

Already for quite a long time, English has been widely acknowledged as a global common language. Everybody in the world knows that without English, world politics, world business and world academia would all fail to function. In today's increasingly interdependent world, everybody knows that if they are to be successful in any field, they must have a good English skills. However, for non-native English speakers – myself included as well as countless of other people on the earth - the role of English is not restricted to a mere global communicational tool. It serves also as a powerful cultural asset, and it is the importance of this aspect of English that I wish to emphasize in this short essay by focusing on the dynamic impact that English language and its learning process can have on each individual. I would like to begin with some personal story.

My Story

I first started to learn English when I was five years old. My mother taught me how to read English words, and she was the brave one who taught me English for the next ten years. I was not a very eager student, and for the most part her lessons didn't interest me much. However, they played a fundamental role in making English a familiar language to me. Since then, my journey with English has led me to two life-changing events. The

first one happened when I was twelve years old. At the time, my passion for the Harry Potter series was so strong that one day I got to a point where I couldn't wait any longer for the next Japanese translation to come out, and I started to read the fourth volume in the original English version. On reading it, I was surprised to realize how different each character sounded from what I had been used to in the Japanese translation. In the original English version, Harry, Ron, and Hermione had more colourful characters, and reading was a lot more fun despite the obstacles to reading a foreign language. The lively atmosphere of the story, the way characters talked to each other, and the sense of humour the narrative showed to the reader sounded all new to me when reading the book in the original language.

The second event took place much later when I was in the second year at university. I applied for an exchange programme, and got the chance to study for two academic semesters at Bishop's University in Quebec, Canada. This eight months study stay provided me with a lot of direct interactions with people from all parts of the world. The small university community was home to many international and local students, professors, and a number of people who worked there. In classes, over a meal, in the bus to the town, or at somebody's home party, we talked and discussed all kinds of

things, and exchanged many stories with each other. In the dormitory, I had a Brazilian roommate and every day was full of new discoveries about each other's cultural back ground as well as personality.

These two events are very special to me because they exposed me to people's different ways of thinking and different ways of life. And this in turn has changed the way I see myself and the world. I am now more interested in knowing what is happening in different places in the world, and when I plan for my future or when I handle a difficult problem, I feel I have more choices at my hand. None of these wouldn't have happened to me if I hadn't been learning English in the first place. English not only provided me with a first-hand access to countless English books and radio programmes, academic institutions outside Japan, and people from all around the world, but also helped me develop a more open-minded attitude toward my own life. Although what I wrote here is no more than my personal story, I believe that most non-native English speakers, if not all of them, go through a similar experience.

Nowadays, a sickly passive atmosphere prevails the Japanese society. People seem to

have less interests in the world and domestic affairs, and have less passion for their lives. Just looking at students of my own university reveals this tendency. Surprisingly few students are interested in traveling overseas. Foreign languages are less popular than they once used to be a few decades ago. When planning their career, the majority of the students try to pick a career from a given selection of jobs instead of seeking for a career that would realize their dream. Making a stark contrast to this is the Japanese people's increasing interests in TOEIC and other English tests. In this globalize world, a number of Japanese companies started to require their employees to take TOEIC, and those with higher scores have better chances for higher posts. Here, things are utterly odd. English is widely recognized as a global communicational tool that is necessary for work and business, but it is not making people's life any better. I believe, in the case of Japanese society, the situation can be changed if we pay more attention to the dynamism that English learning process can bring about to each of us.

At the end of my eight months stay in Canada, I made a trip to the Canadian Rockies with a friend of mine who was also an exchange student from France. At one point during our three day bus journey, we were talking about English education in France and Japan and its meaning, and we came to a conclusion: "by learning English we

become more open-minded, and this could even lead to the eradication of racism in our countries.” For sure, this idea only cannot be a solution to the problem. However, it is very meaningful to understand the dynamic impact that English learning can have on each individual’s way of thinking.