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ABSTRACT

This paper explains that change is part of every language, noting that it occurs from both internal manipulation (e.g., youth culture) and external influences (contact with other languages). The paper focuses on external influences as they apply to Japanese and discusses how much external influence, specifically English, is too much. Today, Japan utilizes more than 30,000 English words, many of which have been "Japanized." This migration to English has led to the abandonment of the original Japanese translations, and the characters that accompany them have given way to "Katakana," the Japanese syllabic set for foreign words. This paper examines the impact of English on Japanese, noting the linguistic and social aspects of Japanese. Information comes from observations, interviews, and experiences as a teacher of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) to Japanese students of varying ages. It discusses the following: the linguistics of Japanese; writing systems; variants of speech; dialects of Japanese; sociolinguistics of Japanese; the impact of English on Japan; and how to teach EFL to Japanese people. The paper examines 5 years of fieldwork, offering four case studies of different types of students in different teaching contexts. It concludes with advice for prospective EFL teachers in Japan. (SM)

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英会話話

Accounts of an Eikaiwa Sensei

Sociolinguistics of Japanese
and
The Impact of English on its Society

By Joe Drakos
August 10th, 2001

先生の記

Introduction

Language is the single characteristic that separates humans from the rest of species in the primate family. A language enables all groups of humans to share ideas and information to members of the similar group. In today's world different groups interact with each other in the interests of business, political harmony and international understanding.

In today's world it is commonplace, and in some cases a necessity, for educated individuals to be versed in at least two languages. A skill in two languages usually means access to better jobs and favorable status for those in internationally oriented organizations. It is also a skill considered to be very difficult to achieve though in its truest sense fairly simple to do once certain rules and patterns are understood.

The first half of this paper focuses on the structure, make up and social aspects of the Japanese language. Japanese is a very old language that is very strict and requires various grammatical changes which are influenced by the social status of the individuals involved in any given communication situation. It has also undergone a great deal change from internal and

external influences.

The second half will discuss how English has changed Japanese. Change is something every language experiences. All languages change over time due to many things such as change of word meanings, development of new idioms and advances in technology. These changes occur from both internal manipulation (i.e. youth culture) and external influence, simply other languages. I will look at the latter advocator of linguistic change as it applies particularly to the Japanese language. Moreover, how much external influence, specifically English, is too much? Today, Japan utilizes more than 30 thousand English words. Some of the words can easily be recognized by a native English speaker, while others have be “Japanized” or made to fit a Japanese concept. This migration to English has more or less abandoned there original Japanese translations as well as the valuable characters that accompany them which have, in turn, given way to Katakana, the Japanese syllabic set used for foreign words.

Furthermore this paper includes a section containing field work the research for the second half comes less from books and more from my observations, interviews and experiences while living here among the

Japanese. My job as an English teacher requires me to encounter this mixing of languages on a daily basis; therefore I have opted to use my students as interviewees per their permission. Each interview looks at a particular student's purposes for studying English, their experience and their successes and failures while studying. The ages range from elementary school to adult with varying education levels. Following the interview I will express my personal thoughts as well as others who work in the Eikaiwa industry concerning the cultural integration that has become in Japan because of this relatively young field of education.

As this paper is written in a field work fashion the research comes less from books and more from my observations, interviews and experiences while living here among the Japanese.

Part 1: The Linguistics of Japanese

Japanese is a very interesting language and at the same time very frustrating and strict. Once classified in the Altaic language family, which includes languages such as Manchu, Mongolian and even Finnish it has since then been classed in its own family with Korean and Ryukyuan, the language

spoken in Okinawa. To the average non-Japanese the language can seem rather impossible and ridiculous at times, making no sense. But this can only be the result of the strict social rules of Japanese society and the appearance of a semi-exclusive society. I use semi-exclusive because there are those who have a very open mind to non-Japanese, yet even these few still, at times, seem to retain small bits of that ethnocentric nationalism. But this is leaning into the next topic on the sociolinguistic aspect that will be covered later.

Japanese is a very limited language concerning its phonetic make up. It has five vowel sounds and fifteen consonant sounds, figure 1 explains these sounds with an English equivalent. Furthermore, each consonant sound is always combined with one of the five vowel sounds to make up a syllable. Most of these are plosive and aspirated making it possible to speak Japanese without opening the mouth very wide. Convenient considering it was once rude to open the mouth widely during conversation, especially for women. There is one nasal sound that has no vowel companion. That is the “n” as in phone sound. This sound is also represented as an “m” sound in varying dialects. Blends and accents give Japanese a broader spectrum of sounds and

word distinction but the language itself sounds very monotonic, seeming to have very little slight emotional expression.

Figure 1. Vowel sounds: a as in father

i as in eagle

u as in spoon

e as in plate

o as in hole

Figure 2. Consonant sounds: p, t, n, d, z, m, g

aspirated- b, h, p

nasal- n

Figure 3. Blends: ch, sh, zh, ts

Also sounds p, b, m, h and n are combined

with ya, yu and yo to create various phonemes.

Writing Systems

The writing system of Japanese is as intriguing as its spoken half. There are three different systems of writing each with its own specific purpose. The original form of writing is Kanji. Kanji are the ever-so-familiar Chinese characters. This system of writing was introduced sometime during the Heian period. Each character is made up of radicals that denote sound and meaning. Combinations of characters developed into words. It's said that the average, educated Japanese can read approximately 2,500 different Kanji. Over the years Japan has simplified its kanji as well as developed some of its own. Therefore it is sometimes difficult for Chinese to recognize the meaning of some characters, of course the reverse is true for Japanese studying modern Chinese.

Because of the difficulty of Kanji two systems of writing were developed to ease the stress of writing, especially for women and in the use of poetry and calligraphy. It also helps differentiate between words that use the same Kanji for different meanings. These systems are known as the hiragana and katakana. These are both phonetic representations for the Japanese alphabet. Each kana is derived from a certain kanji that has been

simplified into its kana form. Figure 3 shows both hiragana and katakana while figure 4 shows which kanji each kana was derived from.

1. Hiragana- A set of fifty-two symbols each one representing a phonetic sound in Japanese. Developed from a massive simplification of certain Kanji.
2. Katakana- This set is similar to Hiragana in its phonetic meaning but its structure is different. It was developed from various radicals that are used to form Kanji. It used mostly to represent words borrowed from foreign languages and place emphasis on certain words.
3. Kanji- the system of ideographs borrowed from China

Below is Hiragana, the original phonetic alphabet derived from kanji, Chinese characters. There are 46 basic characters called kana. Different sounds are made by adding a ” or a small circle on the upper right side of the kana. The idea was to make the written language of Japanese simpler for the use of poetry, art and for women. It begins with the five vowel sounds a, i, u, e, o. Each consecutive line precedes the respective vowel sound with a

consonant sound such as “k” or “m” to create ka, ki, ku, ke, ko or ma, mi, mu, me, mo. The final sound is a nasal n sound. Two kana ゐ (wi) and ゑ (we) have been eliminated from modern Japanese. They have been replaced by the “い” (i) and “え” (e) kanas, respectively. Formerly, there were two other syllables “kwa” and “gwa” which have disappeared in standard Japanese.¹

Fig. 3 Hiragana

あ a	い i	う u	え e	お o	か ka	き ki	く ku	け ke	こ ko
さ sa	し shi	す su	せ se	そ so	た ta	ち chi	つ tsu	て te	と to
な na	に ni	ぬ nu	ね ne	の no	ま ma	み mi	む mu	め me	も mo
は ha	ひ hi	ふ fu	へ he	ほ ho	や ya	ゆ yu	よ yo		
ら ra	り ri	る ru	れ re	ろ ro	わ wa	を wo	ん n		

note- pronunciation in Roman characters are on the right of each kana

¹ Hattori, pg18

The next system is katakana. This is also a phonetic system that mimics hiragana but is used to indicate words borrowed from other languages such as English or German, or to place emphasis on particular words. Katakana symbols are derived from radicals, the basic parts that make up kanji. For example “イ” (ee) is a radical from “人” (hito) which means person. Therefore a kanji such as “仁” (nin·harmony) includes this radical.

Fig. 4 Katana

ア a	イ i	ウ u	エ e	オ o	カ ka	キ ki	ク ku	ケ ke	コ ko
サ sa	シ shi	ス su	セ se	ソ so	タ ta	チ chi	ツ tsu	テ te	ト to
ナ na	ニ ni	ヌ nu	ネ ne	ノ no	マ ma	ミ mi	ム mu	メ me	モ mo
ハ ha	ヒ hi	フ fu	ヘ he	ホ ho	ヤ ya	ユ yu	ヨ yo		
ラ ra	リ ri	ル ru	レ re	ロ ro	ワ wa	ヲ wo	ン n		

note- pronunciation in Roman characters are on the right of each kana

The third and oldest system of writing is Kanji. Kanji is a collection of ideographs developed by the Chinese. Kanji has been known to exist since the Shang dynasty from evidence on ancient items used for divination such as animal bones and turtle shells. These ideographs have been developed over the centuries not only by the Chinese but by other cultures that have incorporated or adopted it as its own writing practice.

Although it looks very difficult to master, many westerners say impossible, Kanji has a very simple method of compilation. Each symbol is a combination of specific elements called radicals. They form the basis of the Kanji which specifically carry a sound and a meaning. These radicals are written in certain fashion either from up to down or left to right and contain an ordered number of strokes.

It is said that educated Japanese can read over 2000 Kanji although it is said that total amount of individual ideographs is near 5000. The writing of ideographs is relatively the same in both Japanese and Chinese. Most Chinese can understand street signs and menus in Japan and the opposite is the same for Japanese. However, these two systems have diverged to some extent over the years. After the Communist takeover of

China the government developed a simplified system of characters which are simplifications of radicals and more difficult ideographs. This change was made to enable all Chinese to become literate. Japanese has also experienced some simplification to its characters as well as the development of new characters to describe ideas particular to Japanese culture. Furthermore, in many cases these languages use different characters to express the same meaning. Refer to the box below for examples

Example of Chinese character divergence			
Changes:	Original	Simplified Chinese	Modern Japanese
	龍 (dragon)	龙	竜
		气 (air)	気
		东 (east)	東
Meanings		去 (go)	去 (leave)
		行 (walk, travel)	行 (go)

Other difficulties occur in with the pronunciation of Japanese ideographs as compared to Chinese. As Chinese ideographs normally carry only one pronunciation per character Japanese has at least two distinct pronunciations of Kanji, onyomu and kunyomi. These are rules of pronunciation particularly when the Kanji is spoken alone or paired with other Kanji, respectively. For example, this character (舞) which means to dance is pronounced “odo”, the proper word being “odoru”, when coupled

with a hiragana modifier, but coupled with other Kanji it is pronounced as “mai”. Yet, some carry more than the standard two pronunciations. The following character (下) means down or under yet carries a number of pronunciations including, shita, shimo, ji, ke and kuda.

As mentioned before, Kanji was significant in the development of Hiragana and Katakana. Each kana was developed from a radical or even an artsy form of the parent Kanji. The following is a chart showing some kana with its parent Kanji.

Examples of Hiragana development from Kanji ²		
あ - 安	か - 加	ま - 未
い - 以	さ - 左	り - 利
う - 宇	た - 太	わ - 和
え - 衣	な - 奈	
お - 於	は - 波	

² Chart examples adapted from <http://Interq.or.jp>, source written by Atsushi Yamamoto, c-1997

Examples of Katakana development from Kanji

ア	－	阿	ケ	－	介
イ	－	伊	ス	－	須
ウ	－	宇	タ	－	多
エ	－	江	チ	－	千
オ	－	於	ミ	－	三

Variants of speech

1. Polite speech- speech which is usually taught in FL classes
2. Male speech- a variation on certain markers, tag questions and words. This is to make the man sound stronger and cool.
3. Female speech- a form opposite male speech to express cuteness and femininity. This includes drawing out sounds to project whining or bimbo girl speech used by the youth generation. Also some girls emphasize raising the pitch in their speech to sound cute and naïve, an aspect unwelcome by most, if not all, non-Japanese males.

4. Yakuza speech- a form a speech similar to male speech yet much stronger. It can be recognized by the rolling r/l sound. This variant developed mostly from Kansai dialect, a dialect of Japanese which is harder to understand than standard Japanese. Many young boys try to use this to sound tough and intimidating, particularly boys involved in motorcycle groups called bosozoku and yankii, punk car drivers. At most it is a phase but since the driving age in Japan is 20, one can see the level of maturity of the rising masses of undereducated young adults.

Dialects of Japanese

Dialects in Japan range from prefecture and region to prefecture and region. There are, though, some very distinct dialects of Japanese that can make it difficult for Japanese who live outside that particular dialect area and foreigners to understand. The national dialect of Japanese is called the Kanto dialect. This is the terminology and language in which most students studying Japanese learn. This is mostly due to the fact that Tokyo, the capitol, lies at the center of the Kanto area. The surrounding prefectures

that make up the Kanto plain include: Chiba, Kanagawa, Saitama, Ibaraki, Tochigi and Gunma. Even these prefectures contain a sub-dialect of Kanto “ben” (dialect).

The second, and most colorful, dialect of the Japanese language is Kansai. Osaka, Kyoto, Nara, Hyogo, Fukui, Wakayama, Hiroshima, and Shimane prefectures make up this area. The belief is that Kansai ben is much more direct and outspoken than its big brother, Kanto ben. People say that it is full of euphemisms and expressions one would not normally learn in a classroom, topped with an inflected tone. Kanto is somewhat monotonic.

The other islands and north Honshu island also have a variety of dialects which, again, differ from prefecture to prefecture. Some of these dialects are very hard to make out for even natives. Particularly, Okinawan sounds similar to Chinese because it uses a variety of tonal inflections. Okinawan is its own language, but it has been dying out slowly over the years as Okinawans tend to favor Japanese.

In recent years, Japan’s national television station, NHK, has tried to expose young children to the variety of Japanese dialects through a Japanese learning program called Nihongo de asobo, which means “Let’s play in

Japanese”. The dialect portion involves an elderly person from any given area of Japan who’s dialect is unique. They guest then recites a common poem in the dialect. At times, even I have difficulty understanding.

The Social and Cultural Aspects of Japanese

Japanese social custom is based on the philosophies of Confucianism. Confucius was an ancient philosopher and political advisor in China during the Zhou dynasty. His philosophies and discussions have become a useful source of ethics in not only Asia but the western world as well. The basis of the Confucian belief is the idea of the benevolent man. This individual held a high sense of duty to his family, king and society. His benevolence came through performing rituals properly honoring his past ancestors and through remembering his place in society. This meant remembering the various types of relationships between people and how to act in each one. It is these relationships where Japan gets its ideas of social interaction.

Japanese has four distinct levels of speech when communicating with each other:

- a. Formal speech- the desu/masu form, all forms of the verb end

in this manner to express politeness.

Example: infinitive- taberu (to eat)

Polite form- tabemasu

The ending “masu” is placed to show politeness.

- b. Informal speech- spoken between friends and family, verbs do not carry a long suffix, polite connotations are less used.
- c. Honorific- placing the receiver in an elevated position. This type of speech is especially used in the commercial and retail sectors of business.

Example: polite- dozo mitte kudasai (please look around)

honorific- dozo goran shitte kudasai (same meaning, yet used by store clerks and shop owners)

- d. Humble- placing the speaker in a lower position.

It is a common assumption that Japanese are very reserved and indirect. This is very true in situations where Japanese are unfamiliar with the surrounding or people. But, when settled and comforted, Japanese can be all the opposite of what many culture books or rumored hypotheses say. The

most important thing the Japanese remember when they are speaking is who they are speaking to. These hierarchical rules must be paid attention to at all times during the conversation. Before, this was strictly adhered to but as trends turn more western, the traditionalism of Japanese speech is dying out.

Hypotheses for the dying out of extra formal Japanese:

1. Loss of respect for elder peers by young. Degradation of family structure. Less appearance of authoritative figure due to job obligations.
2. Moves toward a more western, casual style of life.
3. Difficulties and annoyances of speaking such forms as honorific and humbling.
4. Appearance of more non-Japanese who speak Japanese but tend to forget which style of speech to use because their own language doesn't carry that type of speech.

Part 2: The Impact of English on Japanese Society

The best way we as humans have been able to establish this type of relationship is through the use of a single language which is English. It is unclear how this language became the world's lingua franca but it can be assumed that it is what it is because of the onset of international commerce and its ease of use in explaining ideas. Students in most, if not all, industrialized societies are required to study English to some extent regardless of their future career plans. But the use of English as a form of universal communication doesn't stop there. We are finding that English is working its way into other languages' lexicons as well. To put it in easier terms, every language I have encountered utilizes some English words for specific ideas. For example, Chinese, which is a very ethnocentric language, takes particular English words and "Sinocizes" them. The word salad and brandy become shala and bailandi with regular characters used only to produce the sound of the thing. When listening to Tagalog, the Filipino language, one can hear whole phrases of English during a news broadcast. Yet none of these can really compare to the impact English has made on the Japanese.

The education system of Japan is extremely stressful on students at the junior high and high school levels. Students not only undergo a rigorous advanced level of schooling but also reinforce those classes by attending specialty schools called yobiko. Because many western schools have a wide variety of curriculums to fit all types of students, it is possible to say that many western students may not be able to handle such a curriculum of study.

In western schools the study of a foreign is only required if the student plans to attend university, and in regards to this, only a two-year course is required. In Japan a mandatory six-year course in English is required at the secondary level. During this study, students attempt to develop a large vocabulary of words including words we would rarely think of using as well as outdated syntactical concepts, some of which date back to the time when English was just being introduced to Japan.

A Short History of English in Japan

At the onset of English study by Japanese was far from friendly, intercultural relationships. Instead it was a plan developed to enable Japanese scientists and engineers to be able to read and incorporate western

technology. During the Edo period the Tokugawa Shogunate closed Japan's border to foreigners. Foreign trade and contact was limited to the Dutch and Portuguese respectively. The Dutch were allowed to trade from only one special zone located in the city of Nagasaki. The Portuguese, the Jesuits in particular, developed schools and missions where as they could propagate their religion. It wasn't until 1868 in the small coastal town of Shimoda when huge, black ships were sighted announcing the arrival of America. This event forced Japan to reopen its borders to commerce and international politics in order to avoid invasion. When the Tokugawa was overthrown the Meiji Emperor ascended to take hold of Japan. Intrigued by the technology introduced by the Americans he made it policy to develop Japan into a western clone. Railways were built, the military was reorganized and equipped with western weapons, men were wearing top hats and mutton chops, some women were wearing western attire rather than the traditional kimono and technology was beginning to emerge from Japanese producers. Where does English stand in all this? To say the least, as Japan still remains to this day somewhat purist academic and social leaders stood in fear that one day the west would take over the country forcibly. Therefore, to learn the

“enemy’s” language in order to understand the workings of their technology would enable them to produce it. Scholars were sent to the United States and Europe to study English and other subjects. Upon completion, they would return to teach the youth. In the case of English, lessons were limited to vocabulary and grammar study as well as interpretive reading. Communication skills were only occasionally learned by those wishing to pursue careers in international relations and diplomacy. Methods of teaching similar to this original method existed in the Japanese education system up until only recently.

English in the Public Schools

Japan is only one of the many nations in the world that require their students to take mandatory English classes. These classes teach English in a similar manner that American students would find in a Spanish or French class. As stated before, the public school system in Japan has a six year course beginning in junior high school and concluding in high school. The government also employs foreign teacher through a program called Japan Exchange Teaching program or “JET”. These JET teachers are usually assigned to a junior high school and serve as assistant language teachers to

full time English teachers. Recently, JET teachers have been placed in experimental classes at elementary schools as the government is considering beginning English programs in order to prepare young children for junior high school. The stress on learning English is so high that many students tend to shun it and/ or develop feelings of angst against it, especially when it is a heavy determining factor of whether or not they can enter a good university.

English Education in the Private Sector

The private sector has seen the largest growth of English education. Japanese parents hold the education of their children in the highest importance. Therefore it is not uncommon for a child to attend after school education programs to help give them an edge to get into good high schools and, of course, good universities. The surge of learning English as a communication skill has given rise to a multitude of private schools called eikaiwa kyoushitsu which translates to “English conversation” schools. The goal of these schools, apparently, is to give students an opportunity to learn how to communicate in English in order to speak to those who do not speak Japanese. Furthermore, these schools have introduced the “foreign teacher”

type class where the teacher is from a country that uses English as the main source of communication, e.g. the United States, Canada or Great Britain.

These types of schools have grown very popular as they give students not only English conversation practice but the opportunity to speak with a real English speaker.

English and Society

English has rooted itself so deeply into Japanese society that one can see English words and phrases virtually everywhere. Advertisements, slogans, direction and information signs usually contain English regardless of correctness. Speaking English seems to be a social status marker. Those who can speak it are praised while those who cannot feel embarrassed and tend to shy away from foreigners who look like they speak English.

The television industry is riddled with English education programs for children, adults and professionals. News broadcasts and western movies are broadcast in a bilingual mode where the viewer needs only to switch speaker modes and English can be heard.

In the business sector high emphasis is placed on achieving high test scores in English. Those who score high on national and international

English exams such as the Eiken, TOEIC and TOEFL are eligible for higher salaries and positions in many companies and official positions. They also have a greater chance to travel overseas to foreign-based branch companies. People who can speak English competently are also seen as being well educated, especially in the rural and countryside areas. The drawback to this is the stress that preparing for these kinds of tests causes. Basically, students rush to take prep classes with the idea of attaining a higher score after a miniscule period of study time. They soon come to realize that their goal can only be achieved over the course of a year, or perhaps longer, rather than the previously planned month-long study. This deters students from continuing and they soon fall into a rut, quitting the class and remaining in the same job only with new feelings of failure.

Presently, there are reforms emphasizing the slow, comfortable development of English skills. Many colleges and universities are introducing programs which are designed to teach English as a tool for communication rather than just repetitive study. The hope with this type of program is to bring the mass of educated Japanese up to a level in which they can discuss and debate in English with their international colleagues

without the use of interpreters.

Fieldwork Concerning the Study of English in Japan

Over the eight years of English teaching I have had here in Japan I have come across many types of students with various goals for studying English. I will introduce a few of these students and discuss their learning ability and successes.

I am also going to discuss a few of the problems I, as well as many of my colleagues have encountered. These problems are the biggest reason why students are not satisfactorily producing English in a communicative situation.

Case study 1: Student, Masako

My first year teaching in Japan was quite harrowing. I could speak very little competent Japanese, was unfamiliar with the territory and loaded with culture shock. Once I got past all of that I was able to start examining my students abilities regarding there mental capability for learning English, their capability to use English in a conversation and physical limitations to speaking clearly.

The first student I would like to mention is Masako (I will refrain

from using last names). Masako was a very diligent student of around age 40. She tried very hard and was able to communicate with me on a low level but could only manage that. I believe that because of her educational background and her career, she was a music teacher, she was able to be creative enough to step out from the usual Japanese sense of shyness and mistake making phobia to make her study successful.

Masako was keen on studying English for social purposes. It was her hope to be able to speak with foreigners moving into Japan from English speaking nations. She also wished to do some traveling so obviously felt she needed to study English.

Case study 2: Student, Hisako

My second year of teaching took me to a small school in the resort city of Odawara in Kanagawa prefecture. One of my students, Hisako, was quite adept at learning English. She could converse well and made few grammatical mistakes but those were, for the most part, unnoticed. The only barrier she had was of a social one. Among groups mixed with Japanese and English speaking people she chose to shy away from English and speak

Japanese. Instead she had her fiancé, who was also very adept at English, do the speaking. This is most likely due to the fear of making a mistake. It is at most, a social factor that, I feel, tends to inhibit the Japanese from speaking, particularly for women, and especially in the presence of men. Another possibility may be that she did not want to seem more adept than her fiancé which, in fact, she was.

Case study 3: Student, Yuuki

This field study helps support Noam Chomsky's idea of a child's uncanny ability for learning language, and shows that some children are more gifted than others but only to the extent of how much influence is provided in the home. Yuuki was only four years old but miraculously passed the first in a three set series of English tests for children with a score over 100. The first test is usually for 1st and 2nd graders. He also remembers simple phrases and word.

This brings to mind two little boys, age two, they are paternal twins. They are friends of my daughter's. Their mother is quite adept at speaking English and exposes them to English on a daily basis to her twins. Now both

boys can say English words and recognize ABC's on contact. If there is no interference peer-wise in the future, these two could possibly become bi-lingual without any hindrances.

Case study 5: Students, Daichi

Daichi was a student of mine for about five years. It just so happened that his mother was the owner of the school I worked at. This is an interesting case as Daichi has had great success in English regardless of the fact that his mother is also adept at speaking English. He is a good example of how one can achieve language learning success with effort. He is one of the few elementary aged Japanese students who tries to start a conversation. Another advantage that he has supports the idea that exposure is a key to remembering and using a foreign language. In his case had classes nearly every day and spoke English occasionally at home with his mother.

Case Study 5: Returnee Siblings

I have taught a number of students over my tenure in Japan. I have seen good students and students who have difficulties absorbing concepts but

none have been more interesting than what experts describe as returnees. These are usually children who have lived in another country and whose schooling is strictly English. At school they speak to their peers in English so they naturally gain a good command of English. The interesting point is how the language tends to digress in younger children yet seems to hold in older children. For example, of the many returnee classes I have had involving siblings, those who experienced schooling in English to age 8 or 9 seemed to retain their skills better than their younger brothers or sisters. To be more specific Yurina was an elementary school aged student when she went to New Zealand with her family. There she went to a New Zealand school and came back to Japan when she was just about to enter the 4th grade. Amazingly, she can still carry on conversations appropriate to her age level. On the other hand, her younger brother only attended a preschool. He still has difficulty expressing things in English but can still remember English phrases that children of that age would be exposed to.

Advice to the Prospective EFL Japan Teacher

As I had mentioned before, teaching English is a popular form of work for foreigners living in Japan. This popular form of business has become so big that anyone can find a job opening at just about anytime of the year. This, though, has instigated a multitude of problems in language training as few of these schools have real experience with English as well as little or no training in the area of teaching English. Even more devastating problems have come at schools which boast foreign teachers. Problems where the teacher becomes an entertainer rather than a teacher, which makes this profession of language training into a veritable novelty show where one can come and see creatures from afar who babble in a strange tongue. Culture conflicts and work custom disputes from both sides have sparked huge battles that have marred many schools. My point here though isn't the students but the owners who open these schools, particularly the smaller ones. It seems to be the idea that if one can speak English to some extent and has the money and time will start an English school of some sort. This is the case of many a school owner I have worked for. The problem is that these people, usually mothers with rich husbands and / or families open these

schools with no business experience or ability. They place ads for native speakers to come and work for them and promise things that soon prove to be bait to get the teacher to come.

Their teaching ability usually amounts to tutoring a few neighborhood children and then it grows from there. Unfortunately, the incorrect pronunciations and incorrect usage of words and phrases sets young students into a bad habit and reinforces that of the older students. On top of that is the owner's ego which places them in a position of not trying to improve themselves and sets them up for future embarrassing situations. Also it places them in a difficult position with the foreign teaching staff, who usually end up suffering the most at the expense of the owner's ego and ignorance.

Although teaching overseas is exciting, rewarding and often time packed with cash, one needs to be very careful when selecting a job in Japan.

First of all, one must remember that Japan is an all-inclusive society for Japanese. Those of non-intra island descent are classified in one group called gaijin. Gaijin literally means those people from the outside. The term groups anyone from the rest of the world into this one group. This is

comparable to the Jew- Gentile relationship except not as strict. The Japanese group identity and social knit also emphasizes this thinking. Personally, I don't think this eccentric xenophobia is intended to show prejudice; rather it is a build-up of familiars against and unknown entity. In the end, though, it would seem to many as if the over-exerted avoidance was intended to be rather rude and prejudice in the truest sense then just uncertainty. My advice, go prepared knowing that you cannot own your own business, rent an apartment or even frequent some places because you are not Japanese. Also, keep in mind that you will be considered as a novelty and, at the same time, as feared invader, although not that extreme. People will seem slightly or grossly apprehensive upon sight of you. Even to those who have braved culture shock in many places, none will seem like the culture shock of Japan. This can be best proven from the additions made to jails and prisons, and the proposals by many business owners to close their stores during the recent World Cup tournament. This action is truly expressing the eccentric xenophobia and fear that foreigners will cause a wealth of social problems. Of course, they are forgetting about the increasing rise of juvenile and other social problems plaguing the country today. Ironically, there were

no foreign related criminal incidences during the whole tournament, which proved that gaijin aren't really out to wreak havoc. I am sure this was felt financially by the loss of revenue.

Second, one must carefully research the company they are interested in. All managers and owners express warm feeling and boast that their company is wonderful and family oriented. They want you to feel cared for and a part of their family. Try not to develop feelings of attachment right off. Relationships take time to build in Japan especially with foreigners. Try to do all that you are asked or you will face trouble. Not directly, but it can affect your future with the school. Unfortunately, there is little you can do or say against since this, again, you are not Japanese and therefore not part of the group. Instead you may be labeled as a poor group member or inflexible. This ultimately means that the boss listens to the native staff more than you, this, in some cases, is due to language inefficiencies. Be careful of school managers. These people like to be in positions of authority and exert power but in many cases don't know how to handle it properly and in turn show their ignorance. Lastly, for those with commanding, straightforward personalities, don't be surprised if you find yourself in this situation at least

once. Just like any other business, they are making money and quantity, student enrollment, is more important than quality and if your not helping the machine you will get replaced A.S.A.P. In addition, the Japanese sense of harmony, wa³, is ultimately the basis of happy company. Therefore, those who or who seem to break the wa are removed from the harmonious scene.

But don't let this stop you from going to Japan. It is a wonderful country and not all of the people fit into the category mentioned above. In fact, many of the people you will teach are returnees from various countries and are themselves, having difficulties readjusting to their own society. They may become your best friends. Just go with the idea that you are an outsider and be a little patient and flexible, remember your manners, and if you make those above you happy, your stay will be most pleasant. In support of the "good side" there are many schools that have owners and managers that are very good and fair to their foreign staff. They welcome the suggestions of the foreign teachers and sometimes implement their ideas and elevate them to higher-level positions, if it is possible. All you have to do is try to stay in people's good graces to avoid any unpleasantness described on the previous

³ "wa" is the Japanese word for harmony.

page.

Conclusion

The Japanese language is an interesting language. It has a beautiful character script and strict usage rules. Those who wish to be fluent in this language must also know its culture and social stratification if they are to truly master it. But in all its beauty and tradition it is going through significant change which may cause it to become lost in favor of the domination of English.

English is a word that causes feelings of doubt and reclusion into many Japanese. There is a deep rooted desire expressed by many Japanese to speak English but there remains the fear and embarrassment of making a mistake that will cause them to lose face in front of a foreigner. To some, though, learning English isn't a method of communication study, rather a form of torture. It is a major cause of stress and frustration to school students.

However, for those who manage to develop concrete skills it is also a doorway to a fascinating and sometimes lucrative future. One who can speak

English competently or score high on an English based exam is seen as very intelligent. An entire industry has developed around this language with the many so called “conversation schools” have popped up all over Japan offering one service, improve your level of English.

It is amazing to me when I look back and see all of the students I have taught good or bad, achiever and struggler. They all had the intention of learning my language to communicate with people like me and improve themselves; that makes me feel good. Seeing their success gives me a feeling of success. These accounts and the ones in the future are my reasons for being here in Japan.

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I also wish to thank all students who participated in my interviews, may your studies in English be successful and profitable.



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