

ANYTHING BUT COMMUNICATION:

English and Some Barriers to its Acquisition in Japan

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INTRODUCTION

In 1986, a questionnaire was devised to see how Japanese college students perceived their English language learning experience to date, what affected their attitude, what values or beliefs they held about the target language and its culture, what their expectations were in a 'foreigner's' language class, and whether they felt the need to change their personal approach to L2 learning, particularly with regard to their motivation. The results of this questionnaire are briefly analysed and discussed in the Tokai Women's College (T.W.C.) Bulletin No. 6, 1986, and I would refer the reader there. Although the structure of this initial questionnaire was unsatisfactory, it was administered again in 1987 in an identical form so that variables could be identified. 200 students participated in this second administration (160 1st year students at Gifu University (G.U.) and 40 from Tokai Women's College). Finally, a modified version was administered in 1988 to 72 G.U. students. All of these administrations were made at the beginning of the academic year, all were in Japanese, and the data were collated and analysed in the manner described in T.W.C. Bulletin No.6.

There were 30 questions in all three administrations. Rather than referring to these in chronological order, I will group student responses and comments under appropriate topic related headings (all the multiple choice results are chronologically delineated in the appendix, however, and I would immediately refer the reader there). For the purposes of this paper I will focus on the following areas identified by students as factors affecting language learning in Japan:

1. the Japanese students' educational background, Japanese English teachers, and the J.E.T. program,
2. socio cultural and psychological factors.

THE EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND

All first-year students in the General Education Department at Gifu University are required to obtain a one-year credit in foreign language studies. Between 1986 and 1988 those who studied English had a choice of studying with Japanese teachers or either of two native speakers.

So many students chose the latter that a screening test was given, and one of the key questions was why the student would prefer to study English with a foreigner and not a Japanese teacher. The question is innocent enough, but year after year it seems to provide Japanese students with an open forum for a strong verbal attack on their Japanese English teachers, both at high school and at college, as the following comments attest:

Japanese college professors teach us English using the same grammar/translation technique we used at high school just to pass entrance exams. This is not useful, and boring.

Nothing is more tedious or meaningless than learning English by heart.
Japanese teachers can't speak English.

Our English teachers don't know how to let us learn English enjoyably.

I hated English and my teachers of English at high school.

English classes with Japanese teachers are very difficult and not enjoyable.

There is no communication between Japanese teachers and students.

English with a Japanese college professor is only translating a difficult book into Japanese.

Unlike Japanese teachers, foreign teachers are closer and can touch us directly—we like that.

Japanese teachers are not the reality.

Each year, I receive hundreds of written comments like this. With a few exceptions, they are as invariably damning, dwelling more on the negative aspects of the Japanese education system than the possible alternatives presented by an unknown foreign teacher. Are we to presume that students are so frustrated with the system and their Japanese teachers that any alternative has to be better ... “simple exposure to any foreigner”? (cf. q.6)

According to Linju Ogasawara (1983), a senior advisor to the Japanese Ministry of Education, most Japanese teachers have little experience with spoken English and

when presented with the opportunity to attend workshops or seminars with native speakers they do not do so. Local boards of education, Ogasawara continues, award English teaching certificates, without screening, to any graduate who has acquired the required number of college credits.¹

All students seem to be aware that things are radically wrong with the way English is taught in Japan. But is it fair to blame the teachers? In response to q. 9, of the 15% of the students who chose an alternative to those offered as suggestions as to why English seems so difficult for Japanese people, more than half condemned the Japanese educational system itself for its over-emphasis on grammar and rote-learning. There is an 'official'-looking monograph in English available in most Japanese book-stores entitled, *The Life of a Senior High School Student*, which has been written "In response to the request of the Council of Europe," and purports to disseminate "accurate information about Japan," according to the Director of these publications. While this particular monograph is illuminating, particularly since it is written from the viewpoint of a graduating student, the reasons given for the emphasis on grammar and rote-learning are not given, and misleading reasons are given for the absence of oral English classes: "One reason for this is the difficulty of bringing in foreign teachers; another is the high cost of language lab. material and machines ... Because of this, we Japanese are generally poor in English conversation ... It seems that this educational lack may be one cause of Japanese being misunderstood by foreigners." In a country as rich as Japan now is, it is hard to believe educational authorities could not afford to supply high schools with the hardware the author believes necessary.

In Japan, it would seem that grammatical rules are learned without consideration to meaning, and, aside from the only obvious goal of passing the university English entrance examination, such a syllabus in itself provides no account for the use to which the English learned is to be put. More criticism was expressed in the open-answer section of q. 30, and in q. 26, where students are asked to describe why and how they felt their present knowledge of English was flawed, the majority mentioned "lack of vocabulary" - a surprising response considering the enormous number of words (7,500 according to senior high school teachers) they are expected to have memorized for the university entrance examinations.

On closer focus, it appears that the grammar/translation method is at fault. Professor Shigeo Hatta, advisor to the Aichi Prefectural Board of Education, in a recent interview stated that since the war, students at high school are asked to make word-for-word translations, each word being approached piece-meal ('bara bara') and void of socio-cultural context, and, once lexically digested and memorized, is strung together into a sentence, which in turn has to be memorized. After six years of such a rigid and laborious approach, using standardized textbooks which students find "lifeless" and "dull", it is hardly surprising that even some university freshmen majoring in English state that they "hate" English. "It wasn't until I went abroad for the first time that I realised how useless the English I had learned at high school was!" was the expressed

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regret of the few students who had had the opportunity to travel abroad.

It does seem that the enormous efforts made by students and teachers in Japan are incommensurate with the results regarding L2 learning. The average college freshman, even after 6 years of English studies, seems hard pressed to answer the simplest of questions in English. In commenting on this, Professor Hajime Fukumoto (1978) of Doshisha Women's College used substantiating evidence from the reports of two American professors who had both spent two years in Japan working in and observing the L2 educational system. He quotes:

the government's continued tolerance of so stunning a failure rate has been explained as intentional subversion of a program meant only as diplomatic flattery in the beginning ...These obstacles are social and psychological, numerous and complicated, not much studied as yet, and perhaps to some extent peculiar to Japan. (Brosnahan)

Either the people in charge of this program are incompetent or they are shrewdly calculating, which means they do not intend to produce people who can speak English. Ironically, if one wanted to devise a program that would pay official lip-service to language acquisition but could not possibly succeed in this goal, it would be hard to find a better program than Japan's. (Haynes)²

It is interesting to note that Fukumoto questions the validity of these reports but is more concerned with the fact that they have been accepted as official by the U.S. government. Fukumoto sees Japan's inefficiency to master English as a problem far more complex than the above quoted scholars would suggest and quotes E.O.Reischauer to lend him support. Fukumoto seems to imply that in giving emphasis to the fact that Japanese does not belong to the Indo-European family of languages, Reischauer is suggesting that the problems the Japanese have with foreign language learning are primarily linguistic in nature and not with the way English is taught in Japan. Reischauer states that there are other major factors, but Fukumoto chooses to emphasize only one.

In fact, in his book *The Japanese* (1977), Reischauer is clearly critical of the way English is taught in Japan, which he sees as entrenched in a system he considers "poor and out of date", with, as a "key stumbling block", "50,000 Japanese teachers of English at present in schools ... most of whom are not actually able to speak English themselves," and who feel threatened by any reform of the system. In his revised and expanded edition of the above book, *The Japanese Today* (1988)³, Reischauer is even more critical of the way English is dealt with in an educational system which finds English useful primarily for examination purposes; the bane of all Japanese high-school students, and certainly the cause for loudest lament in the questionnaires. It is a system "entrenched against reform", Reischauer continues, and "aligned against change".

Japan and the West

Many students mentioned the historical perspective necessary to view present Japanese attitudes towards foreigners and foreign languages. Japan has a long history of isolation from the west, as many students pointed out on the questionnaire, and, to continue briefly with Reischauer, an equally “long tradition of learning to decipher a foreign language, but not speaking or communicating with foreigners.”⁴ As Reischauer makes clear, there was even an advantage in not communicating with foreigners : it assisted the Japanese in “keeping them (foreigners) from learning much about Japan and what was in the minds of the Japanese,” a policy which was accompanied by suspicion of, or contempt for, anyone who knew a foreign language too well, together with an unspoken fear that such knowledge might somehow “impair their command of the Japanese language” or in some way affect their identity as Japanese.

Since, even today, well known Japanese professors are advancing such views,⁵ the latter question of identity was directly broached in the questionnaire (qs. 12 & 13). The results show that the students overwhelmingly disagree with the idea that, in becoming fluent in foreign language, some of their “Japaneseness” would be lost, so I do not propose to pursue this area further at this stage, other than to juxtapose the student response here with the results of q. 14 : when asked directly if Japanese social behavior and values interfere with L2 learning (q.14), most students thought they did not , while only about 14% admitted that they did not know. The minority of students who thought that there was interference , and were encouraged to proffer examples, most commonly mentioned : shyness or shame, the fear of making mistakes, the negative attitude towards talkativeness, and the passive approach that Japanese students are encouraged to adopt in the classroom (factors to be discussed later in this paper).

The JET Program

Some students mentioned that young American or British teachers had visited their high schools as part of the recently established Japanese government-sponsored scheme called the Japan Education and Teaching Program (JET). This program is an amalgamation of the former British English Teacher and Mombusho (Ministry of Education) English Fellow programs. Vastly expanded, it now recruits more than 2000 young foreign university graduates from four countries as Assistant English Teachers (AETs) to work alongside Japanese teachers in assisting the teaching of English in the nation’s junior and senior high schools.

According to Minoru Soma (1988), the secretary general of the Conference of Local Authorities for International Relations (CLAIR), the official goals of the JET program are: “To promote mutual understanding between Japanese and other countries ... and foster international perspectives ... by promoting international exchange at local

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levels as well as intensifying foreign language education in Japan.”⁶ Since this is the first government-sponsored undertaking of its kind to be implemented on a nation-wide scale, it would seem to be a step in the right direction.

However, the sceptics inside the program, both foreign and Japanese, are many. In response to Minoru Soma's program goals statement quoted above one frustrated American participant, in a letter to the Japan Times, remarked:

“To promote mutual understanding ... ” is often translated as “To agree with our ideas.” To “foster international perspectives” seems to apply only to the foreign participants, who must learn the Japanese way to do things.”⁷

In an interview with Japanese teachers involved in this program, a simple truth emerged: because the syllabus for the teaching of English at junior and senior high schools in Japan is geared almost exclusively to the dreaded college entrance examinations, if the young foreign teacher were to make any more than a one-shot visit, Japanese teachers and administrators would not know what to do with them. It would seem that only the Japanese can understand the intricacies of the uniquely Japanese way English has to be studied at high school; a system which uses the study of English more as a mental discipline and means of acquiring a body of abstract knowledge of the language rather than developing the skills required to use it. Obviously, only those who have had to go through this system themselves can understand what the average Japanese high school student has to face. And yet inexperienced young foreigners are plunged into this system after only a 2 day orientation program.

There are other very basic problems with this program. At a recent Japan Association of Language Teachers (JALT) chapter meeting in Nagoya, at which the new JET program was being discussed, a Japanese teacher admitted that when some of his English teaching colleagues heard that a foreigner would be spending a day at their school, they called in sick. The young foreign “assistants” themselves expressed frustration at having to play the role of “entertainer” (cf. q.23) on the many one-shot only visits they were asked to make to various schools. There was no chance to have anything but a superficial contact with students in overly-large, well prepared, and administratively protected classes.⁸

At many schools, the Japanese teachers say their hands are tied by school principals who are overly concerned with the school's image. The foreign teacher would be returning to the prefectural office to write a report of his school visit and needed to leave suitably impressed. In some cases, this meant asking the already hard-pressed English speaking staff members to wine and dine the visitor - an uncomfortable first-time experience for most Japanese teachers.

There are personal pressures on the students, too. Although there was no overt criticism of the system in the questionnaire data, an aside from one student is relevant here:

When we heard a foreigner is coming to visit my school, I am exciting. But sadly, when the foreigner came to my class, I am too ashamed to speak.

Stress would appear to undermine the goals of the JET program. Teachers blame their principals, school authorities blame the Prefectural Boards of Education, officials there criticize the foreign assistants for not being better qualified,⁹ foreign teachers justifiably criticize the system, and the student, who gets the shortest shrift of all, can end up blaming herself, as in the above quotation. The JET program may be a step in a good direction but can do little to effect a vast institutionalized education system which students (and many teachers) see not only as unproductive, but counter-productive in terms of L2 acquisition.

SOCIO-CULTURAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS

Underlying Japan's unique English education program students show an awareness of many significant socio-cultural and psychological factors which affect their motivation to study English. One of the most frequently cited is "haji" (shyness, shame, or embarrassment), one of the biggest obstacles foreign language teachers have to face working with the Japanese, and possibly the largest hurdle in the path of the Japanese student. It is the main reason chosen in response to q.9 ("Why does English seem so difficult...?"), and in the open-answer section of q.14 such comments as the following were typical :

Even when I have the chance to speak, shyness stops me.

I am ashamed to show my bad English.

Shyness kills my curiosity.

"Shyness" is addressed directly in q.15, but the reason chosen by the majority of students (65%) in all three questionnaires is remarkably consistent :

"Japanese people simply hate to make mistakes."

Reasons for the above response were asked in a new sub-question to q. 9 in Q2 (the 1988 questionnaire), and almost half of the students spoke of "Japanese pride", and an innate "fear of ridicule," whilst others mentioned the Japanese love for "correctness," "order," and "perfection."

What cannot be overemphasized is the way Japanese communicative norms are affected by "the Japanese love for correctness" (as identified by students), often to a debilitating extent in communication with the outside world. One Tokai student, on returning from a 6-week sojourn at a language school in England, saw this as the largest barrier Japanese students had to face: "The Japanese students in my class were so

obsessed with wanting to say the right thing that they ended up saying nothing. And this could be seen outside of the classroom, too.”

So much value is attached to form in Japan, the appearance of doing things right. Its presence is all pervasive, from its manifestation in the traditional arts - in themselves painstaking exercises in form to the finest details of funeral parlor behavior (brilliantly portrayed in Itami Juzo's film "Ososhiki" [The Funeral]). It has been traced back to the 7th Century,¹⁰ and has been well documented by anthropologists since Ruth Benedict's *Chrysanthemum and the Sword*, (1946) ; but I would turn to Kurt Singer (op. cit.) for one of the most eloquent descriptions of why this concern exists:

In every gesture of daily life, in the style of conversation, in the proper form of giving a present, the main concern, it seems, is how to wrap up things, ideas, feelings. Wherever Japanese life is not governed by this law of laws, behavior is in constant danger of becoming arbitrary and uncouth, crude and repulsive.¹¹

In the light of the above, it is perhaps surprising that the open-ended questions in the surveys yielded such a wealth of unsolicited comment. In preparing the questionnaire, I should have known that the concern for correctness affected the attitude of students towards the form of the questions themselves: "We are not used to this type of question," as one student mentioned. It would seem that most Japanese students have been conditioned into thinking that there is a "correct" answer to every classroom question;¹² in facing open-ended type questions, subjects may well be confronted with additional affective variables preventing any response. But the occasional comment did emerge clearly revealing a culturally-bound attitude resulting in faulty assumptions regarding L2 learning:

Teach me the right thing to say to suit each occasion.

(A subject's response to Q1b, q.23 e).

Neat formulas were expected. Since I could not possibly fulfill this expectation, nor had any intention of trying to teach in this way, this student was probably disappointed with my class; unless, that is, she or he had become aware of the mismatch in beliefs, and expectations.

In spite of the negative aspects implied in students' comments, the tone is surprisingly positive in the attitude they express towards mistakes with regard to L2 learning (q.25). Not only is there a healthy awareness that mistakes are a necessary part of the learning process and do not need immediate correction (d.32%), but slightly more students also accept personal responsibility for their correction (c.37%), although it is hard to determine how the latter attitude translates into personal learning strategies.

For the purposes of this paper, however, the preference expressed in the questionnaire for personal, rather than teacher, correction needs to be seen in the light of the students' very real fear of being exposed to ridicule by their peers if, for example,

the teacher draws attention to an individual's mistake. (During my first few months in Japan, one student went permanently absent from class after being laughed at for a trivial mistake in pronunciation which I had drawn her [and inadvertently her classmates'] , attention to).

Such fears not only affect motivation but also pre-empt employment of some vital language-learning strategies. For example, in assessing the variables on which good language learning depends, Rubin (1975) points to the necessity of risk-taking and the willingness of the language learner to adopt strategies where they "make mistakes", show a willingness to "guess" and "appear foolish", in order to learn to communicate in L2.¹³ The response to qs.16, 17 & 25d would suggest that Japanese students are, to a certain extent, aware of this. But the threat to the individual's ego in adopting such strategies can obviously be acute. As Beebe (1983) notes about L2 learners in general :

They fear looking ridiculous; they fear the frustration coming from a listener's blank look-fear the alienation of not being able to communicate and thereby get close to other human beings. Perhaps, worst of all, they fear the loss of identity.¹⁴

These observations are particularly relevant with regard to the Japanese. Random questionnaire comments from students are helpful here in understanding that what so many of us initially see as stunned passivity in the Japanese English classroom is really a cover for painfully high apprehension:

When I think I have to speak, my heart is beating fast. Why am I so tense?

Maybe you think we're not interested in English if we're passive - we're just nervous.

When I'm tense, I'm tired, and when I'm tired I can't hear.

It's not just because a foreign teacher is present - I feel uneasy about making mistakes in front of my classmates.

Every year at this college (T.W.C.), we foreign teachers are invited to attend interviews for prospective students. There is no doubt in our minds why we are there, but the effect our presence has on many students is often traumatic, severely debilitating any form of communication.

Such major psychological barriers to L2 acquisition evident in the above quotations, however, can be seen to emanate from deeply engrained (and group enhanced) cultural traits, and these have been well-documented. Jack Seward (1971), for example, remarks :

Although normally persevering and patient, the Japanese have a disconcertingly short fuse when they feel that they have been 'baka ni sareta' (ridiculed), either as individuals or as a group. In bringing conformist pressures to bear on children, laughter and

ostracism are a parent's most forcible threats, 'hito ni warawaremasu yo' (people will laugh at you) and 'mo shirimasen yo' (we won't have anything more to do with you) being warnings heard daily in homes... The Japanese are acutely sensitive to any possibility that they will be laughed at for behavior, clothing, or speech that is out of the ordinary or not group-approved.¹⁵

What is expressed here illumines a student's description of Japan as a "shame culture" (in response to questions addressing L2 difficulties). In his book *With Respect to the Japanese* (1984), John C. Condon suggests that shame is the primary means of social control in Japanese culture "where proper behavior is assured by outside social pressure," and he notes that "one is far more likely to lose face in Japan through making mistakes than from any intentional insult by others."¹⁶

The Japanese concept of "face"¹⁷ would seem to embody two notions : an awareness of one's own face, and that of others. Both need to be protected, and this would imply that the strategies involved in any social contact would need to be carefully orchestrated to avoid loss of face. By using vague terms, non-verbal cues, and the strategic silence already referred to, the Japanese can both avoid being embarrassed, and embarrassing others. (In this respect it is interesting to note that Condon also mentions that the Japanese 'kanji' character for "face" is the same as the one for "mask."¹⁸) This, in part, helps explain the importance of 'shincho' (cautiousness) in Japan. Within the confines of a tightly structured society, 'shincho' is a necessary element for maintaining an order and harmony in which all 'faces' are protected ; but, when applied to L2 learning, it can clearly be identified as yet one more stumbling block for the Japanese.

Without understanding the hierarchical nature of Japanese society, however, it would be hard to understand the reasons for the implementation of such elaborately subtle and emotionally fraught communication strategies. *Japanese Society*, by Chie Nakane, (1972), still gives one of the most lucid depictions of the social structure of Japanese life. Nakane stresses that communication cannot be carried on smoothly in Japan without an awareness of the tightly organized hierarchical social-structure : "for rank is the social norm on which Japanese life is based."¹⁹ She continues :

In everyday affairs a man who has no awareness of relative rank is not able to speak or even sit and eat. When speaking, he is always to be ready with differentiated, delicate degrees of honorific expressions appropriate to the rank order between himself and the person he addresses. The expressions and the manner appropriate to a superior are never to be used to an inferior. Even among colleagues, it is only possible to dispense with honorifics when both parties are very intimate friends. In such contexts the English language is inadequate to supply appropriate equivalents. Behavior and language are intimately interwoven in Japan.²⁰

The last sentence here is particularly significant : saying and doing the right thing - the underlying concept of correctness - appears to be vital to the Japanese, underlining some fundamental differences in thought, behavior patterns, and whole

approach to communication.

Professor Takao Suzuki, one of Japan's foremost linguists, is illuminating here : in his fascinating book *Japan and the Japanese*, (1978), he examines the kind of misconceptions that arise when one learns only the vocabulary of Japanese without understanding the cultural framework (findings equally applicable to the Japanese student of English). Professor Suzuki describes the Japanese ego as being in an indefinite state, "with its position undetermined, until a specific addressee, a concrete person, appears and is identified by the speaker... If we cannot identify the other person relative to ourselves, we cannot establish a proper relationship to him. Consequently, the speaker is left in an insecure and indefinite state and cannot easily form a secure relationship with the other."²¹ This definition does not apply just to "Japanese" egos, but it is obviously an area of some concern for the Japanese.

One simple (and safe) procedure for ascertaining identity and hierarchical status on meeting someone for the first time in Japan is to exchange 'meishi' (name-cards). These must clearly delineate who a person is, and more importantly who he works for (a prestigious institution would automatically convey rank). Once the rank of a person is established, the Japanese can refer to an appropriate form of 'keigo' (honorifics), which are then applied to a pre-determined set of phrases, which have been well memorized from childhood and never vary. With an 'anticipated' speech mode, and an adopted code of appropriate behavior, social interaction becomes predictable, and there is little possibility of confusion or loss of face .

Should that eventuality arise, silence would seem to be an acceptable avoidance strategy, a view that one could posit based merely on a review of the vast number of proverbs in Japanese extolling the wisdom of silence : "Better to be thought a fool than to open one's mouth and prove it ;" "empty drums make the most noise," ; "those who know, do not speak - those who speak, do not know" ; etc. "Look at our Samurai history," writes one student, "if you spoke out, you lost your head." Times have changed, but this quotation encapsulates the simple wisdom of communicative expediency in social-interaction. This still exists, even if it is only the face, and not the whole head, that is at risk.

What is more pertinent here is the distrust Japanese seem to have for the spoken word, and that, once again, is an example of a societal belief clearly reflected in its language. In Japanese, revealingly negative expressions related to 'kuchi' (mouth) abound, and such adages related to "Kuchi wa waza wai no moto" (putting one's foot in one's mouth), appear in a variety, and significant number of negative permutations. If students have been conditioned from childhood into acceptance of this distrust of verbal messages, it is easy to identify one more affective factor in L2 acquisition. How this factor may actually be reinforced by Japanese teachers, educators, and administrators will be discussed later in this paper.

In what is perhaps the most eloquent book ever written in English about Japanese life, and in a passage relevant here, Kurt Singer notes in *The Mirror, Crown*

and Jewel (1973), that the Japanese language is admirably equipped to deal with a style of life which is governed by a concern for form, being "rich in ambiguities, elusive terms, indefinite constructions, it is a tool more for withholding and eluding than for expressing and stating." Tendencies which he sees are "inherent in vocabulary and syntax," they are "reinforced by the fact that the spoken word is often not understood until its Chinese ideogram is known."²² (Any foreigner in Japan must have observed the spectacle of two Japanese "sky-writing" or tracing out the lines of a character on the palm of their hands in order to establish that they are talking about the same thing).

Given the complexity and peculiarly unique nature of Japanese communicative style, the process of learning how to relate linguistically and culturally to English, and to life outside of Japan, is one fraught with hazards and ironies for the thinking student. Here it is helpful to turn to Nakane again to see how these socio-cultural, and psychological factors affect communication between the Japanese and outsiders. She sees the problem stemming from the fact that the Japanese have failed to develop any code of manners properly applicable to "strangers" or those people who are "outside", and states :

In the store of Japanese etiquette there are only two basic patterns available : one which applies to a 'super-ior' and another which applies to an 'inferior'. This produces discomfort during contact with a stranger, whether he be foreigner or Japanese.

Japanese on the whole are not sociable ... once outside their immediate orbit, they are at a loss for appropriate forms of expression. They have not developed techniques for dealing with persons 'outside', because their lives are so tightly concentrated into their 'own' groups.²³

With these observations in mind, it is much easier to understand why students often responded the way they did to some of the questions - why, for instance, more students emphasized a "fear of being misunderstood" than a fear of "misunderstanding" (sub-q. to q.24), which I would interpret as the students' fear of exposure to ridicule for a mistake in utterance which only he is responsible for ; or, to put it in another way, a case of self-consciousness smothering curiosity. This might also help explain why, when students were asked how they thought their present knowledge of English was "unbalanced" (q.26), an overwhelming number mentioned a deficiency in speaking ability rather than the problems they have with aural comprehension. Possibly this response is governed by over-concern for "saying the right thing". Whatever the reason, the following tabulations illustrate the disparity between "hearing" and "speaking", as well as showing where students perceive other deficiencies lie :

WHERE STUDENTS SEE THEIR
ENGLISH IS DEFICIENT.

Table No.1 (Qu.26)

Deficiency in speaking	124 *
hearing ability	37
vocabulary	96
pronunciation	13
reading ability	11
grammar	5

REASONS STUDENTS GIVE FOR FEELING
INTIMIDATED BY A FOREIGN E.T.

Table No.2 (SUB Qu.24)

Poor speaking ability	74
hearing ability	28
vocabulary	49
"Shyness"	65
Fear of being misunderstood	61
misunderstanding	27
Fears rel. to direct physical presence of a foreigner (proximics, eye-contact,etc.)	14

* (The numbers represent the number of students who responded to Q1a & Q1b (out of 272))

It should be noted that the above tabulation was made by reviewing the open-answer section of qs. 24 and 26 and should serve only as a rough guide. The numbers for each category were derived from only those students who made explicit reference to a particular area ; where these remarks were ambiguous or vague, they were excluded. Nevertheless, there does seem to be a strikingly similar pattern in the first three categories selected in each table. Also, poor "speaking ability" takes strong precedence over any alternative, and receives the most frequent mention elsewhere in the questionnaires. This is of particular interest because the results in Table No.2 were collated from the response to why students found it intimidating to be in the presence of a foreign teacher. Table No.1 is based on the response to q.26, which addressed a linguistic area and was generally interpreted as such. But q.24 (Table No.2) only did so indirectly and yet still elicited a large number of linguistic reasons for students feeling "intimidated" by a foreign presence.

What strategies would students adopt in a situation where they were addressed in English by a foreigner but failed to understand? (a situation most Japanese dread.) Q. 27 addressed this possibility and the responses were almost identical for all three questionnaires (366 students). More than 80% chose answer (c) concerning "key" words and "gist", which is certainly more effective in the L2 learning process than "remaining silent" or "pretending to understand" - strategies which might be both socially acceptable and effective in a purely Japanese context. But fewer than 35% chose (d) : "interrupt the speaker and ask for clarification," which I believe is a far more effective strategy. Guessing is a step in the right direction but it provides no guarantee that a message has been understood. When "clarification" is asked for, the student has a much better chance of understanding through repetition, rephrasing, reduction in speed of delivery, etc., but such a strategy calls for an immediate vocal response. It remains unclear whether this can be attributed to fear of being the center of focus or of displaying "shameful" ignorance, or whether it is simply a case of being polite - it is considered rude to interrupt anyone in Japan, unprecedented to interrupt a teacher. Whatever the implications for this preference are, it seems important that the students become aware that

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what might be interpreted as an acceptable passive agent in their own social L1 communication can be transferred to English only at the risk of considerable misunderstanding.

Frequently, personal observations were made as if the students themselves were to blame for their "poor" L2 ability- many of the unsolicited Q comments, in particular, revealed self-deprecation or a general lack of self-esteem :

My English is broken. I feel foolish and cowardly.

I am just not good at English. I am stupid.

I am too ashamed of my English even to ask you to speak more slowly.

I am frustrated with my poor ability.

I often know what to say, I just can't get the words out.

I feel my inferiority complex when I try to speak English.

I lack a brave and enterprising spirit.

Although these self-reflections need to be seen primarily in the context of (what students describe as) a "society which values modesty" - in itself another inhibiting factor - they can be seen to reflect an awareness of the conflict between what needs to be done, and their own present estimation of their L2 abilities, which they obviously do not rank highly. The response to qs.4, 7, and 28, would seem to support this assertion (p.4, "it does not matter how good my English is with a native speaker as long as communication takes place ;" q.7 "certain aspects of myself must change in order to be able to communicate successfully in English"; q. 28, " I memorize a new English word by associating it with the same word in Japanese but the ideal way is to use it in context as soon as possible.')

The disparity between the results of q.28 and those of its sub-question are especially striking.

In the results of studies made by Gardner and Lambert (1972), self esteem was shown to be a significant variable in L2 acquisition, particularly in cross-cultural terms.²⁴ The low self-esteem exhibited in the expressed attitudes of Japanese students - "We are too : passive, negative, inhibited, shy, nervous, afraid," etc. - together with commensurate personal observations of Japanese behavior inside and outside the classroom, would seem to suggest that for the Japanese, self-esteem is a highly significant affective variable in L2 acquisition. Tomoo Tsukamoto (1982) suggests that the Japanese are aware of the reputation they have outside of Japan for their poor communicative ability and yet they fall prey to a kind of vicious circle of their own creating : "their unsatisfactory efforts at social events convinces them more than ever that they can't speak English well" which in turn "reinforces the popular notion that Japanese are poor foreign language speakers,"²⁵ a conundrum that is not solved but better explained

by viewing it in another way (and here, Tsukamoto quotes Nevstupy [1987]²⁶) : when Japanese people say, "I can't communicate because I can't speak English well," they should really be saying, "I can't speak English because I haven't learned how to communicate." This is an echo of an observation made by one student in the questionnaire, who went on to state (with four others) that the Japanese are, in any case, "never comfortable with foreigners and not interested in getting too close to them."

Is it possible that there is a deep-rooted psychological barrier here? - that relates back to the notion of a fear of loss of Japanese identity most students are simply unaware of (cf. q.12)? Again, there is no clear evidence in the questionnaire data to support this, but most of the subjects had had little or no exposure to foreigners, and none had spent any length of time outside Japan. In interviews with two of my students who had spent a year or more abroad, however, there were clear indications that this barrier existed - not stemming from within themselves, but imposed on them by their immediate peers and relatives as soon as they returned to Japan. Both students felt that they had somehow been handicapped by their 'foreign' experience ; their behavior was 'suspect' and in both cases they found that they had to play their outside experience down, even though it had been richly rewarding. It was interesting to observe that both students found the reverse-cultural shock of returning to Japan more a traumatic experience than any cultural shock related to their foreign experience.²⁷

In her most recent book on Japan : *The Japanese Overseas* by Merry White (1988), the author devotes her full attention to the problems Japanese face on returning home after too long a sojourn abroad. The pressures would seem to be acute for all returnees : men face damaged careers, and may even be relegated to less prestigious posts ; women are subjected to the constant examination to ensure they are not too seriously tainted from their brush with the outside ; and children are shown to be in the worst plight : having been "accidentally internationalized" they now have to undergo government-sponsored "readjustment education" in order to fit back into the entrance-examination-oriented school system. To conform, White notes, even children who speak fluent English feel compelled to relearn the stilted Japanese variety of their classmates (a peculiarly Japanese phenomenon I have also seen demonstrated in a more arbitrary form in the college classroom by good English speakers who have simply been overcome with self-consciousness). The threat to "Japaneseness" is attributable less to any behavioral changes in the returnee, White asserts, than to "a prolonged absence, which tears the web of connections that is essential to the homogeneity and predictability of Japanese life."²⁸ A hard price to pay, it would seem, for any Japanese seriously intent on improving international relations.

The comments of my returnee students would certainly tend to confirm much of what Merry White has to say. Both students experienced an initial feeling of alienation upon returning to Japan, but, at the same time, this helped them become acutely aware of intrinsic socio-cultural differences, and what they were actually able to achieve in spite of them. Both mentioned that, through a simple shift of perspective, they could view

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their experience as an extension of their personal identity rather than a loss or diminution of any of their "Japaneseness". Obviously it would be dangerous to attempt to draw conclusions from only two subjects in an area where one would expect many personal variables to exist, but I see a positive note here, reflected in comments like these :

Even though my English is still bad, I feel I can adapt myself to two cultures.

I found a freedom in using English that I never experienced using Japanese.

If only Japanese people knew how enjoyable it is to communicate with foreigners, they wouldn't worry so much about small mistakes. (recorded student comment).

One might reasonably rephrase that last quotation : "If only Japanese people wouldn't worry about mistakes, they would know how enjoyable it is ...".

Method for the second, revised survey (Q2, April, 1988)

The following questions were dropped from the initial questionnaire : 3, 4, 5, 9, 10, 11, 13, 18, 26. This was done primarily because I wanted to add fifteen new or modified questions (five were open-answer [OA] types), and I did not wish to overburden the students in the allocated 90 minute class time. Other reasons for discarding these questions included predictability of results, based on analysis of the data collected from the first two administrations (qus. 3, 4, 5, 9, 12, 18, & 26), inconclusive evidence (qs. 10, 11, 13), or simply because of personal dissatisfaction with the way most of these questions were worded. Apart from these changes, the format of the questionnaire was the same as in the two previous administrations ; anonymity was stipulated but all subjects were asked to indicate whether they were male or female. As before, the survey was conducted entirely in Japanese.

Once again, an impartial group of third-year students at Tokai Women's College tabulated the results of the questionnaire as a class project in sociological research. The open-answer questions were translated by groups of third and fourth-year students majoring in English at the same college (T. W. C.). This time the data were also analyzed to identify any variables related to sexual differences, but, since none of any significance were found, these results were not included in this study.*

* Small exceptions were Q24 a., where 2% of the females said they did not find it at all intimidating to be in the presence of a foreign teacher compared to 36% males. For all other results, the correlation rarely varied by more than 5%.

Final subjects. (Q2, 1988)

The administration of Q2 was restricted to 72 new first-year students from the General Education Department at Gifu University consisting of 36 males and 36 females. This group had been personally selected from a group of more than 250 applicants for the 'foreign teacher's' English language class. The same criteria for selection of the 72 students was used as in previous years except that students who had travelled abroad or who had had any communicative encounters with foreigners were excluded. This meant excluding students whom, from past classroom experience, I had found to be less intimidated by my presence, and whose level of English, by my own subjective assessment, was higher because of 'foreign' contact or travel abroad. These students were screened out so that Q2 data relating to attitudes towards foreigners or the target culture could be compared to those of the earlier Q1 administrations in an attempt to identify further variables.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF THE SECOND SURVEY (Q2), APRIL, 1988. Introductory note

In this section I had intended to discuss the discrepancies between the data collected here and those collected in the first two administrations. A quick glance down the results tabulated in the appendix, however, will reveal that there are no major discrepancies. In fact, there is a striking correlation across all three administrations - a fairly predictable, patterned response which has great relevance regarding the implications for teaching (to be discussed at the end of this study). Instead, I will list and discuss the answers to the new or modified questions, and follow this with a discussion of some of the relevant open-answer comments culled from all three surveys.

New or Modified Q2 Survey Questions

Q. 6. When you think of the cultural aspects of English, which country do you think of first?

U.S.A. -74% U.K. -24% Other - (Australia) - 1%

The underlying hypothesis of this question is that the U.S.A. for the Japanese is perceived as THE alternative to Japanese culture and is a simply-grasped representation of all that is foreign. This is most clearly evident in Japanese street behavior, where foreigners will hear themselves referred to as 'Americajin' as often as 'gaijin' (foreigner). The implication is that the two terms are synonymous. Also, most of the 'English Teacher Needed' advertisements in the Japan Times and other English newspapers clearly show a preference for American teachers. Thus, the above response provided no surprises.

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Q. 7. Do you think it's possible to say things in English that you may not be able to say in Japanese?

No -66% Yes - 6 % Not sure -28%

It was presumed that this question would be a purely hypothetical one because all subjects had stated that they had had no communicative experience in a foreign language. It was based on reflective comments made by Gifu University students who had completed one academic year in my language class. The following remark was typical : "In one class activity, I found myself expressing something in English that I would never have done in Japanese. This was a new experience." The results were interesting because I thought that here was one area where a change in student awareness would occur over the year. I have since found that the Japanese translation of this question was too general to be of much significance, but this still does not explain why so many subjects responded negatively to it. (Later, however, I will show how some students observed a change of language behavior after it had occurred ; i.e., only upon reflection did they realize that maybe there were things they could do in L2 that they would not do in their L1.).

Q. 9. Why are Japanese afraid of making mistakes?

This question is really a subquestion to the old q.15 (where the fear of making mistakes was commonly offered as the reason for Japanese 'shyness'). As far as affective and attitudinal factors are concerned it seemed a crucial area to pursue, and it drew a variety of reasons. Foremost amongst these was the 'fear of ridicule' - 28 subjects mentioned this - together with references to 'Japanese pride'. Next in frequency came mention of the Japanese love for 'correctness' or 'perfection' (already touched on in Ch. 2), which students saw manifested in the examination-oriented school system. Other subjects alluded to Japan's history especially during samurai days when a small mistake could literally prove fatal or, simply, "We have a long history of shame."

Q.11. Do you think it is a bad idea for Japanese students to speak to each other in English?

No. -63% Yes. - 6 % Not sure. -31%

This question is connected to q.17 (re. subjects feeling foolish when speaking in English to other Japanese students). A high percentage and correlation on all three administrations shows that subjects do not feel this way. But this question was referred to later in the respective year by the 1986 & 1987 subjects, some of whom held strong reservations about this classroom activity, questioning its authenticity and usefulness :

Most of us can't do this seriously.

We're all in collusion with each other.

It's awkward and unnatural to speak to another Japanese in English.

We use only a few patterns, and take the easiest way.

Our pronunciation is slack, our grammar bad.

If we're given too much time, we're bored.

If the foreign teacher doesn't listen in, we feel unmotivated.

These observations were made by a minority of students, but they raise several valid points which obviously provide the teacher with a serious challenge in overly-large language classes. The results of the new q.11 show that although many subjects have reservations about this classroom procedure, the majority, in choosing to support the idea, are initially showing a willingness to commit themselves to the procedure. At the very least, the question arouses students' awareness of a procedure which might prove problematical, together with the knowledge that their teacher is aware that the situation is not ideal and, in an oblique way, is already asking for cooperation.

Q.16. In your English class at high school, how often did your Japanese teacher speak in English?

- | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| a. 100% of the time - 0% | b. 50% of the time - 18% |
| c. Less than 10% - 68% | d. Never - 14% |

This was a simple fact-finding question based on mostly unsolicited comments made by previous subjects, and the response to q.8, which reveals that subjects believed a 'good teacher' helped their motivation. Obviously the hypothesis here is that 'good' English teachers will expose their students to aural English. However, in the light of the comments made about the poor oral level of Japanese English teachers, the results of the next question are more significant.

Q.17. How do you feel about Japanese English teachers speaking English in class at high school?

- | | | | |
|-----------------|-----------------|----------------|------------|
| Good idea - 52% | It depends - 8% | Bad idea - 34% | N.A. - 10% |
|-----------------|-----------------|----------------|------------|

Because of previous comments made by students concerning their teachers' level of oral English, I had expected more of a negative response here. It is also surprising that more subjects did not choose the 'It depends' response : the question is flawed in being

far too general, giving the subjects no indication of the L2 oral competence level of the Japanese teachers in question. For instance, would the subjects who chose to respond positively still have felt good about hearing their Japanese teachers using atrocious English in the classroom? Conversely, would the subjects who responded negatively still have felt the same way if their teachers had spoken or were able to speak fluently in English? And, just as significantly with regard to student attitudes, how would students react if their teacher's level of oral English was simply mediocre?

Discussions with Japanese teachers on this subject have revealed far more identifiable variables than I would dare to infer from the above data. Teachers who have spent years abroad and have achieved a high degree of fluency in spoken English have said that, in spite of their competence in L2, they have felt compelled to restrict their use of spoken English in the classroom because of student pressure. "The students do not expect me to speak English in class. Although they can't know for sure, they assume my English is bad just because I am a Japanese," remarked one diligent but frustrated colleague.

We can see elements of a deeply entrenched, self-perpetuating system here. If Japanese teachers show too much self-conscious sensitivity in their approach to L2, it is hardly surprising that the students will follow suit. As one student stated in a mid-year report ('The Japanese Way of Learning, 1988), "'Manabu' means 'to learn', but it also means 'to copy' or 'to imitate'. We don't need to develop our thoughts independently because we have a teacher as role model. All we need to do is copy him."

Qu.18. Was your junior/senior high school English class enjoyable? Explain.

Although a written response was called for here, 90% of the subjects responded with a very clear "No" to this question. The reasons summarized briefly were : over-emphasis on the translation of texts, over-emphasis on specious grammatical points, studying in the shadow of the much feared university entrance examinations, too passive an approach, etc., - a fairly predictable list of reasons. But the most illuminating comment came from a subject who questioned the wording of this particular question : "You have to understand that we Japanese do not associate study with 'enjoyment'. We have a spartan approach to learning, and the perseverance necessary is a highly respected virtue."

Here, it seemed, was a key to understanding the attitude of the Japanese towards L2 learning, which is inextricably bound up with the attitude towards study of any kind in Japan. This subject's observation inspired me to explore this attitude further, and the 1988 summer assignment for the same group of subjects was focussed entirely on this area producing the following comment :

"It's not that we are not interested to study English. We are not interested in studying any subject at university. We have been through examination

hell.”

This student was obviously referring me back to our previous class when I had indirectly questioned students' motivation to study English. It is a comment representative of many : explicitly or implicitly, it advises the foreign teacher to view the attitude of the Japanese university student towards L2 learning within the broader attitude towards all subjects studied at university (i.e. this is not to be taken too seriously). Other representative comments included the following :

I'm sorry the system is like this. It makes us less interested in studying.

For most of us, English is only a means of passing 'shiken jigoku' (exam hell).

The entrance examination was the real goal of our studies. Now we have no clear goal.

Perhaps this “real goal” is the most clearly identifiable for the high school student locked into the system. As students at a national university, they have certainly “arrived”, and a good job is now almost guaranteed. But even those students who have failed to attain this goal may have passed a far more significant test in the eyes of Japanese society, related to a powerful underlying socio-cultural process I see evident in comments like these :

Japanese value sweat and tears, so when we study great effort is needed.

To learn something has no charms. It is only a pain for us. The purpose of learning is not to enjoy it.

Japanese effort = effort for effort's sake. It has no aim. We are apt to forget why we study when we study. We must simply 'gaman'.

There is an element of protest in these students' comments, but, at the same time, there is acceptance of the established way : “We must simply 'gaman'.” “Gaman” (to endure) is a vital concept for the Japanese even today when there is no clear physical evidence of the hardship the Japanese frequently had to endure in the not so distant past. Someone who is “Gaman tsuyoi” (good at enduring) in Japan commands a great deal of respect.

But “ganbare” is a term more frequently heard in terms of effort and endurance, and this conveys a sense of “holding out” or persevering in the face of all odds, although there seems to be no one word equivalent in English for this concept. (It is interesting to see that Japanese students have substituted the English word “fight” for this term, in the phonetically compatible form of “Fai-to”, which can be heard chanted from baseball-bleachers or grunted by solitary members of university karate clubs running barefoot through snow and city traffic). It is a term that characterizes Japanese

culture in so many ways, affecting many of its institutions and the whole process of learning, an area particularly well documented by Benjamin Duke (1986), in *The Japanese School*.²⁹

“Effort for effort’s sake.” ? When I spoke to a Japanese colleague about the disparity I had noticed between the effort students expended employing the rote- learning system of English at Japanese high schools and the meagre results, he was quick to reply, “You don’t understand! Think of all the benefits they gain in the way of self-discipline - it’s a valid way of assessing spirit in the individual.” I was to discover that, like the variety of terms eskimos use to describe snow, a variety of terms exist in Japanese to refer to “spirit in the individual”. Besides ‘kokoro’ (‘soul’), and ‘ki’ (‘life force’) these include ‘tamashi’, and ‘seishin’, which Harumi Befu (1986)³⁰ defines as elan vital, ‘including the determination to overcome all odds,” and, “Seishin, sometimes translated as ‘spirit,’ is a mental attitude that helps a person tackle a task.” Befu suggests that the Japanese believe these concepts actually shape a person’s character, and, although “noncorporeal substances,” they are “conceived as substantive” to “make self-discipline possible.” But a process is required. As Befu adds, “a substance needs to pass through the crucible of experience before self-discipline is achieved,” and this involves “hardship, endurance, and effort.”³¹

Befu continues to show how experience in self-discipline is often conceived of as a form of training and becomes the major component in many training institutes. Japanese companies periodically send their employees away to such institutes, where the program is expected to be spartan. I have personal experience in being involved in one of these programs when I was once invited by a Prefectural Education Board to teach “Oral Drills” to junior high school teachers corralled in an “Educational” institute night and day for two weeks. Some of these teachers had been teaching English for twenty years and undoubtedly knew more about my own language than I did. But none had been exposed to a foreigner, and few had any oral competence in English. Although the Japanese supervisors repeatedly exhorted me to be ‘severe’, it was obvious my mere presence was a threat, but accepted in the spirit of ‘hardship’ through which they had no choice but to ‘endure’ and ‘persevere’.

Several students alluded to the importance of self-discipline in their essays on the “Japanese Way of Learning” when they described, possibly for the sake of a clear analogy, ‘sado’ (the way of tea), or ‘kendo’, ‘judo’, ‘aikido’, (and other martial arts). In any of these areas, as one student pointed out, the Japanese *-do* tag clearly identifies these areas as disciplines - a “way” - and as such “a process” where there are no short-cuts. With the ‘sensei’ as the model, and sole voice of authority, “practice is all,” no matter how painful, repetitive, and even pointless, that practice may seem to be.

Seen in this perspective, it is hardly surprising that English is made to seem so difficult for Japanese students. In a society which recognizes and rewards evidence of effort in the face of hardship, it would seem that English has been subsumed and

incorporated into the Japanese educational system with the sole function of serving that system, a phenomenon widely documented, but pointedly so by Reischauer, 1988, (op.cit). How this affects the thinking student's attitude to L2 learning is reflected here :

specifically :

In the traditional ways of teaching, Japanese teachers are absolute. We obey them without question. So when we study with a foreign teacher who treats us as equals and allows us to express ourselves freely, we suffer a kind of culture shock.

and generally :

Practice makes perfect.' We all become standardised, and memorize everything without thinking. I don't think this will ever change.

Q.19. Do you think English should be an elective course at high school?

No -68% Not sure -24% Yes - 4 % NA - 4 %

In the light of the deluge of negative comments made by students from previous years with regard to the study of English at high school, it seemed reasonable to assume that students would prefer to respond affirmatively here.

Q.20. How do you think this class will be different from one with a Japanese teacher of English?

This is similar to a screening question I ask students each year before classes start. It usually gives me some idea of what students expect from my class as well as revealing their attitudes towards L2 and foreigners. Aside from the usual expectations that they will be provided with a chance to speak and listen to English, with the implication that this would not happen in a Japanese English professor's class, the commonest expectation expressed by these subjects is that the class "will be enjoyable", and that English would somehow become more "friendly" or "familiar" to them.

Q.21. How do you think your attitude towards L2 may change in this class?

It would be hard to analyze the results of this question statistically. About half of the subjects either chose to avoid giving any response or simply said they did not know. The intention behind the question was really one of focus, alerting attention, I hoped, to personal observation of attitudes towards class activities and the use of L2 (all subjects would be directly asked to do this periodically in class). Those who responded thought they would become more "active" or "positive" and that they would come to "like English more."

Q.25. Why do you think direct translation is a bad idea?

Again, this is an open-answer question which invoked responses difficult to analyze statistically. 6 subjects chose not to tackle the question, and 6 more challenged the presumption inherent in the question that they thought direct translation was a bad idea : “Without it, I couldn’t understand English!” one subject protested. 13 subjects thought direct translation was a bad idea because it did not “capture meaning” (or words to that effect) or, in the case of literature, “capture the writer’s feelings” ; 10 suggested that it was “unnatural” ; and 6 subjects made fascinating statements to the effect that no translation could capture the beauty of Japanese. The implications inherent in the latter idea have been dealt with at great length in Andrew Miller’s book : *Japan’s Modern Myth : The Language and Beyond* (1982)³² - a fascinating and highly controversial account of the resources employed by certain Japanese educationalists to preserve and protect the Japanese language. Miller states that there is an “enormous field represented by the modern myth of Nihongo and its major Japanese exponents,” but he restricts his sampling to “representative quotations and examples taken from the work of a single prominent figure, Professor Haruhiko Kindaichi.” (ibid p.56.).

Q.28. Do you think it is possible to think in English?

In hindsight, this question should have been phrased, “Do you think you can communicate in English without having to go through the process of translating everything into Japanese?” - which would have made the intentions behind this question more explicit. As it stands, the question culled a blanket “No”, with a few puzzled abstentions - “?”. This question relates to areas where, over the year, I would hope to see attitudinal change based on classroom experience. End-of-the-year feedback from students (Feb., 1989), provided evidence that change had taken place, but, to my regret, the wording of this question was too vague to make any valid statistical comparisons.

Q.30. Do you think any Japanese can learn a FL if the conditions are right?

The wording of this question looks somewhat vague in English, but I was assured that the Japanese translation was acceptable by the Japanese colleague who had asked me to include it, and the subjects showed little hesitation in responding. The question addresses students’ beliefs regarding the difficulty of English. It is based on the number of strongly-expressed comments received over the years that FL acquisition is so difficult for the Japanese that it is beyond the realms of possibility for the majority. Such a notion needs to be viewed within the context of at least two factors :

1. students expressing such views have just emerged from university ‘entrance examination hell’ - the culmination of years of arduous study of a difficult and peculiarly Japanese form of English which most students know is useless in the outside world,
2. the underlying possibility that English is taught badly in order to foster the belief

that it is difficult or impossible to learn for most Japanese. Miller's analogy is apposite here : he compares the game played in Hermann Hesse's novel *The Glass Bead Game*, where a highly sophisticated society "came to focus all its energies and talents upon playing a game that consisted of manipulating markers on a complex abacuslike device through infinite sets of abstract patterns", to Japanese English-language education, which Miller sees as having "been made into a bead game ... to divorce its teaching materials from anything resembling real English, meaning English as a genuine, functioning medium of daily communication - in a word, from English as a language." (ibid p. 176.).

This view may be extreme, but whatever affects the attitude of the Japanese towards the successful acquisition of L2, 80% of the subjects here simply responded affirmatively to this question. I see this as reflecting a positive attitude and a sensible prerequisite to their personal approach to L2 learning, which, as the combined results of the three administrations show (cf. q.29), is seen by most subjects (64%) to be in need of change.

Final student comment emerging from q.30 (q.31 in 1988) across all three administrations Q1a, Q1b, & Q2

The final question was intended to provide the subjects with the opportunity and space to expand on any aspects of the questionnaire. Since a wealth of factors emerged, I considered the inclusion of this general feedback question to be a success. Categorization was obviously not easy, and my selection is subjective, but I have tried to restrict my selection of data to areas which were mentioned frequently.

Foremost here, was the expressed need for change, both at the personal and institutional level. Subjects wanted this new English class with the foreign teacher to provide everything that their classes with Japanese English classes at high school did not. General expectations included : the opportunity to "speak" English ; exposure to "real" (authentic) English ; a means to overcome "fear of making mistakes" and ridicule ; a "friendly", "relaxed," or "enjoyable" atmosphere ; a means to overcome "passivity" ; the acquisition of "practical" English as opposed to "English knowledge" ; etc. - no real surprises here after consideration of the main questionnaire data already discussed, but I find the following quotations both relevant and informative :

In order to learn another language, we should play, sing, speak in that language from infancy.

Japanese don't understand what real communication is. We often can't communicate well with each other.

We can't express our feelings easily, even in Japanese.

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We convert English into our Japanese way of thinking.

When we first learn Japanese, we learn by speaking. But we learn English by writing.

We're not taught how to use broken English, only to be precise.

I'll become an English teacher and want to study English I can speak. I would like to be able to teach Eikaiwa the way foreign teachers do, but I think it's impossible in Japan.

I want to be like a native speaker every day in my actions and bodily expression of my feelings. But I can't get rid of my HESITATION. I CAN'T! Please teach me how to get rid of it.

Comments such as these, along with some questionnaire data, were incorporated into classroom activities (1988) in an attempt to elicit further comment from students and to form some kind of group consensus concerning the major affective factors. There was, for example, an amazingly close correlation amongst the results of qu.14 for all three administrations ("Do you think that Japanese values and social behavior interfere with learning a foreign language?"), and the majority of subjects who had responded negatively had not been given the opportunity to add comments on the questionnaire, the data were discussed in class. When the results from each group were collated and presented to the whole class, students expressed surprise at the number and variety of "interference" factors stemming from their own accepted values and behavior patterns. More significantly, it became apparent that subjects who had responded negatively to this question experienced a change in attitude in the process of sharing their ideas on this topic. A show of hands confirmed that students were now unanimous in thinking that Japanese values and social behavior did interfere with L2 learning. Those subjects who had responded negatively or expressed uncertainty did so either because they had not understood this question or simply "had not given the matter any thought" (included in one group's report), but I failed to capitalize on this at the time and cannot accurately determine the reason.

What seemed important at this stage was that a group of Japanese students focussed on aspects of their own lives, dating back to infancy, they may not have thought relevant to L2 learning, and they were clearly intrigued by the connections (their own) that had been made. Their findings alluded to some of the L2 stumbling blocks already touched on in this paper, but I feel it important to include the students' list, summarized in class in the following way :

- the fear of making mistakes, (linked to the fear of ridicule, and hence, shame),
- the Japanese love for correctness or perfection, (examination mentality and penchant for saying and doing the *right* thing),
- Japanese homogeneity and the group mentality (exclusiveness and negative attitude towards foreigners),

- (linked to the above) the value placed on conformity and passive behavior - the latter fostered from childbirth.
- hierarchy - "our way of looking up or down at people (affecting our form of address),"
- the attitude of Japanese society to FL study, the goal of which is not communication,
- our different use of gestures and body language.

These factors were not only identified by students as stumbling blocks to L2 acquisition, but contained implications (overheard in group discussion) that blind transfer of Japanese values in certain areas would lead to behavior in an L2 situation which would only serve to exacerbate communication problems. This of course holds true for members of any one culture engaged in communication with members of an alien culture. But awareness of this is paramount. Dean Barnlund, (1989) explores this area very thoroughly in his book *Communicative Styles of Japanese and Americans*,³³ in which he says, "What one does spontaneously, without thinking, at home, one must be constantly and consciously aware of away from home," and, "Encounters become fraught with hazard when people do not recognize, or cannot employ, the same communicative norms as their associates."

Results and Discussion of Q3 (February, 1989) A FINAL SURVEY

Q.1. Over the past year, my English has improved.

Yes -32% It's the same -59% It's worse -13%

Please give reasons for your choice.

Of course, there was no accurate way to determine whether their English had improved (or to determine whether subjects had interpreted "English" to mean communicative ability, their Japanese examination-oriented English ability, or an overall assessment combining both areas). The intention underlying this question was to assess subjects' attitudes - how did they *feel* about their amount of improvement in English after one year? - and this was reflected in the reasons they offered for their choice of answer.

Where subjects saw a deterioration in their English ability, "forgotten vocabulary" was the most frequently cited, followed by loss of grammatical competence. I saw this as reference back to the examination-oriented English standard of their high schools. Those subjects who registered lack of improvement in their communicative ability mentioned "lack of class time," or the lack of opportunity to use English "in daily life" - "outside of this class, I never speak English."

The subjects who saw improvement, equated this with the opportunities to speak and hear English in class. But a substantial number (16) made indirect but clear references to improved motivation ; in stating, for example, that they were "more interested in communicating with foreigners," or were more "familiar with the atmosphere of English." This type of comment was followed by one subject with the sad

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reflection, "If we had studied English in the way we do in this class at high school, I would have made progress. Now it is too late." 6 subjects supplied no reasons for their choice.

Q.2. Over the past year, do you think your attitude to English has changed?

Yes -70% No -11% Don't Know -19%

(If "Yes", please explain)

This was a key question with regard to this group ; a question based on the assumption that attitudinal change was not only necessary but that subjects were also aware of this change, and could even identify why the changes had occurred. Like these results, the accompanying explanations were highly rewarding. There were further indirect references to increased motivation, which I inferred from the repeated use of positive vocabulary : subjects felt more "active," "confident," more willing to "try" or make the "effort" to speak English or apply themselves when watching foreign movies or listening to foreign songs. Fifteen subjects used words to the effect that they now saw the dynamic of English, that it was a means of communication between people and not just what they had been conditioned to believe :

I thought English came into existence on paper, but I found it exists between people.

Connected with this was the frequently expressed feeling of familiarity that English now had : it was "nearer to me," "more friendly," had a "natural feeling," was "less difficult," and was even "warmer." Furthermore, I found a more relaxed attitude evident in comments like these :

Things do not have to be exact for me to understand.

I can speak badly and still communicate.³⁴

The former comment supports observations by a Japanese student who visited this class in the second semester. He said that he felt uneasy when he could not understand my English but noticed that no-one else looked perturbed. He also observed that a network had been established whereby students who had understood quietly translated my meaning to those who had not. Ten subjects replied that they did not know if their attitude had changed, and twelve left this section blank.

Q.3. Do you think you are, or would be, less shy to communicate with foreigners in English now?

Yes -69% No -15% Don't know -16%

Even if this positive response does not lead to application, it at least reveals confidence.

Q.4. Compared to one year ago, do you feel more relaxed about about making mistakes in English?

Yes -90% No -7% N.A. -3%

Getting students to feel relaxed about making mistakes in English has been one of my major goals, and this result confirmed my impressions that students were taking more risks in English classroom activities as the year progressed.

Qu.5. What do you think is the ideal class size (no. of students) for L2 studies at university?

5-3% 10-7% 15-9% 20-44%
25-0% 30-33% 40-4% 50-0%

I cannot account for subjects not choosing 25, but a rough estimate would place the "ideal number" there.

Q.6. Would you have liked to use a textbook in this class?

Yes -5% No -95%

For various reasons, I do not use textbooks, but I found these results especially rewarding because they showed a dramatic change in students' attitudes. At the beginning of the year data revealed that these students thought that foreign-oriented textbooks would "best facilitate" their learning of English (cf.Q2, q.21). Through the year, they produced much of their own material related to their own lives, interests, and experiences, which they obviously had not envisaged as a helpful component.

Q.7. Do you think it's possible to learn much English in the scheduled one class a week?

Yes -17% No -75% Don't Know -8%

A fairly predictable result from a question really designed to remind students that to expect a substantial improvement in their English would be unrealistic. It is also deliberately juxtaposed with the next two questions but I regret not having elicited extra comment here - particularly from the subjects who voted "Yes."

Q.8. Do you think that the university wants you to to be able to communicate well in a foreign language?

Yes -27% No -65% Don't know -13%

(If you chose "No", please give reasons for your choice)

Sixteen subjects mentioned that they felt their Japanese professors either did not want them speaking in English or did not regard that aspect of English as important. Many subjects chose to criticize the Japanese professors' system where English textbooks were distributed just for translation purposes. According to some, this resulted in

the “correct answer only” approach they thought they had left behind at high school. In defense of Japanese English professors, I know some who have tried to implement an oral approach (i.e. : speaking mostly in English) in their classes, but even if their English speaking level is high, they feel that the students will not accept their English. As a colleague stated, “They see I am a Japanese so they don’t expect me to be able to speak English well. My English is not authentic.” Thus continues the myth and general adherence to the belief that Japanese people cannot speak English. Professor Sugawara of Gifu University was possibly closer to the truth in the university context, however, when he remarked (in an informal discussion) that Japanese society did not expect much from university students, “Compared to Japanese High Schools, neither students nor staff take scheduled classes that seriously, especially when students are in their first year at university. That’s the way things are in Japan.”

Q.9. If you cannot learn much English with just one class a week, why do you think the university bothers?

This provoked a variety of responses of which the bulk referred to “Keeping up appearances” or “for form’s sake,” but there were several references to the “many other subjects that have to be studied” - reminding me that not all of these students are majoring in English. The two most revealing statements were :

“In Japan, only a few people fluent in English are necessary,” and, “It is a Ministry of Education ruling that all students in their first year at university must receive a credit showing they have attended a foreign language class. We even have to attend a physical education class !”

The first statement is perceptive, touching on a belief that is easy to ignore. In such a homogeneous society, where most Japanese will never come into contact with a foreigner, why should everyone have to study English? It is a reasonable argument that a few specialists are all Japan needs in its dealings with the outside world, and this is possibly the underlying reason for upholding a system in which the majority of students, even after 10 years of English classes, fail so miserably in communicating with foreigners.

Q.10. Do you think Japanese society wants Japanese people to be able to communicate in a foreign language?

Yes -37% No -45% Don’t know -18%

(If you chose “No”, please give reasons)

For this, and the last two, questions one might ask how the students could be expected to produce any answers - how could they know? In hindsight, I saw that these questions should have been more carefully worded, but in defence of their inclusion I

must state that I had two clear aims : to get a rough idea of how many students had given these questions any thought, and to get students thinking about the position, importance, and value of language studies at university level from the viewpoint of society at large, however amorphous that may seem.

Q.10, for instance, was based on the hypothesis that Japanese society - or the community at large - does not want people to be able to communicate in a L2. I was influenced here by recorded comments from the Japanese themselves. Masayoshi Harasawa, for example, a professor at Keio University, makes the following rather startling statement :

To the Japanese mind, nothing foreign exists as such, and all foreign things are there to be Japanese, Japan being the only real country and Japanese the only real language under the sun.³⁵

At the Kanto Association of Language Teachers' Conference in 1979, Izumi Tamura of Komaba High School stated :

In Japan, there is no motivation even on the part of the Japanese teacher to be a good speaker of English ... We do not need English to communicate among ourselves. We have never been colonized. Besides, we should preserve our Japaneseness.³⁶

Furthermore, Robert Christopher (1983) in his book : *The Japanese Mind*,³⁷ quotes the results of a Japanese government survey of 1980, which showed that 64% of Japanese people (in Christopher's words) "flatly declared they did not want to associate with foreigners and had no intention of doing so."

My survey question also seemed to be the one begged from the anticipated responses to the previous questions, and, as I expected, it drew similar or related comments. Foremost amongst the reasons for supporting this hypothesis were references to the way English is taught at high school ; as one subject reasoned : "If they really wanted us to learn English, they would not have such a bad school system." At least 10 subjects suggested that Japanese people felt English was either "not considered important" or not needed in daily life," and that only "special people needed to be fluent" in L2, and even : "There are good translation machines on the market," although many subjects hastened to point out that they did not feel that way. In some reasons offered, there was reference to the commonly held Japanese belief that English for the Japanese was either extremely difficult or impossible, and I found further evidence of this in these remarks :

We Japanese are convinced that Japanese is the only way to understand each other.

It is hard for us to conceive that we can make ourselves understood in a foreign language.

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These remarks also shed light on such blanket statements as, "We are Japanese. We don't need to learn a foreign language." It is as though just being "Japanese" is reason enough, and needs no qualification.

Q.11. If you become fluent in English, and can communicate easily with foreigners, what do you think other Japanese people will think of you?

Contrary to my expectations, the responses showed overwhelming agreement that "other Japanese" would respond positively to signs of the subjects' L2 fluency. It was interesting to note the number of times the following English words appeared: "Respect"-24, "Envy"-19, "Great" (or "Wonderful")-16, "Intelligent"-13, and "International" (or "International Elite")-7. Other subjects thought they would merit "praise," or people would be simply "surprised." Relatively few subjects expressed the idea that they might be considered "unfamiliar" or "not Japanese," as I had expected them to. Possibly, many subjects were superimposing their own motivated feelings on this idea, placing themselves in the shoes of the "other Japanese," - a form of wishful thinking, which preempted my next question.

Q.12. When you see another Japanese person who can communicate easily with foreigners in English, how do you feel?

The response to this was 100% positive. As with Q.11 responses, similar words were used by the subjects to describe their feelings, but this time the English word "Envy" was used 46 times. Again, possibly because of relatively high motivation on the subjects' part, I failed to elicit any of the negative elements in intersocial relations that Japanese "returnees" had observed.

Q.13. If you had the power to change the English educational system in Japan, what would you change?

Predictably, the university entrance-examination was high on the list of priorities and was mentioned by fourteen subjects who wanted to see it changed, although few practical alternatives were offered. But the highest number (37) stressed that priority should be given to the teaching of "speaking." Several subjects suggested that they would incorporate more foreign teachers into the system, and a few suggested that classes should be "more enjoyable", more concerned with "culture", free from texts - "We should learn by ear, not by eye," - and be reduced in size. On my first visit to Japan in 1969, I heard students and teachers saying the system must change, but there is little evidence to show that things are any different.

Q.14. Some people say that Japan is not at all international. What do you think?

Agree -61% Disagree -24% Don't know -15%

For some years now, "kokusaika" (internationalism) has been a buzz word here in Japan. It is a topic one hears constantly discussed on Japanese radio and television, and is the source of heated debate in the international newspapers published in Japan. But it is an elusive term, and in discussing it, people frequently do not seem to be referring to the same thing. At the annual JALT Conference (1988) held in Kobe, Japan, John Ratliff gave a fascinating account of Japanese "kokusaika", suggesting that as many as three quite different Japanese conceptualizations were being lumped together under the name of internationalization. Briefly, he saw these as "Westernization" - copying or imitating western things, where there was very possibly an underlying "foreign complex"; a "tatemae" internationalization, which is simply the continuation of Japan's economic status quo ("tatemae" in Ratliff's interpretation is a kind of lip service, which in this case is directed to the West); and "honne" internationalization, which Ratliff defines in this context as a genuine commitment to openness, and desire to be integrated in the world community. (For complete details, see the report of this lecture in *The Language Teacher*, March, 1989, Vol.XIII : 3.)

This question did not evoke much in the way of added comment but what emerged was explicit, and mostly negative :

Deep down, we don't want to have communication with foreigners.

We're afraid of foreign people, foreign languages, foreign influence.

It's natural things are like this - we have deep traditions.

Our country and culture has been closed since the Edo era. We can't change rapidly.

Four subjects wrote that things are changing, and there was one positive protest: "The young generation is international!" But in the light of Ratliff's analysis, one wonders, "international" in what sense?

Q.15. Do you have any other comments you would like to add?

Most of these extra comments were a repeat of what was expressed earlier. Several subjects expressed words to the effect that they had come to see that their English does not need to be perfect in order to communicate :

I feel English isn't so different. Even if I can't speak well, I can still communicate.

Good communication does not mean perfect speech.

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I think that a broken English speaker can be a good speaker.

This class provided me with many first experiences. I wrote and spoke in English.

Many students expressed personal feelings about the social value of the class itself: "I was happy to make a lot of friends in this class," - a factor not to be dismissed in a country where making friends is not so easy, even for college students. But two students mentioned how uncomfortable they felt when there was silence in the class. I wish there had been further comment from these students because that was a deliberate teaching strategy: my point was to emphasize the fact that Japanese students invariably rely on the teacher to initiate any communicative exchange (and one can see how this affects Japanese social encounters outside of Japan³⁸). If they really did accept "responsibility for their learning", as they stated, and I reminded them that they did, on the initial questionnaire (cf.q.21), surely they needed to take the responsibility here? In the ensuing discussion, all students agreed on the necessity of this with regard to L2 learning, so I can only presume these two students had been absent, or their discomfort had completely blocked out the message embedded in this experience.

Fortunately, there was clear evidence that some students had come to see the importance of taking responsibility for their learning:

It's up to us students to make this class a success,

Obviously, we each must make our own efforts if we want to learn how to communicate well.

There were further critical reflections about the Japanese way of teaching English:

Reading is a single way, communicating is two way;

English isn't a school subject for study, but a living language;

We have to change our present education system. If we don't, Japan will collapse in the next thirty years;

and there were personal declarations of intent together with suggestions for the motivated Japanese student to side-step all the barriers they face in Japan. I would like to conclude this section with two of these statements:

Now Japan has to face up to harsh realities. It is hard to make myself understood in a foreign language. But it is a must for us.

We young people must leave Japan. Go! Go! Go! Go out alone. Make friends. Study in a

lot of countries.

CONCLUSION

The socio-cultural and psychological barriers faced by the Japanese student of English would appear to be formidable. Data from the surveys do not yield an exclusive list, and I have not attempted to supply one. But a surprising number of affective factors emerged, either explicitly expressed by subjects or implicitly evident in the many unsolicited comments. The questionnaire statistics show a remarkable correlation between the three administrations, but yield little to suggest that the majority of Japanese students are aware of the large number of cultural determinants affecting their approach to L2 study. There were many individual exceptions where personal comments revealed an awareness of these factors, particularly with regard to the way English is taught in Japan. These comments also highlighted affective areas students were clearly not aware of - often where faulty assumptions were made based on misconceptions of the L2 mode of communication (e.g. the expectation that there could be a direct transfer of Japanese set phrases) - and the identification of these factors proved useful in the classroom follow-up.

I must re-emphasize that the aim of this paper was simply to review Japanese students' attitudes and attempt to identify some of the obstacles in their L2 learning path - the real and the imagined. The focus on the 1988/89 subjects was entirely experimental and not intended to provide any more than a few examples of classroom applications of reflection sessions based on Q data implications. An attempt was made to determine whether students' attitudes had changed in the course of the year ; comments from individuals would suggest that a change in awareness had taken place, but I could find no instrument to measure this accurately.

Nevertheless, the focus was helpful in challenging learners' beliefs and testing my own teaching hypotheses based on a combination of data implications and past experience. From this I concluded that although foreign teachers can do little to influence the prevailing attitude of the speech community towards L2, we can at least alert students to areas where change is possible, without their having to "leave Japan." One of the surprises of this project was the instrumental effect of the questionnaire itself. As quantitatively unreliable as the questionnaire findings may be, they can be usefully incorporated into classroom procedure to serve other functions, even before the classes begin. Introduced early, a questionnaire can :

1. serve as a self-introduction for both student and teacher ;
2. provide the FT with some idea of students' attitudes, fears, expectations, motivation, and goals ;
3. provide students with some idea of the FT's expectations, ideas for classroom procedure, and level of interest in them ;

4. lessen initial anxiety or culture shock (by providing the space and anonymity to express their feelings) ;
5. provide both FT and students, with data that can be referred back to over the year.

The questionnaire can be included to good effect in classroom proceedings. I have found the "module" form prescribed by Wenden,³⁹ works well, or it can be simply used as a means of yielding and sharing feedback. But this is only one device, an effective one if used with care, but an insignificant one compared to the live, unpredictable, but unmistakably authentic device of the foreign teacher.

Ultimately, foreign teachers in Japanese colleges have the possibility (and usually the freedom) to achieve much that the Japanese L2 teacher cannot. They can go some way to breaking down the stereotypes about non-Japanese, and help dispel the myths that obstruct L2 progress in Japan, and this can take place in the classroom. An interest in, and sensitivity to Japanese thought and behavior patterns, is a prerequisite for the foreign teacher. An expressed interest in the culture by the FT will provide Japanese students with the motivation to communicate from a point that is known and familiar ; and an expanded FT awareness of the social mechanisms at work in the Japanese way of communicating is one that can be shared, and may need to be discussed with students without damaging their self image. I have found several ways to approach this. Video material, for example, can be particularly helpful here : realistic excerpts from films showing conflicts resulting from simple differences in communicative styles (preferably where no-one or everyone looks foolish) can lead to lively discussions, classroom re-enactments, and heightened awareness. This kind of film sequence can then be compared to one showing successful communication between Japanese students and foreigners, especially if this occurs in a situation most Japanese would dread to find themselves (I have found evidence of peer-group success to be one of the strongest motivating factors amongst Japanese students).

Japanese social mechanisms themselves can be exploited in L2 classroom procedure, even ones that can be identified as affective. For instance : the penchant individual Japanese students have for conferring with classmates when asked a direct question by the FT is time-consuming and impractical ; individuals are asking their peers for clarity, support, and a consensus answer - all useful strategies to incorporate and exploit by simply redirecting the question to a clearly defined group. The value attached to perseverance and being seen to be doing one's best can be fostered by having groups compete - a dynamic encouraged from Japanese kindergarten on. In the excitement of inter-group competition, the individual's self-consciousness and anxiety is considerably lessened. The individual can now take risks for the group from a position of security engendered by strong group support (even when wrong), although I must emphasize that this is merely a step or stage in the individual's development he or she will eventually need to transcend.

In this group-competitive mode, the affective 'shame' factor can be harnessed to

good effect by displaying the results of group work at the end of a project, drama-activity or game ; no-one wants their group to look bad or give the appearance of not having tried hard. Thus, the fear of shame in the individual can be reduced from disruptive anxiety level to a defused, healthy tension within the mutually supportive group. Furthermore, the often quoted Japanese phrase, “Deru kugi o tataku ...” (“the nail that sticks up gets beaten down”), which many Japanese see as a restrictive factor in L2 learning, is exploited by students to discipline members who are not working in the interests of the group - a cultural determinant again clearly fostered in the group formations at Japanese kindergartens. Within the classroom groups, students assert their own discipline and take strides towards accepting personal responsibility for their learning.

Other social mechanisms can be adapted from Japanese sports club activities or martial arts procedures: during practice sessions, pairs form, rotate, and practice according to a fixed time limit, and this is usually followed by a reflection session and/or a period of silence. Transferring and adopting such procedure to the FL learning arena may seem highly artificial, but it is democratic, is a practical way to cope with large classes, and is manipulating a system that Japanese students are familiar with, and, in my experience, willing to accept.

The project started as a review of students' attitudes through the use of a questionnaire, which I knew to be flawed. But the issues that evolved made me wonder if the right questions were being asked ; I was searching for students' misconceptions where, very possibly, no conceptions even existed. I now see the latter as an area of primary concern and one that needs to be constantly addressed in the FL classroom until, that is, that magical transition point when students can say in no matter how faltering the English that a part of themselves has been liberated by a discovery that is all theirs. As one student phrased it :

I am surprised to find myself expressing in English what I could never do in Japanese.
I am a Japanese and I can do it.
(underlining mine).

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Linju Ogasawara quoted in a review of a speech given at the November 14th (1982) meeting of the Japan Association of Language Teachers (JALT) East Kansai, reviewed by Juro Sasaki, in the *JALT Newsletter*, Vol.7 : 3, p.18. March, 1983.
(This talk directly addressed cultural interference in Japanese English education, and Ogasawara provides a useful list of factors, some of which have not been included in this paper).
2. Quoted by Hajime Fukumoto of Doshisha Women's College in : “Neurolinguistics : Some Suggested Neurophysiological Constraints on English Aquisition,” in *The Teaching of English in Japan*. 1978. Tokyo : Eichosha, p.731.
3. Reischauer, Edwin.O. 1988. *The Japanese Today*. Tokyo : Tuttle.
4. Ibid p.397.
5. See for example Takao Suzuki's views on this in *The Japan Times*, 29th March, 1988, or in his illuminating book, *Japanese and the Japanese : Words in Culture*. 1978. Tokyo : Tuttle.

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6. Quoted from a letter to *The Japan Times*, 21st March, 1988.
7. From a letter to *The Japan Times*, 1st April, 1988.
8. This is an echo of my own experience of high school visits : at one, the Japanese teacher refused to let me directly address any of the students who had treated me to a baffling display of their oral English ability (obviously memorized and well-rehearsed in advance) ; at another, I was asked to read lines from a Japanese Ministry of Education approved text and have students repeat. When I realised that the students had no idea of the meaning of what they were repeating (and obviously being made to memorize), and since the text itself was presenting English phrases with no thought to context, I began to draw pictures on the blackboard to facilitate what I thought to be an absurd situation. The students were intrigued. Unfortunately, the teacher interrupted this within seconds, exhorting me to "keep to the book." I have also accompanied my own 4th-year students at their request to high schools during their two-week teaching practice (a requirement necessary to obtain a Junior High School Teaching License in Japan) ; my students have often been apologetic because they were not allowed to implement any of the communicative-approach methods they had been subjected to in their own college classes - ways they knew from experience to be effective.
9. The irony here is that according to Minoru Soma, "AETs are not required to be experts. In their respective positions, they serve as assistants." (op. cit.).
10. Gibney, Frank. 1979. *Japan : The Fragile Super Power*. Tokyo : Tuttle.
11. Benedict, Ruth. 1956. *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*. Tokyo : Tuttle.
12. Possibly stemming from too long a focus on Japanese English tests and examinations ; there are frequent cases of students having to guess which answer the professor/examiner has in mind when it is obvious that there may be two correct possibilities, but only one will count. Obviously, this develops bad learning habits, and students not only need to see that, but actively work on open-answer type questions, where imaginative inferencing and guesswork is called for - not memorized answers.
13. Found in the article, "What the "good language learner" can teach us." *TESOL Quarterly* 9 : 41-45.
14. Beebe, L. M. 1983. "Risk-taking and the Language Learner" in *Classroom Research in Second Language Acquisition*. eds. Rowley, Mass. : Newbury House.
15. Seward, Jack. 1971. *More About the Japanese*. Tokyo : Lotus Press.
16. Condon, John, C. 1984. *With Respect to the Japanese*. Maine : Intercultural Press.
17. For more on this , and how "face" leads to "politeness strategies" see Jack Richards in "Talking Across Cultures," in the *JALT Journal*, November, 1981.
18. op.cit., p.33
19. Nakane, Chie. 1972. *Japanese Society*. Berkeley : Univ. of California Press.
20. *ibid.* p.25.
21. op.cit., p.143.
22. Gardner, R. C. and W. Lambert. 1972. *Attitudes and Motivation in Second Language Learning*. Rowley, Mass.
23. Singer, Kurt. 1973. *The Mirror, Crown and the Jewel*. London : Crook Helm.
24. op.cit., p. 130.
25. Tsukamoto, Tomoo. 1982. "Some Problems of Teaching English in Japan", in *Cross Currents* vol.11, no. 2.
26. Nevstupny, J. V. 1987. *Communicating with the Japanese*. Tokyo : The Japan Times.
27. One of these students had stayed with a physically affectionate family but had not noticed that she had assimilated some of their non-Japanese physical habits until her parents greeted her upon her return to Japan : "Their greeting seemed cold. I wanted to hug them but could not!"

28. White, Merry. 1987. *The Japanese Educational Challenge*. Tokyo : Kodansha.
29. Op.cit.
30. Befu, Harumi. 1986. From : "The Social and Cultural Background of Child Development in Japan," in *Child Development and Education in Japan*. Edited by Harold Stevenson, et al. New York : W. H. Freeman, p.24.
31. *ibid.* pp.24-25. 32. Miller, Andrew. 1982. *Japan's Modern Myth*. New York : Wetherhill.
32. Miller, Andrew. 1982. *Japan's Modern Myth*. New York : Wetherhill.
33. Barnlund, Dean, 1989. *Communicative Styles of Japanese and Americans*. Belmont, California : Wadsworth.
34. In many of the above comments students were saying what I wanted to hear but at a stage when they possibly knew what I wanted to hear. Although it is always encouraging to read such remarks, it would be naive to presume they represent any real or lasting change ; an individual's expressed desire to change, however sincere, is not always commensurate with what actually takes place. Once again, this method of gathering data shows that it has limitations, but in spite of these, I would maintain that so many positively expressed responses are, at the very least, a step in the right direction.
35. Harasawa, Masayoshi. "The Ultimate Destiny of English Teaching in Japan," in *The Teaching of English In Japan*. (op.cit. p.547).
36. Quoted in the *JALT Newsletter*, April, 1979.
37. Christopher, Robert. 1983. *The Japanese Mind*. Tokyo : Tuttle.
38. Neustupny cites Japanese behavior while socializing in Australia. At a party, he observed that some Japanese party guests "drank too much because they didn't know how to say "No, thank you" ; they spoke only to those who came and directly addressed them ; and they stayed until everyone else left, because they didn't know how to leave in the proper manner." Neustupny continues to make suggestions for how these situations may be avoided with major adjustments needed to be made by the *host* community.
39. Wenden, Anita. 1986. "Helping learners think about learning," *ELT Journal* vol.40 no.1.

APPENDIX ONE

THE FIRST QUESTIONNAIRE. (Given in Japanese)

Results	(in % for each year)		
	<u>1986</u> (n=94)	<u>1987</u> (n=200)	<u>1988</u> (n=72)
Q1. For you personally, what does learning a second language mean? (you may circle more than one answer)			
a. A means to facilitate travel.	61	70	72
b. A means to improve my job prospects.	30	40	29
c. It is fun.	40	30	39
d. A chance to talk to non-Japanese.	79	71	80
e. A chance to broaden my way of thinking.	51	53	66
f. It is "kako ii" (cute).	18	21	22
g. Other	10	7	7
Q2. What aspect of English do you consider most important to concentrate on now?			
a. Listening comprehension.	33	47	44
b. Speaking ability	52	40	53
c. Knowing the meanings of as many words as possible	3	7	3

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d. Correct pronunciation.	7	2	6
e. Grammatical competence.	3	1	0
f. Other.	1	1	3
Q3. Few Japanese have the chance to use their knowledge of English here in Japan. In your case, is the study of English really necessary?			
a. Yes.	63	54	X
b. No.	5	7	X
c. I'm not sure.	32	37	X
Q4. How good must your English be in order to communicate with native speakers?			
a. Almost perfect.	5	12	x
b. It must be grammatically correct.	0	2	X
c. It does not matter as long as communication takes place.	95	85	X
Q5. Do you think "katakana" helps you with your pronunciation of English?			
a. Yes.	63	54	X
b. It depends.	22	25	X
c. No.	52	47	X
d. I don't know.	23	24	X
Q6. What is needed to become a good communicator in English? (choose the one you think is most important).			
a. Courage to face the unpredictable.	13	5	15
b. A good dictionary.	0	0	0
c. A good teacher.	4	1	3
d. A sound knowledge of grammar.	1	1	0
e. A good memory.	2	9	3
f. Simple exposure to any foreigner.	79	81	79
Q7. To be able to communicate successfully in English it is necessary to : (choose one)			
a. imagine you are a foreigner,	17	18	27
b. imitate native speakers as closely as possible,	23	24	25
c. change certain aspects of yourself to suit the new situation.	39	46	42
d. remain as 'Japanese' as possible but be able to speak English well,	18	11	6
e. other	2	2	0
Q8. What helps your motivation to study English? (You may circle more than one choice).			
a. A good textbook.	4	6	4
b. A good teacher.	69	53	61
c. Working together with motivated students.	56	48	61
d. A variety of good material.	39	37	34
e. A lively atmosphere.	50	56	60
f. A relaxed atmosphere.	71	58	61
g. An atmosphere in which you are challenged.	7	13	17

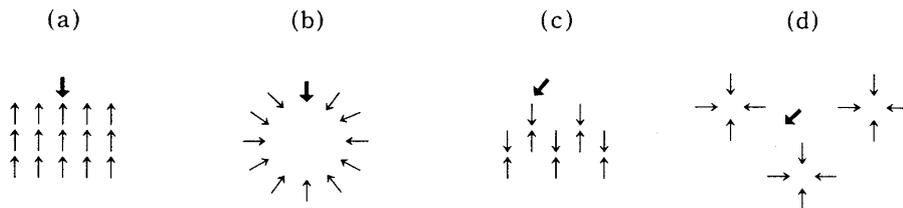
John Williams

h. Other.	6	0	3
Q9. Why does English seem so difficult for Japanese people to learn?			
a. The culture is different.	12	14	X
b. The language is completely different.	29	26	X
c. Shyness.	34	35	X
d. The teachers are not good.	8	4	X
e. Other.	10	19	X
f. No answer.	5	4	X
Q10. Suppose you are communicating with a foreigner and you think that the foreigner's Japanese speaking ability is about the same as your level of English, in the following situations which language would you prefer to speak in - English or Japanese?			
1. You are a host receiving the foreign guest in your home.			
a. In Japanese,	54	45	X
b. In English.	45	54	X
2. You are talking freely in the park or in a coffee shop.			
a. In Japanese.	32	28	X
b. In English.	66	71	X
3. You have business to do with that foreigner.			
a. In Japanese.	28	37	X
b. In English.	70	63	X
4. You are speaking in front of an audience.			
a. In Japanese.	49	44	X
b. In English.	49	54	X
Q11. Is a person who is good at 'eigo' equal to a person who is good at 'eikaiwa'? Or is there a significant difference?			
a. There is a significant difference.	95	94	X
b. They are the same.	4	6	X
Q12. Do you think that if you become fluent in English you will lose some of your 'Japaneseness'?			
a. Yes.	3	4	X
b. No.	90	90	X
c. I don't know.	6	6	X
Q13. A famous Japanese linguist recently suggested that English in Japan should be studied without reference to western culture, i.e., the language itself should be pruned of any cultural content. How do you feel about this?			
a. A good idea.	1	3	X
b. An interesting idea but could cause problems.	40	41	X
c. Impossible.	48	43	X
d. I don't know.	10	13	X

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- Q14. Do you think that Japanese values and social behavior interfere with learning a foreign language?
- | | | | |
|-------------------|----|----|----|
| a. Almost always. | 2 | 4 | 4 |
| b. Sometimes. | 39 | 39 | 39 |
| c. No. | 41 | 46 | 41 |
| d. I don't know | 17 | 11 | 16 |
- sub Q14.1. If you chose a. or b. please give examples.
- Q15. Japanese students of English have a reputation for shyness. Do you think this is because : (choose one or more)
- | | | | |
|--|----|----|----|
| a. Japanese people are generally reserved. | 8 | 11 | 17 |
| b. Japanese people do not like to show off their knowledge of English to others. | 8 | 5 | 0 |
| c. Shyness is a sign of good manners. | 4 | 9 | 3 |
| d. Japanese people simply hate to make mistakes. | 67 | 63 | 68 |
| e. Other. | 2 | 2 | 12 |
| f. N.A. | 9 | 7 | 0 |
- Q16. Do you think another Japanese person looks silly if he/she speaks English imperfectly?
- | | | | |
|------------------|----|----|----|
| a. Yes. | 1 | 3 | 5 |
| b. No. | 85 | 84 | 91 |
| c. I'm not sure. | 11 | 9 | 4 |
- Q17. Do you feel silly when speaking in English to other students?
- | | | | |
|------------------|----|----|----|
| a. Yes. | 1 | 7 | 4 |
| b. No | 85 | 84 | 91 |
| c. I'm not sure. | 10 | 9 | 4 |
- Q18. In the classroom, what do you think is most important :
- | | | | |
|---|----|----|---|
| a. to think of the good of the group? | 18 | 8 | X |
| b. to think of your own needs? | 75 | 86 | X |
| c. to think of your teacher's needs? | 2 | 5 | X |
| d. to think of obligations to your parents? | 1 | 1 | X |
| e. N.A. | 1 | 0 | X |
- Q19. How important is it to share your knowledge of English with other class members?
- | | | | |
|--------------------------|----|----|----|
| a. Very important. | 52 | 39 | 72 |
| b. Fairly important. | 44 | 51 | 27 |
| c. Not very important. | 2 | 7 | 4 |
| d. Not necessary at all. | 0 | 1 | 0 |
- Q20. How do you think a good 'eikaiwa' class should be structured? (you may circle more than one choice)

(← students ← teacher)



a.	13	9	14
b.	84	84	89
c.	14	23	11
d.	63	71	5

Q21. In the 'eikaiwa' class, what material would best facilitate your learning of English? (choose two)

a. An interesting foreign text with information about America or England?	59	53	47
b. A variety of material supplied by the foreign teacher	21	15	17
c. A text in English related to Japanese culture.	8	4	4
d. Student-generated material (material related specifically to your life, interests, and experience).	40	20	19
e. A textbook of conversational dialogues designed for a stay abroad.	61	50	53
f. N.A.	9	2	0

Q22. At college, where do you think the responsibility lies for your education? (choose one)

a. With the administration.	1	3	3
b. With the writers of class texts and materials.	0	1	0
c. With the teachers.	6	5	8
d. With the Ministry of Education.	1	3	0
e. With yourself.	88	83	89

Q23. What do you expect from a foreign teacher of English?

(choose the most important)

a. To show you how you can learn English.	29	35	23
b. To entertain you.	49	46	56
c. To help you memorize words.	3	1	0
d. To tell you about English.	2	2	0
e. Other.	13	13	8

Q24. How intimidating do you find it to be in the presence of a foreign teacher?

a. Not at all.	12	18	19
b. A little.	60	62	64
c. Enough to disturb my concentration.	16	10	13
d. Very intimidating.	12	10	4
e. N.A.	0	0	0

Sub Q24.1 If you chose b., c., or d., give reasons.

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Q25. Do you think mistakes in English, (choose one)

a. should never be made?	2	0	3
b. should be corrected by the teacher?	16	25	20
c. should be corrected by the learner?	37	37	31
d. are a necessary part of the learning process and do not need immediate correction?	32	32	42
e. Other.	10	4	4
f. N.A.	3	2	0

Q26. How do you think your present knowledge of English is unbalanced?

(explain and give reasons)

Q27. If you do not understand what someone is saying to you in English, do you

(you can choose more than one)

a. remain silent?	6	5	2
b. pretend you understand?	15	25	20
c. try to grasp the gist of what is said?	84	83	86
d. interrupt the speaker and ask for clarification?	36	29	36
e. give up completely?	3	3	3
f. Other.	21	11	13
e. N.A.	3	0	0

Q28. When you are trying to memorize a new word in English, do you

a. repeat it quietly to yourself?	23	16	21
b. associate it with the same word in Japanese?	40	42	49
c. associate it with a mental picture or image?	22	18	9
d. try and use it in context as soon as possible?	1	6	9
e. Other.	2	5	11
f. N.A.	10	10	14

SUB Q28. 1. Which do you think is the most ideal method?

d.	68	74	75
c.	21	18	17

Q29. At this point, do you think it is necessary to change your approach to the study of English?

a. Yes.	67	63	62
b. No.	7	10	17
c. I don't know.	21	18	17

Q30. In the time you have left, please add your own comments to any of the topics raised in this questionnaire.

APPENDIX TWO.

THE SECOND (REVISED) QUESTIONNAIRE (1988) n= 72 ss

The following qus. were dropped from the first questionnaire :

3, 4, 5, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 18, 26, and the following open-answer (OA) qus. were added (in Japanese) :

6. When you think of the cultural aspects of English, which country do you think of first?

U.S.A. - 74% U.K. - 24%

7. Do you think its possible to say things in English that you may not be able to say in Japanese?

No - 66% Yes - 6% Not sure - 28%

9. (sub qu. to old qu.9) : Why are Japanese afraid of making mistakes?

11. Do you think its a bad idea for Japanese students to speak to each other in English?

No. - 63% Yes - 6% Not sure - 31%

16. In your English class at high school, how often did your Japanese teacher of English (JTE) speak English?

a) 100% of the time? 0% b) 50% (18%)
c) Less than 10% (68%) d) Never (14%)

17. How do you feel about JTEs speaking English in class at high school?

Good idea - 52% It depends - 8%
Bad Idea - 34% N.A. - 10%

18. Was your junior/senior high school English class enjoyable?

Explain.

No - 90%

19. Do you think English should be an elective course at high school?

No - 68% Not sure - 24% Yes - 4% NA - 4%

20. How do you think this class will be different from one with a JTE?

21. In what way do you think your attitude may change in this class?

22. (extension of old q.22) :

(e) To teach you English indirectly through the study of other subjects. 13%
(f) Other 2%

25. Why do you think direct translation is a bad idea?

28. Do you think it possible to think in English?

No - 89%

30. Do you think any Japanese can learn a FL if the conditions are right?

Yes - 80%

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31. In the time you have left, add your own comments to any of the topics raised in this questionnaire.

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[SUMMARY]

This paper is an investigation and review of Japanese university students' towards EFL in Japan based on solicited and unsolicited student comment collected over a period of ten years. Data collected from recent surveys are discussed in the light of Japanese socio-cultural and psychological factors which place so many barriers in the path of the Japanese L2 language learner. These data will also be related to comments made by Japanese teachers, commentators from related fields, and the author's personal observations inside and outside of the Japanese university classroom.

[要約]

本論文は、日本人大学生の英語クラスへの態度に関する調査、論評であり、その内容は、熱心なものから熱心でないものまでの多様な学生から、10年以上の間収集されたコメントに基づいている。最近の調査によるデータは、日本人の第二言語学習者に障害となって立ちふさがる社会・文化的、心理的要因に観点をおいて語られる。これらのデータは、日本人英語教員や関連領域の研究者からのコメント、さらには、大学の教室内外での著者の個人的な観察事項とも関連づけられる。[訳=高木(北山)眞理子]