

THE JAPANESE LANGUAGE STUDENT

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ABSTRACT:

This paper is a study of the Japanese language student. It will examine Japanese student classroom behavior, student psychology, the foreign teacher's Japanese English conversation classroom environment, and cultural and educational imperatives and constraints of the contemporary Japanese English as a Foreign/Second Language Education Classroom. Further, it will discuss the impact these conditions have on the Foreign English teacher, teaching materials, and pedagogy in Japan. This paper concludes with concrete proposals for foreign English teachers teaching in the Japanese language classroom.

1. Introduction.

The decades of the 1970's and 1980's brought tremendous and unprecedented change to Japanese society. For the first time in its history, Japan became a country that could afford to pay. For the first time in Japanese history, the general public, too, had money to spare. This new wealth, would effect foreign language education in Japan. Education became a "consumer" product. Many more people would begin spending money on extracurricular education. English, too, became a "consumer" product. Today's Japanese foreign language student is more a "consumer" than "student". By the late 1970's, the Japanese

business community arrived at a nation-wide consensus on the need to know English for Japan's global business activities. Thousands of salaried Japanese adult males would have to learn how to communicate in English, and very quickly. The importation of foreign English instructors began on a large scale.

Next, we will examine the Japanese English conversation classroom environment, Japanese student behavior, and cultural, educational imperatives, as well as constraints of the contemporary Japanese English as a Foreign/Second Language Education Classroom.

2. Japanese Classroom-Different Expectations.

"English Conversation" has, for the Japanese, a very different connotation than perhaps "Japanese Conversation" may have for Americans, or Europeans. Here in Japan, English Conversation is a high-priced, leisure-activity "product", in a major, "education-for-leisure" industry. It is not associated with "hard core" academic activity. As a highly commercialized entity, English Conversation is a "product", to be "purchased" for reasons decided only by the Japanese "customer" (student). It is seldom sold as the serious academic pursuit known as "ESL" (English As a Second Language), or "SLA" (Second Language Acquisition). As a "product", it is advertised, glamorized, somewhat mysterious, and sometimes misrepresented. Once outside the school grounds, the average Japanese may be a "consumer-student", rather than, a "study-student" of English Conversation. Therefore, upon entering a private school, or even the university classroom, the average Japanese student may have a very strong "con-"

mer" orientation towards English Conversation.

There are certain "cultural imperatives" that a teacher must work with in Japan, when teaching a foreign language for communication purposes. The teacher can only expect to define his or her parameters of success by performing within the specific learning environment of that Japanese education institution. Only a definition of success parameters based on Japanese cultural imperatives will allow the teacher to set reasonable expectations and goals for the student to achieve. For example, we will discuss a typical university scholastic year. It may consist of 26, once-a-week, 90-minute class meetings. To overcome low student motivation and a limited course structure demands a certain amount of finesse, charisma, and a familiarity with Japanese university student psychology.

Over time, the different expectations of teachers and students, as explained earlier, will result in cultural shocks. Cultural imperatives can be such that the "typical" Japanese enters an English conversation classroom hoping to receive a stimulating "social experience" before "communicative competence" only to face a teacher who is prepared to offer nothing less than a "proper" language education. In the private language school language classroom, a typical Japanese student may pay very well for a passive "experience-of-being-taught-by" a foreign teacher rather, than strive for active-communicative competency, by "learning-with" a foreign teacher.

Value systems can go to extremes in Japan too, as in a cultural bias in favor of "blond, blue-eyed Caucasian types". A brown-haired,

brown-eyed, Italian-American (this author), or a non-Caucasian teacher, might face quite a social "challenge". Of all the gaps to deal with, probably the largest one will be that of students "hoping to receive a stimulating social experience", rather than "studying to achieve communicative competence". Many respected, highly accredited (as in Ph. D.) foreign language teaching professionals, through no fault of their own, leave Japan, having been little more than a "stimulating social experience".

The next big perception gap between the foreign teacher and student is the "pronunciation syndrome". Paradoxically, living in Japan means being literally surrounded by English. The Japanese student is exposed to English in every facet of social activity, from scholastic to commercial. Even an infant's milk bottle is called "mirukku bottoru". The Japanese word for sports is "supootsu". Baseball may be called "beesubooru". The Japanese language is rich with borrowed English words. Alison R. Lanier points out that there are over 25,000 borrowed English words in the Japanese language.¹⁾ However, this is not the plus it may seem. Instead of a sense of advantage, Japanese students have all the more reason to unlearn (re-learn ?) English. The various entrance examinations utilize this rich source of linguistic confusion to trip up students. Students can get a double shock when an American listener inevitably corrects them, when they try to speak "Japanese English".

From junior high school through university, Japanese students learn English pronunciation by looking it up in dictionaries, rather than listening to it through audio, or audio-video tapes. There is a

long background of, and strong preference towards, visual rather than audiolingual pronunciation study. A possible reason for this may lie in the Japanese language itself. Japanese pronunciation is said to be very easy to learn. There are only five basic vowel sounds. They are shortened versions of the five vowel (the long a, e, i, o, u, and short o) sounds of English. Japanese don't consciously think of characters as alphabet letters, with vowels and consonants, as people of alphabet-based languages do. The Japanese "alphabets" (hira-gana and katakana) can be linked together, to form words. They are also assigned to Chinese characters to give these characters Japanese pronunciations (readings). This is where the difficulty of Japanese language study begins; not with pronunciation itself, but in remembering the thousands of Chinese characters, and the various Japanese readings assigned to each one and their compounds.

When one sees or hears a Japanese word, unless one already knows the reading, or remembers the characters of the word, one may not be able to know it. Just listening to a word will not work. It must be further inquired into or looked up. This is a tedious process. There are three possible situations to know a Japanese word after hearing it. First, to be already familiar with the word and its character(s). Second, to become familiar with a word and its character(s), one must ask for visual information on (the shape) of the character. Third, one must use "visual knowledge" of the character(s) in question, in order to look up the character(s). Then, in order to look up Japanese words, one has to be familiar with a character's stroke orders, as well as the number of strokes in the character(s) one is looking for. One cannot even open a Japanese dictionary without having this basic ling-

uistic background. What is relevant to our discussion is that the Japanese language requires an incredible need for looking things up, and rote memorization of huge blocks of "visual-linguistic" information as opposed to the large amounts of "audio-linguistic" information necessary in other languages.

For most Japanese, "pronunciation" of Japanese is learned and mastered between the ages of three and five. However, learning the "Japanese readings" of Chinese characters can take Japanese most of their lives. It is, therefore, a built-in assumption that learning "readings" (pronunciation) in other languages is better done by looking it up. Starting as early as the first or second year of junior high school, students are taught the written version of the international pronunciation phonetic system, mostly by Japanese English teachers who speak very little English in, or outside, the classroom. They are tested on this "visually-oriented" pronunciation system too. Thus, any emphasis on listening, or phonetics is usually perfunctory at best. However, since English has only 26 alphabet letters, and so many different spellings, pronunciation (audio-linguistic information) is critical.

Most junior high schools in Japan are equipped with at least one 45-to-50 student-capacity Language Laboratory (LL) classroom. However, its use is tightly controlled. Students only use these facilities during class time, under the teacher's strict supervision. Against this background, they will be occasionally asked to listen attentively to the foreign English teacher and/or various English Conversation tapes. In most cases, the junior and senior high school language lab is a "closed" facility in Japan. In any case, there just is not enough time

for language listening in the English-for-Entrance-Examination curriculum of the junior and senior high school years. So, habits and attitudes are set hard in these critically important six years.

Even at the university level, few students will, and then only rarely, use language labs spontaneously. Consequently, the critically important language learning task of 'Hearing', or 'Listening' to a target language is, for most Japanese students, either too boring or too demanding. Give the student(s) a "listening" tape and dictionary to study pronunciation, and the Japanese student will almost invariably "look up" a pronunciation, before trying to "listen" to the tape for it. They will try to "read" a pronunciation before they will listen to it. By the time they graduate from a university, Japanese students will have 10 years of "RFP" (Reading For Pronunciation) education. This means that they are far better trained to open up a Japanese-English dictionary for a pronunciation, than to listen to an aural tape, or even to watch-listen to a video tape. As a result, Japanese will most likely check a pronunciation by the spelling out a word they have heard, rather than asking, "Once more please ?", using their own ears when confronted with the sound of English.

3. Classroom behavior: Group Versus Individual.

What about classroom behavior ? Based upon thousands of hours of subjective discussions with Japanese colleagues, and this author's 15 years of classroom experience in Japan, we will expand on two sets of typical classroom behavioral patterns. The first is a negatively skewed experience. The second is a relatively successful class be-

havior pattern. Let us imagine that it is now the beginning of the school year. The foreign teacher has received his/her student load, and will charge heartily into the semester. A month (4 class periods) goes by, the teacher is spirited, experienced; but the students will react accordingly. Within the second month of a session, or semester, a typical class will divide itself into three differentiated behavior patterns, a differentiation that will last through to the end of the session. The teacher has probably no more than two months (8 class periods) to set the mood and expectations of the class. This period will usually make or break the semester.

For the foreign English teacher without "Japan experience", a typically differentiated class will evolve thusly: 10% of the class will be totally enthralled with the foreign teacher; 80% may not care either way, but still cooperate; and 10% will be completely indifferent, or even hostile. We have coined the word "IPPAI" (Japanese for 1-8-1 or 10%-80%-10%) to describe this kind of classroom behavioral composition phenomena. 90% of the students will "pretend to study", and the teacher will "pretend to teach" 90% of the class. If a class has become "IPPAI", it will need "behavioral reconstruction", or risk facing a very dismal year. The semester testing results of this type of class, as a group, will be very negatively skewed.

In our second class behavioral pattern type the foreign teacher has more teaching-in-Japan experience. The foreign teacher has learned how to develop a "good" class. This type of class will have a more positively skewed characteristic behavior pattern. Test scores will also reflect this more positively skewed behavior. Corresponding

percentages may look like what Japanese colleagues call, "NI-GO-SAN" (2-5-3, or 20%-50%-30%). This means that roughly 20% of a class may be highly motivated with the foreign teacher. In this type of class, 50% may not care either way, and the remaining 30% may become completely disassociated. Again, by the second month into the session. This means that potentially, 70% of the students may again, "pretend to study", and the teacher may again, "pretend to teach" 70% of the class. It will be frustrating for the teacher to return each week to this kind of class. However, at this level one is on par with Japanese colleagues.

4. Behavioral Characteristics.

As foreign teachers in a "foreign" country, we are more than aware that we are not "at home". As we struggle to understand our students' values and behavior patterns, we also labor against a seemingly impossible host language, and an almost total information blackout. We work in social environment in which we receive little or no feedback from students, Japanese colleagues, or the workplace. In order to avoid the mismatch in expectations in the classroom, we as foreign teachers, need to be aware that the Japanese student/teacher social contract may be very different, from that of our own country. Those of us able to read and understand Japanese can look for books about Japan, Japanese society, psychology. However, most books written about the Japanese in English, are written by foreigners. Thus, most discussions on teaching methods and hypotheses for the Japanese language student are, for the most part, based on assumptions made from the observations of foreigners. Better at times, than many Japanese

themselves can tell us, but still, seen through a "cultural prism".

There are however, a few Japanese individuals who have spent extensive time and effort, stepping outside of their culture to look in, thinking about themselves as a people. For a deeper insight to Japanese foreign language student behavior, we may look to Chukyo University Professor Shouzou Hibino's comparative-culture research on behavioral characteristics most commonly observable in Japanese society. These behavioral characteristics may give us valuable insight to better understand the attitudes of the Japanese student in the foreign language classroom. In his classic work "Kokoro no Kouzou-Karagata ningen/Kakugata ningen" (Structures of the Mind, Shell-Mind or Core-Mind), Dr. Hibino identifies individual and group behavioral characteristics of what he terms the "Karagata ningen" (Shell-Mind Personality), the type most commonly found in Japanese society. Here is a dissertation of individual and group behavioral traits of a "Karagata Ningen".

Dr. Hibino's list of individual and group Shell-Mind behavioral traits commonly found in Japanese was based upon extensive interviews with Japanese subjects. They are listed in romanized Japanese, with the equivalent English translations in parenthesis made by this author. The Japanese terms are Dr. Hibino's, and may be more important to remember in Japanese, as accurate English translation of Japanese terms can be very difficult. In discussions with Japanese, knowledge and use of Japanese terms are also invaluable.

The Individual Behavioral Characteristics of the "Karagata Ningen"

(Shell-Mind Personality):

1) "Uchi to soto no gainen"

(as in social references, the individual's relationships with other people are always clearly, carefully delineated as either "outside" (formal), or "inside" (intimate).

2) "Hito wo mishiri suru"

(a deliberate shyness toward, and avoidance of, or extreme politeness to "outsiders").

3) "Aimai Buka Maki"

(a deliberately unclear, implicit, tacit, "insider"-oriented cultural environment).

4) "Beta-beta no ningen kankei"

(unclear, wet, impolite, sticky human relations).

5) "Hakkiri shinai taido"

(unclear, indirect responses, little or no feedback, either positive or negative).

6) "Anarogu shikou"

(analogous, circular logic, parallel thinking, behavior on a continuum).

The Group Behavioral Characteristics of the "Karagata Ningen" (Shell-Mind Personality):

1) "Unmei-Kyoudou-tai"

(individual and group lives bound together by a sense fate or purpose).

2) "Isshin-Doutai"

(intimate individual and group relationships are viewed as one-mind/one-body, absolute contracts).

3) "Doukyo"

(security in the group, being together, all in the same place).

4) "Douka suru"

(an emphasis on sameness, compromising or blending of differences in values, principles, beliefs, and behavior).

5) "Kyoutuu-no-kachikan" (an implicit group imperative for all members to have, or identify with, the same values, the same behavior).

6) "Shuudan-shugi" (individual identity heavily reinforced through group membership).²⁾

In Japanese cultural imperatives the application of social concepts such as "The Individual", or "The Group", can be very different, almost opposite, to that of the foreign teacher's understands them to be. A familiarity with Professor Hibino's description of Japanese social phenomena, and its Japanese terminology, his discussion of behavioral characteristics and social values, offers us a generally applicable psychological profile of our students, something we can identify and deal with. Therefore, in "Karagata Ningen" classroom, the foreign teacher can at least understand why it may be very difficult to get a student to demonstrate, in front of peers, any degree of language proficiency. Then the foreign teacher can also understand why, for the average Japanese, in a "public" setting, the individual's identity with a group takes priority to individual identity, which will greatly influence behavior.

What characteristics can we see if we transpose this knowledge onto the Japanese educational environment? A major one is that in

the Japanese education system, there are few "geniuses", a very large middle range of performers, and very few "dropouts". "Gifted" individuals and dropouts must develop themselves outside the "official" education system. Everyone, as a group, aims for the "high average". In a "group-norm" oriented society such as Japan's, groups compete against "faceless" groups for honors, profits, and reputations. To obtain an optimum level of participation from a group, the foreign teacher has to utilize this "group norm" orientation of the Japanese student, or little will be accomplished in the classroom.

This group norm orientation leads to another typical class behavior pattern. Japanese individuals will go through considerable trouble to "match" (understate or under-play) their personal performance to the norms of a group (in our case, your class). Consider this interesting social phenomenon. Most private language schools will offer beginner and intermediate level language classes, but not advanced. Even with advanced classes, few Japanese will challenge an advanced level class, unless it is a private lesson or small group, preferably with strangers. This aversion to being, or behaving as an elite, standing out from one's peers, in a formal educational setting, is a behavior (or social imperative) learned as early as kindergarten.

Diametrically, Americans learn, as early as kindergarten, to stand up and stand out, as much as possible. Training and development of employee manuals in America emphasize the acceptance of different attitudes from employees, rather than suppressing them within the organization line, while a Japanese employee can be "ostracized", or even fired from his working organization for not thinking,

or least behaving, in the “same” way as colleagues. Thus, in Japan, much of the work in meetings is accomplished outside them.

Merry White discusses several characteristics of the typical Japanese classroom. Characteristics found as early as in elementary school, and as late as in the workplace. She found that the Japanese teacher emphasized “process”, “engagement”, and “commitment”, rather than western-style emphasis on “discipline” and “outcomes”. White notes further, “The core pedagogical principal of a Japanese elementary school is that all children are equal in potential, and that the excitement of learning can best be produced within a ‘unity of equals’.”

White points out further, that for teachers, competition creates division and pulls a child towards a “negative individualism”. Thus the teacher uses group activity of various kinds, and resists singling out individual pupils except for short periods of time and

in turn. White gleans that the Japanese teacher’s classroom is likened to a “kyoushitsu okoku” (classroom kingdom) of equals. The teacher behaves somewhat like a mother hen, surrounding his or her class with “nurturing care”. This model of classroom unity is what White terms the “equality of peers” model. White uses the graphical representation shown in figure 3.³⁾

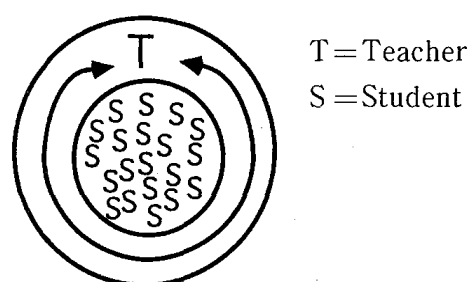


Figure 3
“Equality of Peers” Model.

So what is any group, if it behaves characteristically in a cultu-

ral setting? W. Cummings says, "groups are conceived of as educational vehicles in the broadest sense rather than as mere instruments for rationalizing cognitive education."⁴⁾ For the language teacher in Japan however, although language acquisition is highly individual, "western-style" displays of individual proficiency before a peer group, and explicit individual competition, may not be culturally acceptable, or desirable in Japanese society. Class pedagogy that emphasizes competition against a class test score, or other group performance norm may be more successful than one that emphasizes competition against individual fellow students. Within a typical Japanese classroom, students strive for "class ranking". Classes compete with each other for higher class averages. While an individual's ranking within the class may be posted, test score results are rarely made public knowledge. In a class of 40, only the student knows his or her own score, but everyone else knows everyone's class rank (position in a group).

The passive behavior of the Japanese student in the language classroom is a part of the Japanese "group dynamic". We are witnessing a cultural imperative. Many a foreign English Conversation teacher has strained against the deliberate hesitation of the Japanese student to participate in class openly, only to be amazed at the student's sudden enthusiasm and approaches after class, or even after the school year. The typical Japanese teacher/student relationship is more of a one-way, apprentice-type bond. The traditional classroom instruction approach in Japan is that the teacher "teaches", and the student "memorizes" (learns).

Textbooks are designed to reflect this type of learning hierarchy

as well. The class itself will become a "group". In the group, several types of behaviors will dominate the lessons: the younger students will defer to the older ones; the girls will defer to the boys; the smarter students will suppress themselves to the level of the others; nobody will ask questions, or admit they are lost. This author has had many an LL class, in which students using a machine, will wait the whole lesson out, before this author discovered that their machine was not working. In Japan, Students can, and do, sit through a whole lesson without a single attempt to communicate a problem. The level of feedback from students, on almost anything (even asking for permission to use the restroom), can be minimal. The traditional "vertical" Japanese classroom is ill-matched with the typical foreign teacher's "horizontal hierarchy" English conversation class.

In addition to differing cultural imperatives, there are also different (heavy/hard versus a soft/easy orientation), that both "foreign" English Conversation teachers and their Japanese students bring to the English Conversation classroom. While "western" people may be fluent in two or three languages, and be Afro-French, or Italian-American. Japanese have only one language and one cultural base to refer to and from-Japanese. As a result, they do not place a cultural preference on "second" language acquisition. They are, instead, highly desirable of possessing the "use of", or "control of", another language (most preferably English). A foreign teacher who has little or no command of the Japanese language may have to "prove" him/herself to the class in order to elicit any cooperation and/or class participation. The teacher may well be treated almost like an "extraterrestrial".

For a clue to this kind of thinking, we look to what Professor Chie Nakane, a respected Japanese scholar, has written about Japanese society's organizational behavior, and Japanese concepts of identity. It is important to discuss her analysis of Japanese social behavior in this paper, because social behavior determines learning and educational priorities in any society. Professor Nakane's discussion of the criteria of group formation in Japan is one more critically important work necessary for understanding the Japanese "koudou ishiki" (mentality and behavior) towards learning and acquisition of foreign language. In her classic discussion of the structure of Japanese society, Professor Nakane contributes a radically unique concept for understanding Japanese social behavior based on the terms "attribute" and "frame". Let us look at how Professor Nakane defines her original terms "frame" and "attribute", and explains the sociological context of frame as opposed to attribute.

It is important, however to redefine our terms. In this analysis groups may be identified by applying two criteria: one is based on an individual's common "attribute", the other on situational position in given "frame". I use "frame" as a technical term with particular significance as opposed to the criterion of "attribute", which, again, is used specifically and in a broader sense than it normally carries. "Frame" may be a locality, an institution or a particular relationship which binds a set of individuals into one group. Attribute may mean being a member of a definite descent group or caste. In contrast, being a member of "X" village expresses the commonality of frame. Attribute may be acquired by birth or achievement. Frame is more circumstantial.

The ready tendency of the Japanese to stress situational position in a particular frame, rather than universal attribute, can be seen in the following example: when a Japanese 'faces the outside' (confronts another person) and affixes some position to himself socially he is inclined to give precedence to institution over kind of occupation. In group identification, a frame such as a 'company' or 'association' is of primary importance; the "attribute" of the individual is a secondary matter. The same tendency is to be found among intellectual: among university graduates, what matters most, and functions the strongest socially, is not whether a man holds or does not hold a Ph. D. but rather from which university he graduated. Thus the criterion by which Japanese classify individuals socially tends to be that of an institution, and the institutional unit (such as school or company) is the basis of Japanese social organization.⁵⁾

Professor Nakane's analysis and description of the organizational behavior of Japanese is critical to our understanding of the importance of the Japanese foreign language education priorities (as in extremely difficult entrance examinations, in which entering an institution is harder than graduating from it, emphasizing membership), and strong cultural imperatives (a strong bias towards group (frame) behavioral pattern versus individual (attribute) behavioral pattern). It is also critical in understanding the behavioral patterns of classes of Japanese students towards foreign teachers who speak their language versus the behavioral attitudes of Japanese students towards foreign teachers who do not speak their language.

Like those of White and Hibino, the implications of Professor Nakane's analysis and description of the organizational behavior of Japanese are immense for understanding the way Japanese approach the learning and acquisition of foreign languages, their behavior in the classroom, and the ways in which we, as foreign teachers, must learn to assist and facilitate learning and acquisition in the Japanese foreign language classroom. It must also influence the design of the educational materials we use in Japan, if we can understand more clearly how social behavior patterns affect the Japanese language student's ability to acquire foreign languages.

5. Cultural Imperatives-National Identity.

The "tribe" (group) mentality that many foreigners have to deal with in Japan, and the "We Japanese are unique" syndrome are not the larger problems. Identifying what it is that Japanese think they may need from a "foreign language" learning experience is perhaps the most difficult task Foreign English teachers face inside the classroom. The difficulty lies in the nature of Japanese behavior. The characteristically small amount of explicit communication, feedback of wants and needs of the Japanese learner, forces the foreign educator to either give up, or find the medium. In a classroom in Japan, the "We Japanese" cultural imperative will be an invisible wall between the Japanese student and the goal of foreign language acquisition. In other words, at best, a Japanese would like to be, "physically fluent" in another language, but not necessarily "mentally bilingual".

For many Japanese, the word "bilingual" connotes being "different", "half-breed"; which is not yet overtly, culturally desirable in Japan. Among Japanese, a Japanese is not an individual first, but first, a member of some group (Dr. Nakane's "frame"). The "We Japanese" cultural imperative is still so prevalent, that this author's Japanese wife rarely mentions the fact that she is married to a "foreigner", and rarely admits that she can speak English. If my wife's status (married to a foreigner) is known by someone else, it will always be mentioned as if it were something "special". This consciousness, or self-consciousness, acts as a culturally imposed "gag" on the Japanese wishing to speak English, or to be bilingual. Therefore, if a Japanese is asked, he will call himself, at best, "a user of" another language, but never "fluent", or "bilingual". Thus, for most Japanese, learning a "foreign" language is more appropriate a term than "second" language, or being bilingual.

How then does the foreign language teacher prepare for the Japanese student? Reading books, such as those suggested in this paper, is a start. But most "experts" (those of us who have made all the mistakes earlier than others) recommend "total immersion". Just get in and do it. There can really be no "sufficient preparation". With different cultural imperatives, a language gap, and a difficulty in gathering necessary information, the foreign teacher almost has to, in addition to becoming a Japanese language expert, become an anthropologist and sociologist as well. For acquisition of this kind of knowledge, Japanese society itself is the best classroom. We can attempt to ask our Japanese colleagues. And asking may force many of them to think about their work more deeply. However, it has been this author's experi-

ence that in general, many Japanese may be at pains to explain themselves, their systems, or their values. In a "do what you are told society", it has all just sort of happened to them, and few Japanese question the "system". After all, it is still a fact that more books about Japan and the Japanese are written by foreigners, than by the Japanese themselves.

Much of what we do in any society is done unconsciously, only to be brought to our awareness by the "outsider". Most of what we could call the "collective social consciousness" is, for most Japanese, intuitively, unconsciously acquired. The amount of feedback in this society may be (certainly less when compared to American society) considerably less than what we are used to in our own societies. If Japanese can have 80% of what they may want to say, "unsaid", in their own language, to each other, how much of another language will they be able to use? This is the society at large. Thus, as foreign professionals in Japan, it may take years of living in this society, even achieving a certain fluency in the Japanese language, to finally be able to intuit cultural behaviors, values, and expectations. However, few professionals coming to Japan, looking for some "experience", do not have so much time. For most foreign English teachers there is only now, and the difficulties in front of them.

6. Culturally Mismatched Classroom Materials.

Another obstacle in the achievement of an optimum foreign teacher-Japanese student language classroom is the typical "for Japan" English Conversation textbook. In all societies, textbook design and

content are based on pedagogy that springs partly from cultural values. From western publishers we are offered the usual, individual-performance oriented, language training drills and texts that Americans and Europeans are used to, cultural regularities in those societies. The perceptual facing language learners in Japan and their foreign teachers is reflected in the design of textbooks. For many educators and their students, both Japanese publishers as well as western are still publishing the "wrong stuff". Most of us are looking for better classroom materials.

While the rich selection of "content-based" textbooks are the "structurally correct" rage in Europe and America, here in Japan, the majority of our students only open these "ideal" curriculum materials when they have to, and probably only in the classroom, under our supervision. The "Active Learner Pedagogy" model, used in language for communication purposes in the Japanese classroom in Japan, is that which has been developed abroad. And it is usually developed from a North American or European "Active Learner Pedagogy" orientation, by native speakers from those countries.

A majority of the "for the Japanese" English conversation publications are culturally "mismatched" for the Japanese market because they are designed on the "Active Learner Pedagogy" model. Academically, they are wonderful educational materials, colorful, loaded with valuable language information. However, foreign and Japanese English teachers have to use textbooks, designed for the "active" behavior patterns of students in other societies, on their "passive" behavior Japanese students. As was pointed out in Merry White's "equality of

peers" model, in a typical Japanese language classroom, students are not taught to be explicitly competent, or competitive in performance, amongst their class members, in order to "get good at English".

Because language is performance-oriented, we have a natural tendency to design our curriculum and select texts to encourage explicit, direct, "creative competition" amongst peers in a classroom in Japan, as it is so successfully done in the American, or European educational settings. But in doing so, difficulty of method implementation, based on cultural incongruence will be a constant source of fatigue and frustration for both the foreign English teachers and their Japanese students. Add this to the attitude of the Japanese student towards a "foreigner", the built-in "insecurity" about themselves in relation to someone not Japanese, the certain initial uneasiness, shyness, avoidance to deal with, break through, and the foreign teacher faces the energy-consuming task of fusing himself with the group, or vice-versa, in order to even get a minimum of cooperation and participation from the class. A culturally mismatched textbook between a teacher and students makes differences more acute in a society that works hard to avoid or cover up things that are different. Add to this a foreign teacher who cannot even speak to students in their own language to explain, or be understood.

From Japanese publishers we get a wide selection of "western" style materials, many done by western writers. The content and layout of most these materials is nothing even close to exciting for the average Japanese EFL student. Japanese students have very little interest in verb conjugations, greetings, and dialogue practices. "Real-

ism" in curriculum design is only desirable if the Japanese students want the "realism and the logic approach" in the classroom. Almost ironically, it is very difficult to catch an 18-year-old business major's attention, with a text and tape that "realistically" portrays 10 units of "business adventures", especially so, if the student is expecting some kind of "thrill" from an English Conversation class.

Japanese serious about language acquisition secretly go abroad to study, to be immersed. For the rest, something that all the Japanese are doing is "appropriate". For the rest, regular books, magazines and video materials that excite Americans may be far more attractive, and effective, than "English Conversation" materials. Many Japanese have a tremendous interest in American movies, cultural activities, and business methods. A more adequate discussion on textbook and curriculum development is needed, but this is the scope of another paper.

7. Conclusion

In this paper, we have examined and discussed Japanese cultural imperatives which regulate language study behavior in Japanese society. We have discussed foreign teacher roles and positions within the classroom and Japanese society. We have also examined behavioral characteristics commonly found in Japanese students. And we discussed some of the factors of mismatch in Western-oriented language education classroom materials to Japanese student needs. Further, we have discussed that teacher expectations, pedagogy and teaching materials can be, and are, very logically and rationally measured, designed and produced, even though language and its acquisition are, by

anture, illogical, irrational, and very difficult to measure. We stressed that language acquisition is individual-specific, situation-specific.

We have emphasized that credentials and experience achieved outside Japan are at best referentially valuable, that the foreign teacher's Japan experience is primary, each day and one step at a time. That he or she must "win hearts", "perform", to be competent in Japan. That the foreign teacher has to learn cultural "bonding techniques" in order to control and affect learning in this classroom. And, that the foreign teacher will have to have a certain level of Japanese language competency to control the classroom. For the 1990's, speaking some Japanese, and having a certain amount of cultural experience in Japan, will be a prerequisite learning here. We also discussed the need for a re-evaluation of course and textbook development. That cultural aspects must be reconsidered in order to facilitate learning in the Japanese student's classroom.

We also stress that cultural aspects, physical and structural constraints, lack of access, and limited class hours per scholastic year, all contribute to lower performance parameters and expectations of the language learning environment in Japan. With the current conditions and present assumptions of language learning and pedagogy, the efficiency level and ratio of language experience per student, in the Japanese language classroom, will continue to be far less than we could be getting. We need to approach the Japanese language classroom with new assumptions. We need more research on the Japanese language classroom. Because the Japanese experience fundamentally challenges our most basic assumptions of the teacher/learner rela-

tionship, the problems we learn to solve, and the approaches we develop in Japan will add to the global pool of knowledge.

In the 1990's Japanese foreign language students need several things:

- 1) **Attitude** (a workable attitude in the classroom, may students are just being fashionable).
- 2) **Re-evaluation** (of language competency goals, students don't study to use the English).
- 3) **Flexibility** (to make new assumptions about bilingualism).
- 4) **Bicultural/Bilateral discussion** (There is a great need in Japan for more bicultural, bilateral discussion among Japanese and foreign language students).

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