English in the Japanese Linguistic Landscape: An Awareness-Raising Activity Examining *Place*, *Form*, and *Reason*

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Abstract

The Japanese linguistic landscape offers a space beyond the classroom in which to engage Japanese learners of English with a critical examination of the English in their environment. Such an opportunity for continued learning beyond the classroom is of particular value in English as a Foreign Language contexts where exposure to the target language outside of formal classes is limited. This article reports on an awareness-raising activity which involved students first receiving a lecture on the Japanese linguistic landscape focused on the themes of *place* (where English can be found), *form* (in what ways English is used), and *reason* (the purposes of using English). Students were then asked to critically examine the English in their linguistic landscape outside of the classroom over the following week, framed within the three themes, and then submit a 400-word English report discussing what particular features they noticed. Using a corpus-based analysis of the reports, it was found that students had noticed and further explored not only things discussed in the lecture, but also their own insights and discoveries into where, how, and why English was used around them.

1. Introduction

The linguistic landscape of a place comprises the "linguistic objects that mark the public space" (Ben-rafael, Shohamy, Amara, & Trumper-Hecht, 2006, p. 7), and this space can allow anyone to "see the world through the eyes of a sociolinguist, who questions how and why people use language differently according to different social identities or purposes" (Sayer, 2010, p. 153). This article reports on an awareness-raising activity conducted at a Japanese university which encouraged students to critically engage with English in their own linguistic landscape. The purpose of the activity was to promote the linguistic landscape beyond the classroom as a "learning space and input source" (Aladjem, 2016, p. 66), by having students critically examine the forms and functions of English in the public spaces around them. Exploiting learning spaces beyond the class-

room is particularly valuable in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts, where opportunities to engage and interact with English are limited.   As such, the activity was envisaged as a pedagogically-valuable research activity in which to engage the students in a critical examination of the English that surrounds them, of which they may have limited conscious awareness.

In an awareness-raising lecture given to all students in the Department of English, specific focus was given to the three major themes of *place*, *form*, and *reason*: with *place* concerning the physical contexts where the English is used, such as signboards, clothing, and product packaging; *form* concerning how the English appears visually, such as grammatical patterns and orthography; and *reason* concerning why the English appears in these contexts in these forms.   Students were guided through an hour-long lecture conducted by the author, which used personal photographs of the linguistic landscape to highlight each of the themes and involved students having short, pair discussions on what they noticed in each photograph.   Students were then asked in the week following the lecture to critically analyse their own linguistic landscape framed within these three themes of place, form, and reason.   They were given a homework assignment to submit a 400-word English report at the end of the week in answer to the question: What interesting things can you notice about the use of English in the linguistic landscape around you?   It was anticipated that students would further explore the themes raised in the lecture, and was also hoped that they would discuss their own insights and findings from being critically engaged with the English around them.   In order to analyse these writings for their content, they were composed into a corpus and analysed using corpus linguistics software. Aspects of lexical frequency, common lexical phrasings (also called clusters or N-grams), and lexical collocations were analysed for how they indicated which themes had been taken up by the students and in what ways they were being discussed in their writings.

2.   Researching the Japanese Linguistic Landscape

The Japanese linguistic landscape is an omnipresent expression of the country's rich history of language contact, shown through the use of multiple languages and numerous scripts regularly combined on a single sign.   Whilst contact with China has had the most profound overall impact on the current form of the Japanese language, in modern times it is vocabulary from the English language which is most extensively and innovatively

adapted for integration into Japanese society (Irwin, 2011; Stanlaw, 2004).   Despite mainly taking the form of individual lexical items, or in rarer cases, short lexical phrases, the novel ways in which English is incorporated into the Japanese language and displayed in places such as shop signs, road markings, and product packaging makes the Japanese linguistic landscape an area rich for academic research (Backhaus, 2010; Barrs, 2011).   In such research, not only can the language itself be investigated, but also the pragmatic functions which the language serves, and the attitudes which people hold towards this language usage.

The most extensive study of the Japanese linguistic landscape so far conducted was carried out on the language of signs in Tokyo, with the principal finding that the signs reflect "nascent multilingualism in Tokyo" in the form of "increasing linguistic diversity in the Japanese capital" (Backhaus, 2007, p. 64).   The study examined an initial collection of 11,834 signs gathered from 28 survey areas around the Yamanote rail line in central Tokyo, Japan; with 2,444 of these being classed as multilingual and being taken forward to the next stage of analysis.   In the next stage, the signs were examined from three theoretical angles: who created the signs, who were they created for, and what aspects of language usage do they contain?   Backhaus finds that although English is by far the most dominant non-Japanese language used on the signs, there is also strong evidence of other-language communities in Japan expressing themselves in written form through the use of their native languages, such as Chinese and Korean.   Backhaus' overall conclusion is that Japan's "much-quoted monolingualism is about to lose relevance in a globalizing world" (Backhaus, 2007, p. 146).   This finding gives strength to the argument that the Japanese linguistic landscape can be a convenient and vibrant "learning space and input source" in terms of supplying students with authentic examples of language usage.   In particular, his finding that almost 93% of the 2,444 signs in his sample contained English shows that the Japanese linguistic landscape can offer Japanese students of English a rich environment for exposure to the target language.

With a specific focus on how the linguistic landscape can be of pedagogical benefit to language learners, Rowland conducted a classroom activity which focused on students investigating the question of "how and why is English used on signs in Japan?" (Rowland, 2013, p. 497).   The activity involved 27 students recording instances of English usage in the linguistic landscape around them in their daily lives, bringing the photos into class, and categorising them based on their own views and opinions as to how and why English was

being used.　This was followed by having the students write up their conclusions in reports of between 500 to 1,000 words.　These reports were then analysed by the author of the research for whether or not "claims made in the literature about the pedagogical benefits of linguistic landscape projects could be identified in EFL students' written work" (2013, p. 503).　His overall conclusion was that the Japanese linguistic landscape is indeed a valuable space for students to engage with English beyond the classroom, allowing the students to concentrate their attention on the "semantic, syntactical, pragmatic, and symbolic features of the English language as it is used by Japanese people in Japanese society" (2013, p. 503).　It should be noted, however, that it is not just 'Japanese people' who contribute to the language in the Japanese linguistic landscape, with this point being particularly stressed in Backhaus' study where he states that "Tokyo's two major linguistic minority groups in certain parts of the city have started to visually make their presence felt" (2007, p. 142).

Wang (2015) is a further example of a linguistic landscape study focused on Japan which involved a comprehensive survey of student opinions as to the use of non-Japanese languages.　In this case, the attention was not only on English, but non-Japanese languages in general, as used on signs within a Japanese university campus.　251 signs were photographed and categorised according to the number and type of languages they contained.　70 students (35 Japanese and 35 overseas) were then surveyed for their opinions on the use of different languages and the importance that these languages seemed to have been afforded.　The focus of this study was primarily on the *reason* for English on the signs, with students commenting that multilingual signs were necessary to support the overseas students in their campus life.　Overall both the Japanese and overseas students supported the idea that English was the most necessary foreign language on the signs, although it was also considered important for future globalisation of the campus to possibly include a wider variety of languages.

In a similar vein to Wang's (2015) focus on Japanese students' views and opinions towards the use of multilingual signs in Japan, and Rowland's (2013) more specific focus on opinions and attitudes towards the use of English on signs in Japan, the current research was conducted to encourage students at the author's university to engage with English-language usage in the environment beyond the classroom.　As noted by Rowland, students can be unaware that English actually exists in this landscape (2013, p. 497), and this is particularly the case when English is encoded in the Japanese script of katakana,

which masks the direct association between the lexical item and its roots back in the English language (Barrs, 2011). Indeed, Rowland states that "English in the Japanese LL [Linguistic Landscape] is abundant and it provides a wealth of both literal and symbolic information (Backhaus 2007), yet at the start of the current project, many of the students disputed this" (2013, p. 503). The current research was conducted to explore which themes from the explicit awareness-raising lecture given to the students would be picked up and used in the written reports of what they noticed in the linguistic landscape in the week following the lecture. In addition, the research aimed to investigate if students would bring their own insights and findings into the discussion, and if so, what these would be.

3. Methodology

This section gives details of how the corpus was compiled and analysed in order to explore the themes which students had discussed in their writings. Following the 60-minute awareness-raising lecture on English in the linguistic landscape, students in attendance (n=115) were required to submit a typed paper-based 400-word report in English which answered the following question: What interesting things can you notice about English in the linguistic landscape around you? They were required to submit the report within one week after the lecture. 101 reports were submitted and these were scanned into Word files with Optical Character Recognition (OCR) software. The files were then cleaned by removing identifying names and student numbers, and incorrect scans of words and characters were checked and fixed by referring to the original paper submissions. Spelling and grammar mistakes were not corrected if they were problems with the students' original submissions rather than in the OCR scanning. This was to keep the writings authentic student submissions and to avoid possible ambiguities and inconsistencies in how to approach the error correction.

The files were then compiled into a single corpus, with the individual file structure maintained to facilitate more fine-grained analysis in later stages of the research. The corpus compilation involved batch converting the .docx files into .txt format and including them all in a single folder. The folder was then uploaded into the freeware corpus analysis software AntConc (Anthony, 2014), created and maintained by Laurence Anthony. This software allows text concordancing and analysis to be conducted on any user-com-

piled corpus, and facilitates detailed analyses of word frequency, phrasal clustering, and collocational behaviour.　In most cases, except where stated below, the default options of each function in AntConc were used.

4.　Analysis

The first analysis run on the corpus was word frequency.　This was done using the default options of the *Word List* function of AntConc.　Figure 1 shows the AntConc software *Word List* function interface and the top ranked words by frequency from the corpus. The software first gives summary statistics on the corpus as whole, showing that of the 37,843 words in the corpus (i.e. word *tokens*) 3,004 are different words (i.e. word *types*).　It then gives detailed statistics of which words are most frequently used in the corpus, their rank within a listing of all the word types in the corpus, and their frequency in the corpus. As an example, the most frequently used word in this corpus is *English*, with a frequency of 1,549.　It is possible to click on each word in the list and get a filtered view of the concordance lines of that word across all the individual writings.　This word list was then manually scanned to identify frequent words reflecting common themes which had been previously discussed in the student writings, and any new themes which seemed to be appearing.　As is shown in Figure 1, even within just the most frequent 16 words in the
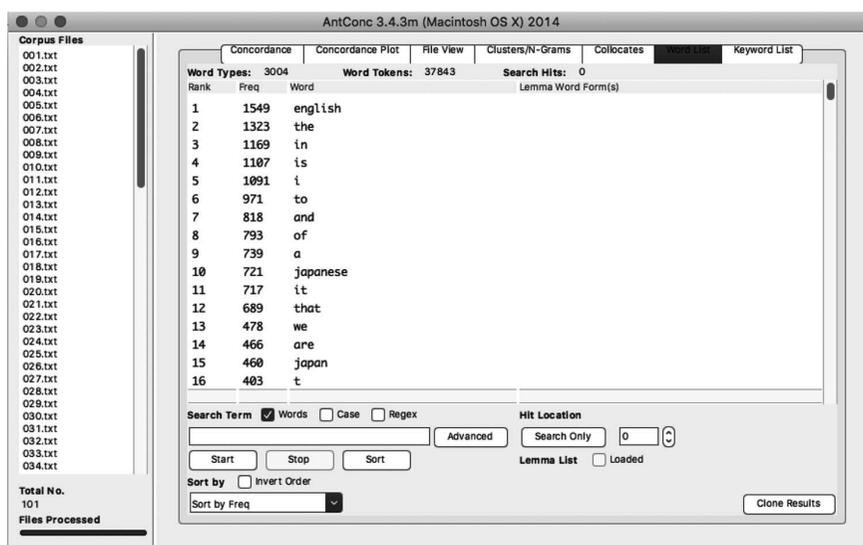

Figure 1.　The interface of the *Word List* function in AntConc corpus analysis software.

corpus there is a sharp drop in frequency. This is because of the small number of word tokens in the corpus, and the fact that 49.7% of the words were used only once, known in corpus linguistics as Hapax legomenon (meaning a word that occurs only once within a defined context). This follows Zipf's law that predicts around half of the words in a corpus will be used only once. As a result, only the top 200 most frequent words were used in further stages of analysis, as these had a medium to high level of frequency. Data of the number of word types at several different frequency levels is shown in Table 1. The dominant words and themes in the student writings will be presented and discussed in the following sections.

The next stage of the analysis involved investigating in more detail the themes suggested by the frequent words in the corpus. AntConc provides two functions which allow the deep analysis of the lexical and grammatical context of a word: *Clusters/N-Gram* and *Collocates*. The collocates function uses a span of words to the left and right of the search word to extract the frequent words with which the search word collocates, and then applies a statistic to measure the strength of association between the search word and these frequent collocations. Whilst this function can be an extremely powerful lexical analysis tool for corpora with a large number of word tokens/types, when the corpus is much smaller in scale, like the one used in the present research, the results of a collocational analysis are often of limited value. There are two interrelated causes of this: (1) the low frequency of collocations, and (2) weaknesses in the measures of association when word frequency is low.

Overall, the smaller the number of tokens in the corpus the lower the number of collocations that will hold between the words. This then can cause problems when a mea-

Table 1. **The number of word types at selected frequency levels.**

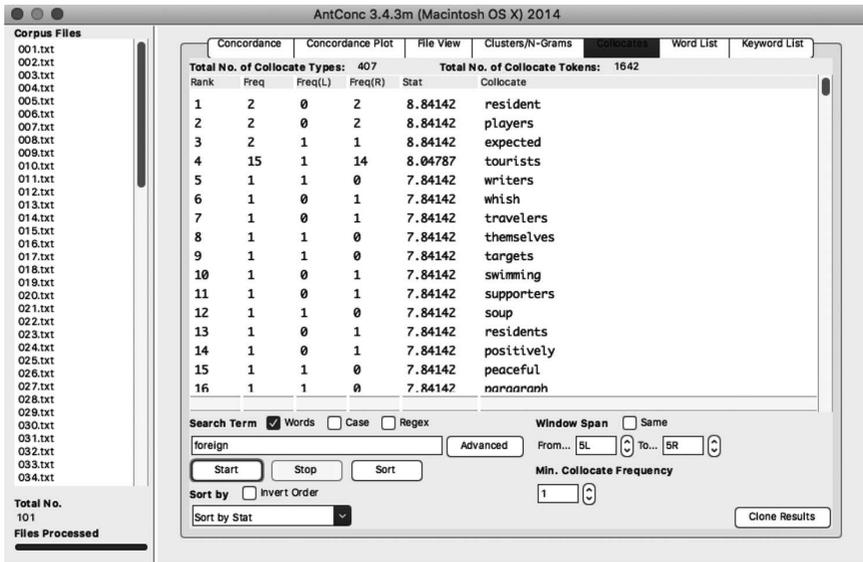| Rank Level	Word Types	% of Total	Cumulative %
1000 +	5	0.16	0.16
500–999	7	0.23	0.39
100–499	56	1.9	2.29
10–99	340	11.3	13.59
2–9	1102	36.7	50.9
1	1494	49.7	100
Total	**3004**	**100**	**100**

Figure 2. The interface of the *Collocates* function with the MI statistic, for the word *foreign*.

sure of association is used to rank the collocates based on their strength of association with the search word. AntConc uses the default statistic of Mutual Information (MI) in the collocates function, but this has the weakness of bringing low-frequency collocations to the top of the list. As can be seen in Figure 2, the top ranked collocates of the word *foreign* all have a very low frequency, with twelve of them having a frequency of just one occurrence. It is possible to change the statistic to T-Score, which as shown in Figure 3 brings collocates with a higher frequency to the top of the list. However, especially when working with small corpora, this measure of association also includes many highly-predictable grammar collocations, such as *the*, *to*, and *in*. This makes it very similar to a pure word frequency list.

Because of these limitations with the *Collocates* function when a small-scale corpus is analysed, for the present research it was decided to use the *Clusters/N-Grams* function to further lexically analyse the themes which were suggested by the high-frequency words in the corpus. This analysis tool focuses on strictly adjacent collocates, often called N-Grams, rather than collocates which can appear anywhere in a user-defined span, as with the *Collocates* function of AntConc described above. Figure 4 shows an example *Cluster/ N-Gram* analysis of the search word *foreign*, using AntConc's default settings.
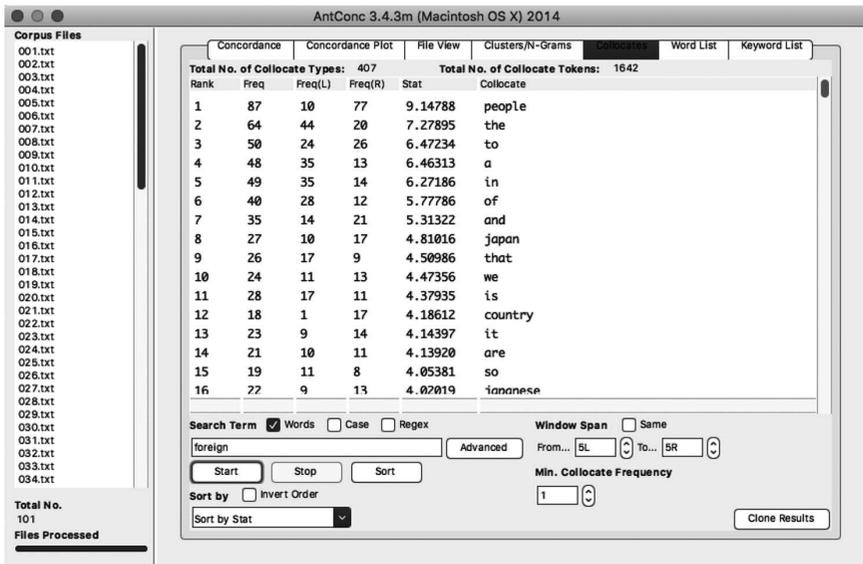
Figure 3. The interface of the *Collocates* function with T-Score statistic, for the word *foreign*.
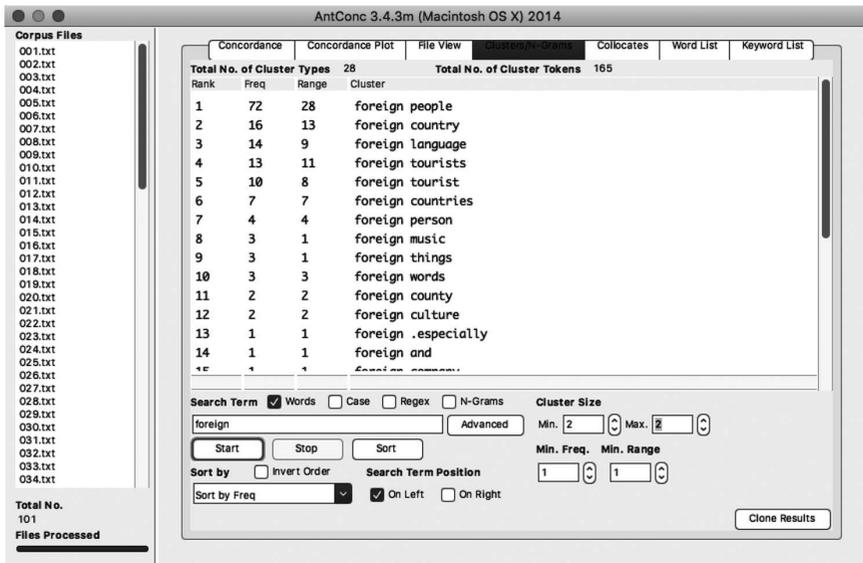

Figure 4. The interface of the *Clusters/N-Grams* function of AntConc, for the word *foreign*.

5. Discussion

As previously explained, the focus of this research was to explore in what ways students had picked up and written about specific themes concerning English in their linguis-

tic landscape.　The three themes which had been included in an awareness-raising classroom-based lecture were: *place*, *form*, and *reason*.　More specifically, the lecture contained details of the wide array of *places* where English is found in the Japanese linguistic landscape, with specific attention paid to signboards and clothing as particularly visible contexts.　In terms of *form*, it was discussed in the lecture how English appears in a wide variety of visual representations, focusing specifically on the accuracy of spelling and syntactical patterns and the choice of orthography.　Concerning the *reason* for the English, several topics were presented such as the use of English as a fashion symbol in Japan and as an attention-getter due to its marked usage compared to native and Sino-Japanese words.　The following sections focus on each of these themes and show how they were picked up and commented on by the students.

5.1.　The *Place* of English in the Japanese Linguistic Landscape

　　Within the most frequent 200 words of the corpus, several were indicative of the theme of *place*, and it appeared that students had taken up the main linguistic landscape contexts of clothing and signs, as had been discussed in the lecture.　Students seemed to be paying attention to English in these contexts in their own linguistic landscape, examining in what ways the English was used.　Table 2 shows the words which were considered to be related to the *place* theme.　The last column in the table shows range, which is the number of student writings which contained that word.　This gives an overall indication of how prevalent the word was across the whole corpus.

　　Using the *Clusters/N-Gram* function of AntConc, these words were explored in more detail to see in what ways they were being used.　The clusters *clothes written* and *(T-) shirt*

Table 2.　List of words (in most-frequent 200) related to *place*.

Rank	Word	Frequency	Range (out of 101)
49	clothes	130	39
54	shirt	127	41
72	wear	93	41
93	shirts	69	25
106	signboard	55	24
160	wearing	34	24
163	sign	33	15

written show students talking about the English written on Japanese clothing, with examples given of words which students considered to be funny and/or rude which they noticed on the clothing.   One student commented "I am careful not to wear clothes written in English in foreign countries".   An interesting feature related to place, not given much time in the lecture but taken up by several of the students was the use of Japanese/ Chinese in foreign countries on clothing.   Students commented that they had often noticed strange Japanese on Western clothing, but hadn't given much thought to the English on Japanese clothing in their own environment.

Related to signs and signboards, students didn't discuss this context as much as the previous one of clothing, and it was often referred to as part of a list of linguistic landscape contexts, such as *signboard and guideboard*, or *signboard and clothing*.   Several students did however comment that they hadn't paid much attention to English on signs before, but now had begun to question why it was there.   As an example, one student thought the signs with English might be useful for foreigners visiting the city, and had just thought that the English was correct.   They commented that now they realise companies might just "translate the English on signboards with website translation.   It is not always correct". Overall students seemed to have become more conscious that even in their daily Japanese lives, English surrounds them.   They had noticed English on clothing, signs, and stationery which they wrote they had not given much attention to before.   Having noticed more of this English around them, it was clear from the writings that students were then giving thought to how the English was being used.

5.2.   The *Form* of English in the Japanese Linguistic Landscape

The issue of incorrect English usage in the Japanese linguistic landscape was the most emphasised theme in the awareness-raising lecture, and seems to have similarly been picked up and explored by the students.   The word *wrong* was a very frequent word in the corpus, and appeared in just over half of the writings.   Some of the bi-grams (2 adjacent words) using *wrong* were: *wrong English*, *wrong spelling*, *wrong meaning*, *wrong words*, *wrong pronunciation*, and *wrong expression*.   This was true also of the words *funny* and *strange* which also had bi-grams such as *funny/strange meaning*, *funny/strange signs*. Relating back to the previous theme of *place*, several students used the tri-gram *funny English t-shirts*.

From a pedagogical point of view, this activity seems to have been particularly useful

Table 3. List of words (in most-frequent 200) related to *form*.

Rank	Word	Frequency	Range (out of 101)
45	wrong	141	51
51	understand	129	66
74	funny	87	41
79	means	82	43
82	strange	79	39
123	correct	44	24
158	mistakes	34	21

for encouraging students to look up the meanings of English words they noticed around them and in some cases students offered what they believed to be more appropriate translations.   Focusing on one of the student's writings in particular, they gave the example of English on a t-shirt printed as 'Sunny Town Erection Party', which they noticed had mistaken the word 'erection' for 'election'.   They then made the very observant comment that "a little mistake makes a big change of meaning for what [the] company wants to tell the customer".   Overall, the students' writings seem to reflect a common situation of not having previously paid much attention to the English around them, but now being aware not only of the presence of English but also that much of it might possibly be incorrect in terms of grammar and meaning.

5.3. The *Reason* of English in the Japanese Linguistic Landscape

Four key words were extracted from the word list which indicated student discussions of the *reason* for having such a large amount of English in the Japanese linguistic landscape.   These are shown in Table 4.   The first three words are focused on an outward perspective from a Japanese standpoint, thinking of foreign people visiting or living

Table 4. List of words (in most-frequent 200) related to *reason*.

Rank	Word	Frequency	Range (out of 101)
38	foreign	165	64
85	foreigners	77	35
97	foreigner	65	30
137	cool	40	29

in Japan and the English they will encounter.　This is expressed in the lexical clusters *foreign people come to* and *when foreigners come to* and was finished with words such as *Japan* and *sushi restaurant*.　These clusters were often concerned with foreigners being puzzled, or confused by the English they see in Japan.　But like the theme of *place* discussed above, there were several mentions of foreigners wearing clothing with strange Japanese, which they likened to Japanese people wearing clothing with strange English. Although this is a valid point, it must be remembered that looking up the meaning of kanji in a dictionary for a non-Japanese person is a vastly more complicated task than a Japanese person looking up the meaning of an English word.

The word *cool* was particularly interesting as it was used to suggest that the reason for using English was often more for fashion than direct communication of semantic meaning.　One student commented that "things become cool when written in English" and there were several other mentions of *cool design*, and *cool image*.　In this way students had picked up the theme from the lecture that not all English in Japan is meant for a foreign audience, and therefore there is likely to be variation in its accuracy of use, depending on the function.　Overall, the writings showed that students had explored several different functions of English in Japan and had begun to think about who the intended audience was of the English usage.　They seemed to understand that if the audience was likely to be a non-Japanese one, then the use of English was more likely to be correct.　Connected to this, several students wrote that they hoped all English would be used correctly in the future, otherwise the image of Japanese people using English would remain negative.

6.　Conclusion

This research aimed to engage students in a pedagogically-valuable activity that encouraged them to critically engage with the linguistic landscape around them, at the same time as producing data which could be used for an investigation into what features they were noticing about the English around them.　The principal value of the activity was in extending learning beyond the classroom, by exploiting the linguistic landscape as a learning space and input source for exposure to English.　In an EFL setting such as Japan, this kind of activity can increase the opportunities for students to be actively involved in English learning.　From the corpus-based analysis of the students' writings it was found that they had picked up and further explored the main themes presented in the

lecture of the *place*, *form*, and *reason* for the use of English in the Japanese linguistic landscape. Furthermore, it was found that students had begun to explore some of their own insights and findings, such as relating the incorrect use of English on Japanese clothing to situations they had noticed before of incorrect Japanese on Western clothing. Future directions of this research should involve a larger corpus of student writings to allow a more in-depth lexical analysis of word frequency and collocations. This would help to explore the themes in more detail and to uncover richer insights than was possible with the present small-scale corpus.

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