

## **Imagined Second Language Identities Language Learning and Identity – A New Perspective**

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### **Abstract**

Recent studies claim that second language learning influences learner identities. In the light of globalisation, learners of English invest in this powerful language of career and social enhancement, which is simultaneously an investment in their new identities. Learners of English, particularly in EFL countries such as Japan, strive to acquire this language despite their limited immediate need for it. This small qualitative case study of Japanese adult learners of English suggests that they believe English can transform who they are and/or what they can do. Additionally, they regard English as the language with which they can express their opinions freely. Findings also suggest that these Imagined Second Language Identities (ISLIs) — imagined English-speaking selves in an imagined global English-speaking community — are primary factors that influence their investment in learning English and their willingness to communicate actively. Given this, the concept of ISLIs should be explored and incorporated into ELT.

Keywords: second language identity, language learning

### **Introduction**

English, the current global language, is being learnt in many parts of the world as a basic skill alongside the national or official language and numeracy (Graddol, 2006). This has changed who is learning the language, their motives and needs as learners. Since proficiency in English language is strongly associated with socioeconomic advancement and better prospects for the future, Norton (1997) argues that learners invest in this language, which is simultaneously an investment in their new global identities. In typical English as a Foreign Language (EFL) countries such as Japan, English is not an essential language for most people but is still considered to be the language of better opportunities and lifestyles. Japanese learners of English strive to become fluent English speakers regardless of their current need for the language. Through the process of learning English, learners imagine themselves as members of global English-speaking communities (Kanno & Norton, 2003). Drawing on Norton and her colleagues' theories of investment and imagined communities, this small qualitative case study investigates learners' Imagined Second Language Identities (ISLIs) — imagined English-speaking selves in an imagined English-speaking community.

This is part of a larger scale study which was conducted at eikaiwa schools in Tokyo, popular private institutions where both adults and children learn English for communicative purposes as opposed to examination-oriented public English education. Through the process of data collection, ISLIs emerged as a particularly significant factor that influenced learners' aspirations to learn the language and willingness to communicate actively.

While many studies have been done on the topic of language learning and identities, there seems to be a scarcity of literature on this emerging aspect of language learning. This study aims to explore learners' ISLIs and the implications of these for future English language teaching and learning, particularly in EFL contexts where learners have few opportunities to use English outside their English classrooms.

### **Background**

Before exploring the topic of ISLIs, it is important to first clarify the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts described in this study. I use Crystal's definition (2002) for this term although classification of English entails ambiguity and limitations given the present worldwide spread of the language. EFL contexts are places where English has no official status but is learnt as a foreign language in schools and colleges, and through various means. Such contexts include Japan, China and Brazil. These contexts are different from English as a Second Language (ESL) contexts where English has special status and is used in addition to local languages as an official language, for domestic and international purposes. Such contexts include Nigeria, Singapore and India. The participants in this research learn English in an EFL context. However, language learning in EFL and ESL contexts in addition to English as a mother tongue contexts is interrelated both in terms of similarities and differences; thus, it is necessary to explore the current topic from multiple viewpoints.

The interrelationship between identity construction and language learning has drawn much attention over the past decade and authors have argued that second language learning influences learners' identities (Benson, Barkhuizen, Bodycott, & Brown, 2013; Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009; Gu, 2010; Kanno & Norton, 2003; Norton & Toohey, 2011; Palvenko & Norton, 2007). Such studies have provided a new perspective into language learning and teaching that it regards language as a dialogue in which speakers strive to negotiate meaning and positioning in their social contexts. Norton (1997) refers to identity as people's understanding of their relationship to the world, how this is constructed over time and space, and its prospects for the future. When language learners speak, they are not just exchanging information with interlocutors but constantly organizing and reorganizing their sense of self in relation to the social world. In other words, they are in the process of constant identity reconstruction and negotiation. Norton and Toohey (2011) also draw attention to the poststructuralist view of power and language among interlocu-

tors who seldom share the same right of speech when structuring discourse because meaning is in part determined by their ascribed social, political, individual and group identity. For example, Peirce's (1995) study of immigrant women in Canada (1995) describes their struggle to gain recognition as multicultural citizens and legitimate speakers of English in a new country where they constantly experience inferiority in daily interactions with native speakers of English. Lin (1999) has examined the dilemmas in four ELT classrooms of different socioeconomic backgrounds in Hong Kong where English is regarded as the language of educational and socioeconomic advancement, given the worldwide association of access to English language with social mobility and life chances as a result of the global spread of English.

Graddol (2006) claims that the current enthusiasm for English is closely tied to the complex process of globalisation which is shifting the world to a totally different social, economic and political order in which English plays a crucial role, as the current global language. Hence, English language learning is inseparable from the power it carries which signifies learners' identities. Consequently, from the perspective of learners, language learning can transform who they are and what they can do (Palvenko & Norton, 2007) because learners' identities are, in part, fixed by the language and varieties of language they speak and their membership of particular speech communities (Benson et al., 2013).

Norton and her colleagues' studies also suggest that when learning a language, learners participate in imagined communities (Anderson, 1991), groups of people who are intangible but accessible through the power of imagination (Kanno & Norton, 2003; Palvenko & Norton, 2007). This is particularly noteworthy in EFL contexts. For example, when a Japanese fashion designer learns English, he/she might imagine one day becoming a successful fashion designer in New York (Kanno & Norton, 2003). Learners' imagined communities are no less real than their immediate social and cultural communities and may have stronger impact on their investment in language learning (Kanno & Norton, 2003; Norton & Toohey, 2011). Learners invest in learning a language at a particular time in a particular setting because they believe it will give them access to a wider range of symbolic and material resources. In addition, investment in the target language is simultaneously an investment in the learner's own identity (Norton, 1997). Language learning may be shaped by the learners' desire to acquire cultural capital for a new and hopeful lifestyle that allows them to participate in different social and cultural groups (Benson et al., 2013).

Second language identity is different from language identity and refers to any aspects of a person's identity that is concerned with their knowledge or use of a second language (Benson et al., 2013). Language learners may develop their second language identity within the simultaneous process of acquiring linguistic knowledge of the target language and learning its sociocultural practices (Block, 2007). In other words, they build up knowledge of how things are done in a particular sociocultural context and how to do them. For example,

Benson et al. (2013) studied two students in Australia and England who became more and more confident as users of English during their study abroad programmes through making friends in a new environment, coping with the communicative challenges they faced, planning and accomplishing trips and so on, while they tried to project identities that matched who they were and how they wanted to be perceived by their interlocutors. In contrast, typical EFL countries rarely provide such sociocultural contexts for learners. In fact, learners in these countries are much more likely to imagine their contexts and the outcome of their learning English. For instance, Ryan's investigation (2009) of Japanese secondary and tertiary students' ambivalent attitudes towards English language learning indicated the notion of personal liberation which was particularly prevalent among female participants. This refers to their belief in the possibility of being able to express themselves more freely in English than in Japanese, a language typically considered to be more restricted in gender, pragmatic, and formality features. In the same study, a male interviewee spoke of his expectation of becoming another person by embarking on an intensive English language programme.

EFL countries are those where the majority of people do not use English in their everyday social interactions, therefore, they may not feel an immediate need for the language. However, Ryan (2006) argues that globalisation has had a significant influence on this conventional concept. Drawing on the theories of Norton's imagined language community and Dörnyei's Ideal L2 Self, he attempts to reconceptualise learner motivation in ELF contexts where globalisation has shifted their sense of identity and thus motivation to learn English. He argues that in addition to their local identities, learners have a sense of being a member of a global community which is detached from any particular nations or target language communities. They strive to gain membership of this imagined global community as users of English, which acts as the basis for their motivation to acquire the language. Similarly, Munezane's study (2013) of the relationship among various factors that influence students' willingness to communicate in class suggests the ideal L2 self, the idealised second language speaking self, hence belonging to the imagined global community with both linguistic proficiency and professional success, is particularly significant in EFL countries like Japan where students have very few opportunities to use English outside their English language classrooms.

### **Eikaiwa Schools and Japanese ELT**

English language has been taught in Japan as a subject in junior and senior high schools, and as a foreign language activity in the fifth and sixth grades of primary school, and many students continue to learn it at a tertiary level in university and college. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) has revised its ELT policies a number of times since the 1980s in response to criticism of the traditional grammar-translation approach that focused on preparing students for examinations and neglected

communication, and as a result, did not meet the various global needs of Japan (Kikuchi & Browne, 2009; Lockley, Hirschel & Slobodniuk, 2012). However, implementation of communicative language teaching has been reported to be difficult due to the pressure of high school and university entrance examinations, poor instruction, the inadequate speaking skills of Japanese teachers, and the prevailing culture of learning (Nishino & Watanabe, 2008; Sakui, 2004).

Eikaiwa schools, literally translated as “English conversation schools”, first appeared during the Japanese economic boom in 1970s as a solution to examination-oriented high school English classes, and rapidly gained popularity throughout Japan. They aimed to fulfil Japanese learners’ desire to communicate in English, a foreign language they would otherwise rarely use especially in interaction with native speakers. English conversation classes were offered to adults who had studied English at school but without being able to use it as a means of communication, as well as to children. The popularity of eikaiwa peaked in 1980s in the midst of Japan’s *kokusaika* (internationalisation), the term with which the government promoted the necessity of being able to use English, the international language, in *kokusai-jidai* (international era), for expressive rather than passive purposes (Mizuta, 2009). However, being commercial entities as opposed to public school or private school English language education, eikaiwa schools have inevitably focused more attention on sales than pedagogical concerns and educational gains for the learners. Literature on the topic of eikaiwa schools has consistently criticised their operation for commodifying English language and whiteness, and exploiting Japanese learners’ admiration for the imaginary West and Japanese women’s *akogare* (desire) for Western men (Appleby, 2013; Bailey, 2007; Kubota, 2011). In addition, the native speaker focus that they utilise to promote their lessons has been blamed for encouraging a native-speaker and non-native-speaker dichotomy and reinforcing the supposed superiority of the West, which does not reflect the realities of English as an international language (Mizuta, 2009; Seargent, 2005). The recent emergence of new schools, private tutoring, online lessons, and cheap study abroad programmes has made the eikaiwa business more competitive than ever before, yet their popularity continues.

Whereas the tendency to learn English language at eikaiwa schools as a leisure activity has been observed in Kubota’s study (2011), a growing number of learners study English for other purposes. In the light of globalisation where English has begun to play the role of the global language in various aspects of Japanese people’s lives such as business, education and travel, English has become increasingly necessary for many people who now use English on a regular basis. The 2020 Tokyo Olympics seems to have accelerated Japan’s enthusiasm for English, making the global language more prevalent in public places and among its people. As a result, although English continues and will continue to be a foreign language in Japan, learners of English aspire to attain this language as a powerful skill that gives them an advantage in their

current or future professions as well as in social interactions, and which will enable them to participate in the English-speaking global community. For those who learn English as a means to access career enhancement and/or to acquire cultural capital for a new and hopeful lifestyle, English language learning is an investment (Norton, 1997) rather than purely a leisure activity. In summary, despite the changing roles of English and learner aspirations, the learner diversity of eikaiwa schools suggests varied intentions for language learning, and the sales-prioritised operation of such schools implies ambiguity in pedagogy, employment and positioning in Japan's ELT.

## **Methodology**

### **Setting**

The study was conducted in 2013 at two eikaiwa schools in Tokyo. As mentioned above, eikaiwa schools are privately operated commercial language schools where people from various walks of life ranging from pre-schoolers to retirees learn English for a variety of purposes such as work, study and/or leisure. Due to the diversity of the learners, eikaiwa schools cater to their different needs with numerous courses ranging from children's play classes to adults' basic conversation classes, advanced business English classes, and preparation classes for English proficiency tests such as TOEIC. Additionally, some courses are offered on a fixed day and time while others can be booked and attended at the learners' convenience. The vast majority of adult eikaiwa school learners take their lessons once or twice a week after work in the evening or the weekend. A few courses are provided at eikaiwa schools for students who want to study English full-time. Such full-time courses attract adult learners who are eager to improve their English for career advancements, preparation before studying overseas, and as a lifelong study among the retirees.

### **Participants**

Seven adult learners of English – five females and two males - at two different eikaiwa schools in Tokyo volunteered to take part in this study. Five participants were studying a full-time course five days a week while two were studying a weekly evening course. Most participants of the full-time course expected to find work that required English language skills after their course completion. The two participants on the weekly course were already using English at work regularly with their business clients from overseas but hoped to improve their English communication skills as well as to gain a better opportunity for promotion with a higher score on the TOEIC test.

### **Data collection and analysis**

Two different methods, a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview, were used for data collection to investigate the case from multiple perspectives. A questionnaire was used as the first data collection method in order to get general views and opinions of the participants, to select participants for the following semi-structured interviews, and to develop interview questions. The questionnaire was written in both Japanese and English and some ambiguous terms were given a definition to avoid misunderstanding. The participants were given a choice to respond in either Japanese or English. It is also important to point out that at the time of designing the questionnaire, the focus of the research was not on the current topic, and ISLIs were a theme that emerged during the process of data collection and analysis.

After the questionnaire was returned from the participants, three participants were selected for a semi-structured interview using “opportunistic sampling”, a sampling strategy in which the researcher samples individuals according to unfolding events that help answer research questions (Creswell, 2012, p. 209). All interviews were conducted in Japanese in order for the participants to express themselves clearly and to achieve linguistic consistency. Interviews took place in a café near their eikaiwa school and were audio-taped. The interviews were transcribed and then translated into English. The interview translations were emailed to and approved by the interviewees before being analysed.

Two cycles were used to code both questionnaire and interview data. The first cycle was Initial Coding, a line-by-line or sentence-by-sentence coding which provides the researcher with a starting direction in which to take the research (Saldaña, 2013). These small codes were analysed again into more categorical and thematic codes in the second cycle using Pattern Coding, an explanatory or inferential coding method that identifies an emergent theme, configuration or explanation (Saldaña, 2013). Qualitative data collection and analysis are normally conducted simultaneously since qualitative research is an emergent process (Merriam, 2009). As I was simultaneously collecting and analysing my data, I looked for emergent themes, and ISLIs were a theme that arose during this process.

### **Findings**

#### **English as a language of empowerment**

Almost all participants associated proficiency in English with enhanced career, and academic and personal opportunities. Some had clear ideas regarding the purpose of learning the language.

Question: “What are your purposes and reasons for learning English?”

Miho: I believe that studying English gives me a lot of opportunities. If I spoke English fluently, I could get a nice job, and travelling overseas would be more fun.

Ai: I study English because I like it and I believe that English enables me to communicate with many people around the world since it is considered “world’s official language.” Also, now I study English because I want to work using my English.

Narumi: I want to learn about people from different countries and cultures. Also, being proficient in English is advantageous for job-hunting.

Kazu: My first reason is work. There is an increasing number of clients who develop their business overseas and I would like to be able to talk with and email the overseas representatives and read documents written in English. My second reason is promotion and job-changes. I would like to improve my TOEIC score because in many cases of promotion and job-changes, a high score is required. My third reason is to broaden my life. If I can speak English fluently, I may increase chances of meeting people by talking with more and various people

Masa: I need to use English for work to communicate with people from overseas.

The responses suggest that participants believed proficiency in English would enable them to gain access to better career, social and personal opportunities. However, only two of the seven participants knew exactly what those opportunities meant to them. These two participants already used English at work on a regular basis and had specific ideas about why and for what they were learning English. To them, English was a business tool – a term used repeatedly by some of the participants – that they had to learn to use. In addition to their current professional skills, a good command of English and a high score on an English proficiency test such as TOEIC were regarded as a requirement for promotions and job changes. This indicates that English is a powerful tool that advantages them in their careers. On the other hand, five of the seven participants did not have specific reasons for learning English despite their belief that doing so would enable them to get a good job and to communicate globally. However, they expressed considerable interest in the world, people and cultures outside Japan, and English was regarded as the necessary means to achieve access. Also, it did not seem to matter what their current life and career situations were; they assumed that proficiency in the English language would transform them.

### **English as a language of expression**

It is noteworthy that all of the participants regarded English as a means to express opinions. Being unable to do so was also considered to be both a weakness of Japanese English speakers and an undesirable attitude. New understandings of Japanese communication were also expressed by the participants.

Question: “What is the English language ability required of Japanese people now and in the future?”

Ai: Expressing ideas or opinions is needed for Japanese people. Many Japanese people are shy and too afraid to talk in English because we don't want to make mistakes or we weren't taught to express our opinions in school.....

Miho: I think speaking is important. Japanese don't learn how to express our opinions, and people tend to think modesty is a virtue. We have to learn ways to express our opinions.

Narumi: The ability to convey our thoughts to others. This might be an issue that precedes English language ability or learning any foreign languages, but I think we need an English ability with which we are able to state our opinions, and also to sympathize with others.

English language learning seemed to have had a marked influence on the participants' attitudes towards communication. In Japanese communication, traditionally, speakers avoid openly expressing opinions because this may be interpreted as boastful or disrespectful. Participants' responses suggest that they believed they could express themselves in English, but not in Japanese.

Two participants mentioned the impact that expressing our opinions in English may have on Japanese language and people as a result.

Miho: ...even among Japanese people, we hardly ever have opportunities to state opinions or are unable to express ourselves. Through English... learning aspects such as how to state one's opinion to people from other countries, and also among Japanese people, might have a positive effect.

Narumi: I don't think there were occasions in our compulsory education in which we were asked “what do you think?” or asked others for their opinions in class “what do you think?” I think the priority may be the ability to express “what would I/you do?” in Japanese. The language of our country is Japanese...

Miho's and Narumi's responses indicate their changing attitudes towards Japanese communication as a consequence of learning English. As Narumi mentioned, Japanese learners of English may benefit from practicing expressing their opinions in Japanese if they wish to do so in English. This suggests learning a second language may also influence learners' first language and first language identities.

## **Discussion**

### **Imagined Second Language Identities**

The findings demonstrate the participants' strong association of English language proficiency with career, social and personal opportunities. This notion is described by Norton and Toohey (2011) in the poststructuralist view of

power and language which regards English as the language of educational and socioeconomic advancements. It is promoted and commoditized as a result of the global spread of English and its increasing impact in the world, creating power relationships among speakers and non-speakers, and inequalities as a consequence (Lin, 1999). English, the current global language (Graddol, 2006), was regarded by the participants as a powerful tool to access the world outside Japan. They expressed their desire to get a job that required English language skills, to work internationally, as well as to travel, meet people overseas and communicate with them. Career enhancement was also a key factor in learning English, for which proficiency and a good test result were vital. A small number of the participants had specific purposes for which they wanted to learn English while the others had rather vague ideas such as “If I spoke English fluently, I could get a nice job.” English was seen as a powerful language that they believed could significantly change their status quo. This implies their aspirations for a new and hopeful lifestyle that allows them to participate in different social and cultural groups. Given the very limited role of English language in Japan for most people, such ideas indicate their participation in imagined communities (Anderson, 1991) - English-speaking global communities that are intangible but accessible through their power of imagination.

Narumi: To be honest, I think you can live without English in Japan though I sometimes hear about companies suddenly becoming foreign owned or one day your boss is a foreigner... For example, I used to be in the field of social work where I never felt the necessity of English. I could easily live without it.

Even though there is an increasing number of Japanese learners of English who use English on a regular basis, for the majority, English-speaking communities are beyond their reach and tangible only through their imagination. Yet, they try to establish self-identity in terms of their relationship to the global world, constructed over time and space, and prospects for the future. They strive to gain membership of the imagined global language community, on the periphery of the English-speaking world (Ryan, 2006). These imagined communities are no less real than their immediate social and cultural communities and may have a stronger impact on their investment in language learning (Kanno & Norton, 2003; Norton & Toohey, 2011). Through learning English, the participants aspired to become different people because they believed that language learning could transform who they were and what they could do. Their investment in English was an investment in new identities.

In addition, the participants believed that English was the language with which they could express themselves to the world. They claimed that they needed to learn to speak English confidently because Japanese people are too shy and too afraid of making mistakes. Their responses indicate an attitude that is very different from traditional assumptions about Japanese communication styles which are typically regarded as restricted in gender, pragmatic, and formality features. A similar belief is referred to by Ryan (2009) as personal liberation, the possibility of being able to express themselves more freely in

English than in Japanese. Further implications of learning to express themselves in English were suggested by two participants who spoke of a reconceptualization of Japanese language. How Japanese learners of English are going to learn to express themselves in English remains unclear. Nonetheless, their aspiration to express themselves in English and perhaps in Japanese is evident.

Japanese learners' participation in an imagined English-speaking global community and belief in expressing their opinions more freely in English imply their envisioning of imagined second language identities (ISLIs) – imagined English-speaking selves in an imagined English-speaking community. ISLIs are different from second language identities that are developed within the simultaneous process of acquiring linguistic knowledge of the target language and learning its sociocultural practices. Rather, for the vast majority of people in EFL countries such as Japan, such sociocultural practices are accessible only through their imagination. Learners imagine their new second language speaking selves in an imagined English-speaking global community. These ISLIs are embedded in the participants' picturing themselves as successful English-speaking professionals, as well as communicating fluently, confidently and globally in English. As opposed to Japan's traditional attitude toward learning English which focused on passing examinations, learners' ISLIs are their new aspirations for learning the global language and acquiring new global identities. Hence, in order for Japanese English learners to be active users of the language, their ISLIs require more attention in ELT. In other words, educators need to incorporate ways to encourage and foster learners' ISLIs into their pedagogy.

In the light of ISLIs, ELT providers in Japan such as eikaiwa schools may play a greater role now and in the near future. As the MEXT struggles to meet the needs of global Japan with its English language education, learners have to turn to other sources to put their high school English into practice. Hence, at present and until the MEXT successfully implements its English language curriculum, an eikaiwa school seems to be a feasible solution for learners who wish to become active users of the language. Eikaiwa school learners invest in their new global identities with which they believe they can access a more hopeful career and lifestyle. However, many do not realise when they start that language learning demands time, effort and dedication. In order to become successful learners of English, a superordinate vision is needed to sustain them through the tedious process of language learning (Dörnyei, 2009). For most students of eikaiwa schools whose current career and social circumstances do not require English, such a vision is their ISLIs. Likewise, Munezane's study (2013) which investigates Dörnyei's (2005, 2009) theory of ideal L2 self (2005, 2009) in a Japanese ELT context, claims this idealised English-speaking self in an imaginary global community is a particularly significant factor in EFL countries that influences learners' willingness to learn the language and to communicate. Therefore, if eikaiwa schools and public

schools are to be successful providers of ELT, they need to find ways to enhance Japanese learners' ISLIs.

### Conclusion

This study suggests that ISLIs significantly influence Japanese learners' aspirations to study English language in that English is regarded as the language which gives Japanese learners professional, social and personal opportunities. It is also regarded as the language with which they believe they can express themselves to the world. English will enable them to become who they cannot be and do what they cannot do with the Japanese language. Their investment in this powerful language is an investment in their new identities. Through learning English, Japanese learners take part in imagined English-speaking global communities that are, for the vast majority of them, accessible only through their imagination, and yet their participation in such communities seems to be the primary factor behind their desire and effort to learn the language. Therefore, the concept of ISLIs should be incorporated and encouraged in Japanese ELT because learners are always constructing their identities in relation to the world around them and prospects for the future in the era of globalisation, even if their current circumstances do not require any English.

### Note

1Pseudonyms are used to protect the participants' confidentiality.

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### **Appendix: Questionnaire**

What are your purposes and reasons for learning English?

Ai: I study English because I like it and I believe that English enables me to communicate with many people around the world, since it is considered “world’s official language.” Also, now I study English because I want to work using my English.

Hitomi: I want to use English at work.

Kazu: My first reason is work. There is an increasing number of clients who develop their business overseas and I would like to be able to talk with and email the overseas representatives and read documents written in English. My second reason is promotion and job-changes. I would like to improve my TOEIC score because in many cases of promotion and job-changes, a high score is required. My third reason is to broaden my life. If I can speak English fluently, I may increase chances of meeting people by talking with more and various people.

Masa: I need to use English for work to communicate with people from overseas.

Miho: I believe that studying English gives me a lot of opportunities. If I spoke English fluently, I could get a nice job, and travelling overseas would be more fun. Moreover, I could have chances to understand other cultures deeply.

Narumi: I’ve always wanted to learn about people from different countries and cultures. Also, being proficient in English is advantageous for job-hunting.

Saori: Because I’m interested in acquiring foreign languages, different cultures. Learning different ways of thinking through other languages has always fascinated me.

What is the English language ability required of Japanese people now and in the future?

Ai: Expressing ideas or opinions is needed for Japanese people. Many Japanese people are shy and too afraid to talk in English because we don’t want to make mistakes or we weren’t taught to express our opinions in schools; so I think it is important for us to learn how to express what we want to say whether you can use sophisticated words or not.

Hitomi: Speaking and discussion skills

Kazu: To convey your intentions and opinions forthrightly and to understand others without being embarrassed or ashamed.

Masa: The ability to actively achieve mutual understanding with people from various countries.

Miho: I think speaking is important. Japanese people don't learn how to express our opinions, and people tend to think modesty is a virtue. We have to learn ways to express our opinions.

Narumi: The ability to convey our thoughts to others. This might be an issue that precedes English language ability or learning any foreign languages. But I think we need an English ability with which we are able to state our opinions, and also to sympathize with others.

Saori: It's difficult to point out every problem we have in our English education, but one of the reasons why I joined this English course was that in high school they never taught me how to speak English, although I learned how to read or understand grammar. And I'm sure it is impossible to acquire speaking skills without real communication practice. So what we need is, I think, to be practical, that is, speaking and communication skills, and to be more affirmative speakers. We can study grammar after that.

#### **Note on Contributor**

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