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Journal of English for Academic Purposes

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/jeap

Academic English and elite masculinities

Roslyn Appleby

Faculty of Arts & Social Sciences, University of Technology Sydney, PO Box 123 Broadway, NSW 2007, Australia

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:
Available online xxx

ABSTRACT

This paper addresses the ways in which the teaching of English for academic purposes by 'Western' teachers in Japanese higher education institutions is shaped by gender and sexuality. The paper draws on findings from a 5 year ethnographic study of white Western teachers of English in Japan. Drawing on interview data with 18 male participants, the paper points to the way elite status is attached to the teaching of English for academic purposes (TEAP) in contrast with teaching general English; the way TEAP is reproduced as a male-dominated activity among English-native-speaker teachers; and the way white Western men teaching in these contexts display an enhanced professional masculinity. Discourses articulated by the men also serve to position gendered Others as illegitimate or unworthy participants in TEAP. Although the men's accounts tend to frame TEAP as a rational, disembodied, asexual occupation, the paper argues that gender and sexuality are deployed as identity gatekeeping tools that serve to police the borders of academic English as an elite, male-dominated professional category. In closing, I make proposals for transformation of gendered hierarchies in this context, but these would require shifts in deep-seated cultural, institutional, and interpersonal gender ideologies.

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1. Introduction

This paper considers the ways in which the teaching of English for Academic Purposes (TEAP) may be shaped by discourses of gender and sexuality. It draws on data generated in a 5 year ethnographic research project that sought to investigate the effects of gender and sexuality in the professional and personal experiences of white 'Western'¹ men and women who taught English to adults in Japanese post-compulsory education contexts. My focus in this paper is on a specific part of the study: interview data with 18 Western men in regard to teaching academic English in Japanese universities. My analysis of this data addresses the following research questions:

- How do Western male educators construct TEAP as a professional activity?
- How do Western male educators construct TEAP as a gendered form of labour?

E-mail address: Roslyn.Appleby@uts.edu.au.

¹ I recognise that terms such as 'white' and 'Western' are contentious, and have been extensively problematized in critical whiteness and race studies. In line with contemporary scholarship, I see both 'whiteness' and 'Western' (and 'heterosexuality') as discursive constructions and ascribed identity markers that have significant material and structural consequences. Here, they are used to denote English language teachers who are so-called 'native speakers' of English from what is considered to be the Anglophone Centre, that is, the USA, UK, Canada, Australia or New Zealand, where English is regarded as the dominant first language. In the global English language teaching industry, white native speaker privilege has been widely documented but gendered hierarchies have received relatively limited attention.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jeap.2018.03.007>

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Please cite this article in press as: Appleby, R., Academic English and elite masculinities, *Journal of English for Academic Purposes* (2018), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jeap.2018.03.007>

I begin with an overview of gender distribution among teachers of English in Japan, drawing on professional association membership data and Japanese international marriage statistics that provide a partial map indicating male dominance. I also provide a working definition of TEAP in this context. I then describe the larger study on which this paper is based before introducing the specific dataset and analytical framework used in this paper. In discussing my analysis, I draw primarily on male participants' interview data to demonstrate how an elite status is attached to the teaching of male-dominated EAP and how the boundaries of TEAP are policed through discourses that serve to exclude a range of Others, in particular Western women.

2. Gender distribution in the teaching English for academic purposes in Japan

For many Western men (and women) who wish to work in Japan, English language teaching provides employment opportunities in a range of institutional contexts. In the adult educational sector jobs fall into two main categories: first, private conversation schools (*eikaiwa gakkō*) such as Berlitz, ECC, Gaba, and AEON, which provide tuition in general English and tailored courses for business English; and second, public and private higher education colleges and universities where language tuition includes EAP and discipline-focused ESP. The status of employment in the higher education sector is shaped, in part, by institutional and employment hierarchies. Higher education institutions range in status from small, private two-year liberal arts colleges at the lower end, up to prestigious national public universities. In terms of university employment status, this ranges in prestige from relatively low-level part-time positions, through fixed term contracts, to fully tenured positions (for more detail on university employment categories and institutional hierarchies, see Nagatomo, 2012, 2016). A third, smaller category of employment is with private companies that supply instructors for in-house corporate language training.

The context in which this study took place was in EAP at university level and I use 'TEAP' throughout this paper to capture three key notions. 1) As an empirical description of the context in which participants worked, that is as teachers of English in universities; 2) As indexing a particular subjectivity and positionality with regard to what constitutes EAP. The educators I interviewed positioned themselves as, *inter alia*, teachers of EAP, and this was a major part of the subjectivity that they projected when speaking of their university work which they described as encompassing, for example, inducting students into the genres, discourse features and academic skills characteristic of specific faculties or institutions where they were enrolled. Thus, in terms of subjectivity, a primary focus of the men's talk about their teaching work concerned their efforts to place themselves in opposition to the teaching of general English or casual conversation (commonly associated with conversation schools) and to place themselves in a higher-status category of employment that included the teaching of English for academic purposes. 3) As signaling a poststructuralist approach to accounts of identity as fluid, multiple, and highly contextualised, rather than tied to the teaching of clearly delineated content matter (for further detailed discussion of fluid and contingent professional identities and English language educators in Japanese universities see Fraser, 2011).

The qualifications required of Westerners applying to teach English in conversation schools is often only that they are, or can pass as, 'native-speakers' of English, whereas employment in colleges and universities often requires a Masters degree, TESOL experience, and 'native-speaker' ability. Indeed, of the men at the centre of this study, most had eventually achieved doctoral qualifications in language-related fields. Perhaps even more importantly, securing work in university EAP in most cases depends on making personal connections, initially attaining casual university work through word-of-mouth, then maintaining networks in which job information is shared, and thereby building a resume that is more attractive to potential employers (Appleby, 2014). This process serves to maintain existing gender structures in the workplace, as will be discussed in later sections.

In higher education institutions there are marked gendered patterns of employment among both Western and Japanese teachers. The exact gender breakdown of English language teachers in Japan is difficult to determine but some indications can be gleaned from higher education employment statistics published in Japan. In two-year colleges (awarding associate degrees and diplomas), the number of Japanese male and female staff members is roughly equal, but among foreign (non-Japanese) staff men outnumber women by approximately two to one (MEXT, 2012). In Japanese universities, men occupy almost four out of every five academic positions and among non-Japanese staff, men outnumber women by three to one in full-time positions. It is only in less secure casual academic appointments that the proportion of women increases slightly, though they still comprise only one third of staff in this category (MEXT, 2012).

Although no definitive data is collected or published in regard to the number of academic English language teachers in the Japanese university system, estimates suggest that the pattern of gender disparity is even more pronounced in this sub-discipline category. Hayes (2013), for example, extrapolates from several sources to estimate that male teachers comprise up to 90 percent of the 1600 foreign (non-Japanese) full-time (mostly limited term contracts and some tenured) lecturers employed in English language teaching or related fields in Japanese higher education institutions. A further source of evidence for the predominance of foreign men across Japan's English language teaching industry can be seen in the membership of the Japanese Association for Language Teaching (JALT). In 2014, the non-Japanese membership of JALT stood at 1,727, of which 73 percent, were male (B. Green, Membership Director, JALT, personal communication 28 April 2014).

This contrasts with the gender pattern among 934 Japanese members of JALT, where Japanese men comprise only 32 percent of total membership. Although JALT does not exclusively draw its members from higher education institutions, it seems reasonable to assume that those Western teachers of English who attain employment in a university may be more likely to join a professional association than those who teach general English for only a year or two at lower level conversation schools.

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