with English in their linguistic and cultural contexts. The most typical mistakes are: use of additional preposition with adverts denoting place; double negation in one sentence; disagreement of subject and predicate in number; use of the indefinite article with a plural noun, etc.

Most of these phenomena can be seen in native language basilectal and mesolectal varieties of some Outer- and Expanding-Circle countries as a result of inter-linguistic contacts and inhabitat, which do not cause communication problems.

#### V. CONCLUSION

There is no doubt that extensive growth of trade and intercultural communication in Asia today will give rise to the use of English as a lingua franca, a language of international communication. New Asian varieties of English will develop, so people in East Asia will consider English an Asian language, as it has already happened in South and Southeast Asia. [1]

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