Promoting Japanese University Students' Participation in English Classroom Discussions: Towards a Culturally-Informed Bottom-Up Approach

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This study reviews the current body of research into reasons for Japanese university students' reluctance toward spoken class participation in English, along with a critical review of general teaching suggestions for encouraging participation. It then identifies the limitations of teaching strategies that may not take into account certain reasons for their silence, which may be rooted in the Japanese communication style or educational background rather than confidence or language ability. This paper aims to make use of these reasons to identify concrete, bottom-up participation skills that are more grounded in Japanese culture and communication style differences, and to provide related teaching suggestions. While this paper aims to address the issues affecting Japanese students, the implications can be applied to other East Asian students whose verbal participation may be affected by similar cultural factors.

1 Introduction

English for Academic Purposes (EAP) programs are generally designed to prepare students for studying in English-medium instruction (EMI) courses. Many students for whom English is an L2 may take EAP courses to prepare for studying abroad at universities in English-speaking countries or EMI courses in their home country. Although any EAP program with a speaking component will generally aim to increase students' oral communicative competence in English, even advanced-proficiency students may remain silent in university classes for other reasons. One demographic for which classroom silence has been empirically documented is Japanese students taking EMI courses at universities in both Japan (King, 2011) and Australia

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(Nakane, 2006, 2007). For example, in an analysis of class dialogue over a period of 48 hours, among 924 students and across nine Japanese universities, King (2011) found students spoke less than one percent of class time. Because students are generally expected to speak during discussions in these classes, sometimes for a participation grade, this clash between expected and actual student behavior can frustrate both instructors and students.

A common belief is that Japanese students are silent because they are "just shy," are unfamiliar with student-centered learning environments, or struggle with low oral English ability. Thus, this view implies, teachers (both EAP instructors and university professors) should simply make liberal use of icebreakers, scaffolded and student-centered activities, and general encouragement for students to "speak up." However, a look into existing research on what may cause Japanese students to remain silent reveals more specific factors, and these can help guide a culturally-sensitive approach that pinpoints concrete skills to help them participate in EMI university classes, including those abroad in English-speaking countries.

This paper presents a review of the literature on Japanese students' classroom silence and existing advice for EAP/ESL teachers and university professors in this regard. It then highlights a bottom-up approach that aims to promote Japanese students' verbal participation without the pressure to abandon their cultural norms by identifying and equipping them with the necessary skills, speech acts, and associated phrases. The author believes that more attention should be given to this bottom-up approach and related teaching suggestions, as it allows "participation" to be viewed from a cultural perspective as well as be broken down into more readily teachable skills. Because the suggestions in this article are informed by research on Japanese students and are focused on participation in university class discussions, they are primarily offered to EAP teachers in Japan who teach only Japanese students. However, they should also be helpful for teachers of EMI courses or more general ESL/EFL classes to encourage participation.

2 Causes of Silence Among Japanese Students

2.1 Culture

Culture affects the "dispositions, attitudes, and approaches to learning" of students (Gay, 2000, p. 29). In Japanese culture, silence has been associated with truthfulness and social discretion and politeness (King, 2011; Lebra, 1987), with value placed on "taciturnity and the distrust of words" (Kumagai, 1994, p. 19), as well as an abundance of proverbs and literature portraying the positive value of silence (King, 2011). King (2011) summarizes research on aspects of Japanese childrearing habits that may account for increased silence, including less verbal interaction between mother and child and

training children to be sensitive to those around them which could result in self-monitoring.

Like all international students, Japanese students can carry their cultural norms from their own country into U.S. or Australian classrooms, in this case using silence to preserve harmony by not disrupting the lesson and to express politeness to the teacher (Banks, 2016; Nakane, 2007; Sasaki & Ortlieb, 2017). Both Jones (1999) and Passero (1993) further note that a tendency to prioritize face-saving by avoiding social risk and making mistakes may also reduce speaking among Japanese students in EMI classes, while classroom observations and interviews with Japanese university students in Australia have supported this trend (Nakane, 2006, 2007; Sasaki & Ortlieb, 2017).

Although culture is not the only factor to consider, it can play an especially important role in a homogeneous classroom of Japanese students. Most of the studies cited above involve Japanese university students in an English speaking country together with students of other nationalities. However, in EAP contexts in Japan (and in the author's own institution in the U.S.), homogeneous classrooms of Japanese students are common. In these contexts, Japanese cultural norms such as group-mindedness may naturally prevail among classmates. Even in the United States, the classroom itself may sometimes *feel* like a microcosm of the Japanese education system to students; after all, they are surrounded by Japanese classmates. In these contexts, students are likely to speak in Japanese among themselves before the teacher arrives, refrain from giving strong opinions, and perhaps feel as though they are still governed by the norms of a classroom in Japan. Despite being taught about the importance of active participation in U.S. or Australian classrooms, Japanese students may feel reluctant to participate in an effort to preserve group harmony and avoid being the "odd one out" who speaks up. Thus, cultural factors may play a stronger role in a homogeneous classroom context, such as an EMI or EAP classroom in Japan.

2.2 Communication style

Japanese student perspectives toward class participation suggest they may incline toward silence due to aspects of the Japanese communication style (King, 2011; Mertin, 2014; Nakane, 2005, 2006). First, in Japanese culture, it is generally the responsibility of the listener to understand messages rather than ask for clarification (Anderson, 2018; Hammond, 2007; Passero, 1993). As a high-context society, communication in Japanese culture relies more than European-influenced cultures on context and shared knowledge for obtaining information as opposed to the spoken word. Second, a tendency toward group-mindedness may cause reluctance to share opinions that differ from the group's consensus (Anderson, 2018; Hammond, 2007; Harumi,

2011). This pressure to avoid challenging the established unanimity of a group may limit Japanese students' contributions to class discussions.

Third, Japanese students often answer questions by first "consensus checking" and conferring with a classmate in Japanese before delegating a leader to present the answer formally to the class (Anderson, 2018; Hammond, 2007; Moxon, 2009; Passero, 1993). This "collective communication system" was observed among Japanese university students by Banks (2016), and reflects "the importance of formalized speechmaking in Japanese society" (Hammond, 2007, p. 45). Similarly, Matsuoka, Matsumoto, Poole, and Matsuoka (2014) observed that students were less reluctant to speak during oral presentations. However, giving a presentation and spontaneously contributing to a discussion are two very different speaking tasks, with the latter likely to be less familiar to Japanese students.

Fourth, styles of turn-taking differ between Japanese and other cultures; Hammond (2007) describes American conversations, for example, as "a volley of speech between speakers" (p. 46) that allow interruptions, whereas Japanese conversations involve patiently waiting for one's turn. Harumi (2011) states that "compared to Japanese, [English] has more spontaneous turn exchanges and a more speaker- oriented communicative style" (p. 263), while student frustrations from her questionnaire given to 197 Japanese university students reflect this; they indicated that their silence in EMI classes resulted in part because it was "difficult to claim their turn and thus [they] missed the chance to express themselves" (p. 264). Ellwood and Nakane (2009) similarly found that inability to take turns during discussions limited Japanese university students' spoken participation in EMI classes.

Lastly, the Japanese style of communication tolerates a longer acceptable length of silence and pauses (King, 2011; Kumagai, 1994; Nakane, 2007). In contrast, those familiar with U.S. or Australian classrooms can likely relate to Kumagai's (1994) description: "in a class discussion, English speakers sometimes 'grab' turns while the previous speaker has not even completed the statement or question yet," an act he describes as "extremely rude and aggressive in the Japanese context" (p. 23).

2.3 Education system

In addition to culture and communication style, the Japanese education system has been cited as contributing to silence among Japanese students (King, 2011). Japanese culture generally values silence in classrooms as it is a sign of respect toward teachers and promotes harmony (Kato, 2010), an important value in Japanese culture (Midooka, 1990). In contrast, giving personal opinions is often considered impolite (Kato, 2010; Mertin, 2014), as is interrupting (Moxon, 2009). In addition, the Japanese style of learning tends to be passive and teacher-centered (Hammond, 2007; King, 2011; Moxon, 2009; Passero, 1993), focused on listening and note-taking

(Hammond, 2007; Moxon, 2009). English instruction in Japanese secondary schools is largely accomplished via grammar-translation rather than communicative language teaching, as Japanese EFL teachers can undergo pressure to prepare students for exams that do not contain a speaking component and maintain discipline with large class sizes (Rapley, 2008); upon entering higher education, students may thus be accustomed to remaining silent in class.

The Japanese secondary education system's approach to contemporary issues, in which analysis and discussion of global or social issues are largely not featured and "political education [has] long been almost a taboo topic" (Aoki, 2016, para. 17), may also contribute to students' silence when they study at U.S. or Australian university classrooms. Mie and Osaki (2016) explain that "political debate is virtually nonexistent in Japanese classrooms" (para. 11), and cite a 2016 Asahi Shimbun poll in which "62 percent of 3,000 youths aged 18 to 19 said they either do not or rarely talk about politics" (para. 10). Due to unfamiliarity with background sociopolitical knowledge and inexperience with such analysis and discussions in their educational history, Japanese students may find it challenging to be suddenly faced with the task of contributing to the discussions on politics or current events sometimes featured in U.S. or Australian college courses.

2.4 Contextual factors

It is important to note that cultural background alone does not account for all silence among Japanese students, nor are Japanese students universally silent. Kim, Ates, Grigsby, Kraker, and Micek (2016) explain that "Japanese students are…not much different from American students in terms of valuing talking and enjoying talk" (p. 442); they may simply do so less in the context of a classroom. Anderson (2008) expresses that while Japanese people talk a great deal in socially-acceptable contexts such as meetings or karaoke bars, students may not talk because the Japanese cultural rule that dictates appropriate places to talk does not include classrooms.

Research involving student interviews and classroom observations has revealed a multitude of contextual factors affecting silence, including the classroom environment and communicative competence (Banks, 2016; Cutrone, 2013; Ellwood & Nakane, 2009; King, 2011; King & Aono, 2017; Nakane, 2005, 2007; Osterman, 2014), confidence and anxiety (de Goei, 2018; Goharimehr, 2017; Harumi, 2011), teacher interaction styles (Lee & Ng, 2009; Morita, 2004), rapport among classmates and classroom size (Sasaki & Ortlieb, 2017), as well as prior experiences with spoken English (Osterman, 2014). Other factors contributing to silence have included identity as a marginalized or less competent member of a native English-speaking group (Morita, 2004) as well as simply an individual preference to be quiet (Kim et al., 2016). Learner preferences and adaptability are other factors in

how much students will speak; Sasaki and Ortlieb (2017) state that while some students "have a willingness to modify their silent behavior," others "prefer to maintain their inherited learning style" (p. 90).

3 Silence Conflicting with Instructors' Expectations

In contrast to the Japanese cultural importance of silence, U.S. and Australian instructors generally value discussion, consider spoken participation a sign of engagement, and can mistakenly view silence as lack of understanding (Ellwood & Nakane, 2009; Jones, 1999; Kim et al., 2016; Sasaki & Ortlieb, 2017) or shyness (de Goei, 2018). They are also likely to mandate spoken participation as a class requirement; in a survey of 946 instructors across multiple higher-education institutions in California, Ferris and Tagg (1996) found that while not all students were subjected to the same speaking requirements in their American college classes, professors generally featured student participation as a requirement and their courses were increasingly "less formal and more interactive" (p. 31).

Therefore, reluctance to speak will often be at odds with instructor expectations in these classes. As Moxon (2009) explains, the Japanese cultural rules of etiquette "have led to serious misunderstandings when naturally applied in an overseas learning environment" (para. 3).

4 Review of Existing Teaching Suggestions

This section reviews existing suggestions for encouraging Japanese university students to verbally participate, then draws attention to their limitations, namely that most suggestions offered in previous research do not utilize an understanding of Japanese communication style differences to teach concrete, bottom-up participation skills.

4.1 General suggestions for university professors

4.1.1 Building empathy
Many suggestions in the literature relate to building empathy and rapport with Japanese students to encourage them to speak. These include developing a social, mentor-like relationship to help them adapt to their new environment (Sato & Hodge, 2015), getting to know students outside of class (Hammond, 2007), and having candid discussions that address both sides' expectations and cultural perspectives on silence (Banks, 2016; King & Aono, 2017). Furthermore, teachers can raise their own awareness of Japanese students' reasons for silence (de Goei, 2018; Ellwood & Nakane, 2009; Harumi, 2011; Jones, 1999; Kim et al., 2016; Nakane, 2006).

4.1.2 Giving students more time

Other strategies have included providing more wait time to reduce cognitive load and encourage student responses (King, 2011; Nakane, 2009), although King and Aono (2017) found that Japanese students could be uncomfortable with lengthy instructor silence if they do not expect it. In addition, Smith and King (2017) found that increased wait time worked best as a strategy only with initiation-response-feedback patterns in the classroom, in which the instructor provides a prompt and students are expected to answer; thus, wait time may not encourage students to voluntarily speak unless the instructor explicitly invites responses.

In addition to wait time, teachers can provide opportunities for students to prepare their ideas in writing before speaking (de Goei, 2018; Kim et al., 2016; Nakane, 2006), including via online blogs (Kim et al., 2016). However, these strategies do not encourage spontaneous speech and are similar to preparing a polished monologue for an oral presentation.

4.1.3 Encouraging voluntary participation

Encouraging voluntary, spontaneous participation can therefore remain a separate challenge. To address this, Nakane (2007) suggests instructors increase unity in the classroom and focus on topics relevant to students' countries when possible. Relating to students' personal lives can encourage them to be more invested and motivated, since they are "expressing their own voices and identities through the language" (Goharimehr, 2017, p. 28). In addition, Kim et al. (2016) propose general anxiety-lowering activities like ice breakers to increase comfort with speaking.

To encourage comprehension and thus participation, Morita (2004) suggests that teachers scaffold class discussions and explain necessary background cultural information. However, this may not be efficient for professors who have only a handful of Japanese international students in their classes; explaining relevant background information may bore local students for whom it is common knowledge.

To avoid students from more outspoken cultures dominating class discussions, Jones (1999) and Mortia (2004) suggest that instructors control turn-taking among multicultural groups of students (p. 252). Kim et al. (2016) suggest that instructors make use of small group discussions, with the groups remaining the same over multiple classes to encourage familiarity, and with discussion leaders assigned and rotated to encourage equal participation.

4.2 General suggestions for EAP teachers

While the advice in the literature aimed at university professors who teach Japanese students is valid, it may not necessarily be helpful for EAP teachers in Japan who prepare students for such classes in advance. For example, teacher-centered strategies like regulating turn-taking or increasing wait time

can be effective, but only if the professors that students find themselves with are trained in this approach. Similarly, if students are "spoiled" with excessively long wait times by their EAP teachers, they may find themselves unprepared to participate in a "real" discussion led by an American professor who will not scaffold the lesson in such a manner. It is quite possible that once students leave the "safety" of the EAP program, their professors will be less accustomed to the needs of ELLs. Therefore, rather than aim to prepare all professors with advice on how to teach Japanese students, it seems more worthwhile to identify practices EAP teachers can use to empower Japanese students to deal with the speaking requirements of any university classroom they may find themselves in. Fortunately, the literature also includes suggestions for EAP teachers who prepare Japanese students to take classes at U.S. or Australian universities.

4.2.1 Raising confidence and awareness

Much general advice has been proposed for boosting Japanese students' confidence and helping them understand the value of fluency in addition to accuracy. Banks (2016) states that students can be encouraged to focus on fluency over error-free accuracy, and reminded that negotiating meaning by asking for clarification, repetition, or help are normal functions of language performed frequently in an increasingly multicultural world. Kumagai (1994) suggests teachers expose Japanese students to different accents and varieties of English, as well as discuss topics related to Japan in English, in order to separate the language from its association with Anglophone cultures and instead focus on its usefulness as a tool for communication.

Passero (1993) offers specific activities that help Japanese students focus on their strengths to build confidence. For example, she suggests students note the words they understand rather than those they do not, before deciphering the overall meaning of a text or listening passage in groups. To reduce anxiety, she also suggests Asher's (1969) method of Total Physical Response, the Natural Approach (Krashen & Terrell, 1995), starting with simple yes/no questions, and using games. While useful, these suggestions are general in that they do not take into account Japanese students' communication style or cultural background.

One particularly unique suggestion that directly utilizes an understanding of Japanese culture to encourage participation is Hammond's (2007) suggestion to use role-plays that simulate "scenarios where speaking is culturally sanctioned." These include settings such as *karaoke* booths in which Japanese students would feel that speaking is more appropriate. Hammond additionally suggests giving students a break from American-style instruction by lecturing, which can serve as a listening activity. By building confidence and comfort with speaking in class, these strategies and activities may help scaffold Japanese students' adjustment toward the greater participation requirements of EMI classrooms, whether abroad or in Japan.

4.2.2 Providing practice with speaking tasks

EAP teachers should also incorporate into their classes authentic speaking tasks that learners are likely to encounter as university students. Ferris and Tagg's (1996) analysis of California professors' oral participation requirements revealed a useful list of such tasks, which included large and small group discussions, presentations, oral summaries, case studies, social events, phone calls, meetings with professors during office hours, and cooperating with classmates on group projects. Despite the usefulness of such a list, Ferris and Tagg found that requirements for spoken participation and level of interaction in classes varied among professors and by area of study. Thus, they state that "EAP programs should consider offering context-specific EAP courses whenever feasible" (p. 50). Planning for these courses should include an investigation into the specific university courses that students plan to take, if possible, in order to identify the types of speaking tasks they will be expected to engage in.

4.3 Limitations of general suggestions for encouraging participation

The above teaching suggestions largely focus on making students more comfortable, confident, and cognitively capable of speaking up in class. However, these general suggestions apply to learners of all backgrounds and do not necessarily take into account more specific reasons for silence from the literature, such as the Japanese communication style, or equip students with concrete, bottom-up skills to help them participate. In other words, these suggestions simply acknowledge that Japanese students must become confident and comfortable enough to "speak up."

In these cases, the American or Australian style of speaking and learning is viewed as the ideal, while the Japanese student's learning habits and classroom behavior are seen as a deficit in need of remediation to be successful. Despite good intentions, these techniques do not provide students with any concrete "tools" to help students participate; merely knowing they must speak in class and reducing their anxiety does not guarantee they will have the linguistic tools to do so without changing their cultural communication habits. In fact, research cited by Cutrone (2010) shows the ineffectiveness of teachers' attempts to change this type of behavior among students (Alpetkin & Alptekin, 1984; Brumfit, 1980; Kramsch, 1998), and he advocates restraint in teaching "Western" classroom conduct to Japanese students specifically.

Such pressure to adopt foreign communication patterns and classroom behavior without acquiring the specific requisite skills may make Japanese students uncomfortable. For example, because face-saving and group-mindedness are important aspects of Japanese culture, it is likely unrealistic to expect a homogeneous class of Japanese students to abandon their cultural definitions of politeness by frequently speaking out in class among their

Japanese classmates. On the contrary, pressuring them to speak may result in ever-increasing levels of apprehension toward speaking, as this ignores their "psychology of silence" (de Goei, 2018, para. 11). Worse, such pressure could be viewed as a form of forced cultural assimilation, and as Passero (1993) states, we do not want to "de-value [students'] past educational training and cultural background" (p. 74). Jones (1999) similarly describes the harm this approach can cause to student motivation:

> Students who find that their notion of social role of their native conversational and rhetorical style is being dismissed are not going to develop a positive attitude towards learning new pragmatic and discourse norms... (p. 251)

In other words, although it is true that role-playing gregarious speakers from another culture during class activities can sometimes be fun or motivational, it is also important to allow students the freedom to behave according to their own culture among their peers from the same culture. Otherwise, they may experience a conflict between their Japanese identity and the expectations in an English classroom (Kidd, 2016). Anderson (2018) similarly describes the futility of trying to change socialized patterns of behavior in an English class:

> One can thus not expect students who find themselves in a Western-style classroom in Japan, after 12 or more years of experience in Japanese classrooms, to interact like Western students (although a few might) simply by virtue of having studied English. Non-Japanese English teachers who radically try to alter the existing patterns are usually those who become frustrated… (Chapter 14)

Therefore, simply reminding students again and again that American or Australian classrooms require active participation, while pushing them to "be confident" and "speak up," is unlikely to be effective. An experience in one of the author's own classes of 14 advanced-proficiency Japanese EAP students studying in the U.S. reflects this; despite viewing and analyzing multiple videos of American classrooms, a visit to an American college classroom to observe this firsthand, and repeated reminders about the importance of speaking and the expectations of American college professors via an extensive orientation, only two highly-motivated students seemed to have significantly altered their spoken participation habits by the end of the semester.

Furthermore, reminding Japanese students that speaking is important may in fact be unnecessary; in many cases, they are already aware of the value of speaking and consider it a goal. Research has shown that Japanese

students are often already conscious of the importance of speaking in Australian or U.S. college classes, desire to speak, and understand that their communication styles may differ from those valued in these classrooms (Ellwood & Nakane, 2009; Harumi, 2011; Nakane, 2006; Sasaki & Ortlieb, 2017). They also often feel a sense of urgency to develop English fluency during their limited time studying abroad (Sato & Hodge, 2015).

Nonetheless, Japanese EFL students themselves have expressed little desire to integrate fully into English-speaking communities, preferring instead to learn English for career purposes, international posture, making foreign friends, and accessing international information (Goharimehr, 2017). This trend further suggests that students may wish to retain their own culture and communication style while using English as a tool, and teaching practices should aim to acknowledge this.

5 Toward Culturally-Informed Solutions

5.1 Exploring an "English as a Lingua Franca" approach

It must be recognized that Japanese learners can acquire communicative competence in English without being forced to adopt a foreign communication style, which may be difficult to instill anyway. In other words, while we can reasonably ask students to follow an "English only" policy, it is likely neither realistic nor appropriate to have them follow an "American-style communication only" policy, especially among a homogeneous group of Japanese students such as an EAP classroom in Japan.

Instead, an approach that enables Japanese students to communicate in English with Japanese communication patterns has been proposed (Abe, 2013). Similarly, Hammond (2007) suggests that teachers adopt the following attitude: "Remember not to pit American cultural teaching styles against Japanese school culture, but to build slowly on Japanese communication styles to ensure students feel comfortable in class" (p. 49). These approaches align with Gay's (2000) model of culturally responsive teaching.

Specifically, allowing Japanese students to follow the rules of their own culture while speaking in the target language may help them feel more comfortable when performing less familiar speech acts such as interrupting. For example, Moxon (2009) recommends teaching students that "interruption is an essential skill in the discussion process," while also understanding that "Japanese will remain polite even when interrupting" (para. 10).

Another helpful concept in line with the above ideas is English as a Lingua Franca (ELF), which recognizes the legitimacy of the Japanese style of speaking English. To borrow Jenkins (2012) description, ELF is "a means of communication between people who come from different first language backgrounds" (p. 486). ELF speakers can take advantage of resources from all languages they speak to express their cultural identity (Jenkins, 2012;

Kidd, 2016) or communicate effectively with people from other cultures (Suzuki, 2020). In addition, because native speakers "constitute a small minority of those who use English for the purposes of intercultural communication," non-native speakers who use ELF "should not feel the need to defer to them for appropriate English use" (Jenkins, 2012, p. 487).

The concept of ELF thus makes it acceptable to speak English without necessarily adopting the patterns of L1 English speakers, including pragmatic norms. Among other aspects, pragmatic norms include how speech acts are performed, conversational structure, and the sociolinguistic aspects of language (Bardovi-Harlig & Mahan-Taylor, 2003, p. 1). For example, the Japanese style of communicating in English, with a greater amount of silence, greater requirements for politeness when addressing those of a higher position, and less frequent or direct opinion-giving, should not be viewed as a limited form of nonnative-like English, but rather as one of the many valid varieties of ELF, one that that borrows pragmatic norms from Japanese. In fact, this style of English may be more approachable to Japanese students.

Further evidence that a foreign English communication style should not be forced onto Japanese students is the fact that they may also study in EMI courses in Japan alongside classmates who are not native English speakers; over 40 percent of Japanese universities offer EMI courses (Brown, 2018), and over 90 percent of foreign students at Japanese institutions of higher education are from nearby Asian countries (Uchida, 2017). Regardless of where they study, understanding the concept of ELF and the validity of Japanese-style English can give Japanese students "confidence that their communication patterns are as valid and acceptable as any other style of English" (Kumagai, 1994, p. 31).

5.2 Suggestions for teaching bottom-up participation skills

Since mere nagging from teachers is unlikely to change the participation habits of Japanese university students, and while the sound strategies for reducing anxiety and building rapport can be helpful, there is a need for "precise specification of what [Japanese] students need to know and use" (Jones, 1999, p. 247). In other words, even advanced-proficiency students who are confident in their speaking may refrain from participating in English if they lack the conversational strategies and speech acts to do so politely from a Japanese perspective. Specifically, Japanese university students can be unfamiliar with the pragmatic features and expressions needed to maintain the cultural level of politeness they are comfortable with, especially with face-threatening acts (Ellis, 1990). Because students do not simply acquire pragmatics through immersion, these features of language must be explicitly taught (Jones, 1999).

Thus, strategies that move beyond basic encouragement and anxiety reduction toward equipping students with bottom-up skills are needed to help

them participate while remaining grounded in their cultural norms. We may look to Japanese culture and communication style as a starting point for identifying these skills. Although cultural factors that contribute to Japanese students' silence only exist "to a degree in conjunction with other variables, they can certainly influence learner behaviour" (King, 2011, p. 60).

While researchers have suggested teaching participation in a way that respects Japanese students' cultural communication patterns (Abe, 2013; Kumagai, 1994; Moxon, 2009), only a limited number of studies have also provided specific suggestions for teaching these bottom-up participation skills (Cutrone, 2010; Harumi, 2011; Jones, 1999; Nakane, 2006). For example, Cutrone (2010) suggests teaching phrases for conversation strategies such as backchanneling, asking for clarification in order to avoid loss of face, interrupting, disagreeing, and asking for help. Nakane (2006) and Harumi (2011) further suggest teaching fillers (e.g. *um, Let's see, It's like*) so students can avoid losing their turn to speak while they hesitate.

These examples all represent a particular type of teaching implication that 1) breaks down verbal participation into concrete, bottom-up skills, and 2) is informed by the needs of Japanese students in particular and can thus be helpful for teaching homogeneous classes. Below, the author aims to add to this rather limited body of advice by presenting suggestions for teaching bottom-up participation skills to Japanese students, each informed by the prior analysis of Japanese culture and communication patterns.

5.2.1 Claiming turns

Nowlan (2012) suggests that by teaching different methods of nonverbal communication and their corresponding implications in different cultures, instructors can help students better communicate in English. Applying this idea to the teaching of turn-claiming in fast-paced discussions, the author suggests teachers help students practice and become comfortable with kinesthetic cues that signal one would like to speak, such as leaning forward in one's seat, opening one's mouth, and of course raising one's hand. Students can be shown a video featuring a fast-paced discussion and asked to analyze not only the phrases, but also the gestures that speakers use to interject. Video recordings of American classrooms, available online through a quick search, can be useful for this.

Invariably, more outspoken students who feel comfortable adapting to the foreign classroom environment may dominate class discussions. To encourage equitable turn-taking and include quieter students, the author has personally had success holding a sort of "asynchronous discussion" in his own classes. This is a scaffolded activity in which a whole-class discussion is led as usual, with the exception that students are given one minute of "thinking time" between speakers. After one student speaks, the discussion is "paused," and the class is asked to silently prepare their thoughts. After a minute of silence, the teacher calls on another student to "piggyback" on the

first students' remark. This process continues until several students have contributed to the discussion, while the turn-taking remains controlled by the teacher.

To grapple with turn-taking in a fast-paced U.S. or Australian classroom discussion with only brief gaps of silence between speakers, the strategy of interjecting is often necessary, especially if the instructor does not require students to raise their hand first and be called on. While not common nor polite in Japanese culture, Japanese students may not be able to avoid interjections altogether; nonetheless, they can gain confidence by knowing how to interject politely.

While Jones (1999) has suggested an "interrupting game" to make students more comfortable interrupting by having them shout *excuse me!* when they hear a target sound or grammar structure, teachers should also equip students with phrases for polite interjections (e.g. *Can I jump in here?*), or short utterances that signal one would like to add something to the discussion (e.g. *Yeah, and…, So…*). A competitive game for practicing these skills could involve a small group discussion, in which individual students score a point for every sentence they contribute to the conversation while remaining as polite as possible and using frequent interjections. An online video of an academic conversation that features interjection strategies, or one acted out and recorded by a few teachers, can be used as a model for this activity. In addition to learning phrases used to interject, students should be taught how to identify the appropriate opportunities to do so in a discussion. For example, teachers can give students practice with identifying the falling intonation that often signals a speaker is finished talking.

At the same time, it is important to equip students with strategies to avoid being interrupted themselves when they may pause between sentences to think. To help with this, they can be taught the strategy of using fillers while hesitating in order to avoid forfeiting their turn in conversation. Teachers should also help Japanese students speak with appropriately strong intonation and sentence stress in English to maintain the interest of the class. Because Japanese has a narrower range of intonation pitches, Japanese students "likely will have an insufficient intonational repertoire for use in English" (Park, 2011) due to language transfer. Therefore, to provide practice, the author suggests teachers use chants or ask students to stand up and "perform" a sentence using their body language to emphasize the stressed syllables.

5.2.2 Giving opinions

When promoting speaking, teachers should consider that pressure to share one's *own* ideas may cause discomfort, particularly since this can be an unfamiliar classroom speech act for Japanese students. Therefore, teachers should also prepare students to remain in an active listener role by teaching and providing practice with strategies such as backchanneling or

paraphrasing another speaker. Backchanneling, or *aidzuchi*, is more frequent in Japanese spoken communication and expresses politeness and attention (Cutrone, 2010), so teaching backchanneling expressions in English (e.g. *Uh-huh, Really?*) can give Japanese students the option to communicate in English with the familiar communication style of their L1. Competence with both backchanneling and paraphrasing can allow students to remain an active listener and reduce the pressure to share personal opinions, while still allowing them to show engagement and providing speaking practice. To provide practice with these skills, teachers can modify activities such as the "telephone game" or dictogloss, requiring students to use backchanneling and paraphrasing as they relay a message.

Although these active listening strategies may be helpful for students, they cannot avoid giving their own opinion indefinitely; there will invariably be times when professors elicit student opinions, and so EAP teachers must also help Japanese students share their own ideas. Because face-saving and silence are important and individuality is downplayed in Japanese culture and education, a student may feel most comfortable giving an opinion in class if it is done so very politely. To help students maintain politeness and a humble tone in sharing their opinions, teachers may wish to provide sentence starters for prefacing/hedging one's ideas (e.g., *This is just a thought, but…*). Teaching phrases used to acknowledge multiple sides of an issue would also seem helpful (e.g., *I think…,but Kotono also has a valid point*) as these would help avoid the appearance of giving too strong a personal opinion.

5.2.3 Keeping the conversation going

In addition to giving opinions, students may struggle with continuing group or pair discussions with their classmates. For example, in interviews with Japanese and Chinese students studying in the U.S. by Sato and Hodge (2015), students mentioned concerns such as failure to expand on conversations with a partner rather than simply answering his or her questions, as well as feeling excluded from group discussions since they could not maintain their American classmates' interest. To help prepare students for situations like these, the author suggests EAP teachers offer an opinion and invite students to playfully challenge it, or give students practice creating and asking follow-up questions to expand on group discussions and keep up the conversational momentum. A helpful activity for this is a game the author calls "keep talking," in which a team of two students is challenged to continue a conversation with each other for as long as possible by asking follow-up questions; points can be assigned to the team for the total number of turns taken in the conversation. Students can also be dealt a hand of cards with language functions printed on them (e.g. *agree, disagree, give an example, ask a question, paraphrase someone*), and challenged to "use up" all of their cards in a group discussion. When students may feel as though they have nothing of interest to say, sentence starters can also help generate

interesting ideas. The author has found the sentence frame *This reminds me of* particularly useful in getting students talking. To further help with generating ideas, critical thinking is an important skill to develop in students from educational backgrounds where it is not encouraged.

5.2.4 Producing worthwhile contributions

To build academic discussion skills, EAP teachers should help students recognize what constitutes an idea worthy of sharing in class, become familiar with the types of spoken contributions students generally make in U.S. or Australian classrooms, and give them practice forming such ideas. A helpful framework for this process can be adapted from one used for making annotations while reading. In this framework, students are taught that observations about a text can be classified into the categories of "basic" or "deep." A "basic" idea is an obvious, logical comment or question that does not involve critical thinking, while a "deep" idea is one that involves analysis and possibly makes a connection with something else the learner has encountered in another class, another text, or his/her personal life. In order to build students' understanding of these levels of thinking, the teacher can elicit and write their ideas on the board, following this with a whole-class task to sort the ideas into "basic" and "deep" categories. To "gamify" this activity, teams can retroactively score one point for each "basic" idea they generated, and three points for each "deep" idea.

Students can also be encouraged to make contributions using a "KWL chart," in which students use "K," "W," and "L" columns to note what they *know*, *want to know*, and *learned* after engaging with material such as a text, video, or lecture. In addition to this technique, teachers should be encouraged to explore and adapt other strategies used for teaching reading among NS students at the secondary or even primary school level, as these often have value in scaffolding the formation of higher-order ideas to share verbally and can thus help encourage spoken participation in academic discussions.

In addition to showing what constitutes higher-order thinking, teachers can provide sentence starters to promote it and serve as models for the types of valuable comments students are encouraged to produce. Example sentence starters for making connections are *This reminds me of…* or *I thought…was interesting because…* Sentence starters can also help students reference material (e.g. *Based on the article…*), as well as paraphrase or "piggyback" off other speakers (e.g. *To add to what Sachiyo said…*) Furthermore, sentence starters for disagreeing can encourage students to challenge ideas and require them to think critically in order to form a rebuttal. Numerous lists and charts containing sentence starters for academic discussions can be found online, including those developed for a teaching method known as "accountable talk" (Michaels, O' Connor, Williams Hall, & Resnick, 2016) to help primary and secondary students contribute thoughtfully in academic discourse. However, as far as the author knowns, these have not been used to

promote participation among college-level ELLs. An activity the author has found effective with a homogeneous Japanese EAP class involves groups of students each getting a deck of flashcards with a sentence starter on each card. Students take turns drawing a card and using the sentence starter to make an observation about a text, video, listening passage, photo, or other stimuli. A short list of possible sentence starters for encouraging higher-level contributions to academic discussions is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Sentence Starters for Academic Discussions

Language function	Sentence starter
Add to a speaker's point ("piggyback")	To build on that… _____ made a good point. Also, … To piggyback off what _____ said… I want to add something here.
Disagree politely	I'm not sure I agree with that, because… I see what you mean, but…
Paraphrase another speaker	So, what you mean is… So, in other words, … So, just to clarify, … It sounds like you're saying…
Make a connection	This reminds me of… This makes me think about… This relates to something I read/heard/learned…

5.2.5 Building background knowledge for discussions
To help students become informed on political or news issues that may arise in U.S. or Australian classrooms, EAP teachers can include short, daily assignments requiring students to read or listen to the news. A good option is having students watch or listen to a short, daily news briefing outside of class (e.g. CNN10) and use a "listening log" to record important new words or phrases, information they find interesting, and questions they may have. The listening log can be used to spark a quick discussion or pair sharing activity at the start of each class.

Outside of academic discussions, Japanese students studying in native-English speaking countries can also have difficulty finding mutual topics of interest to talk about casually with NS peers (Sato & Hodge, 2015). Thus, the author suggests EAP teachers help them identify interesting topics in advance to participate in such conversations. For example, students in an EAP class can identify three aspects of their culture they feel would be interesting for foreigners, and create a presentation to teach these. Having practiced the necessary vocabulary and phrases via this presentation assignment, students would be prepared to later have conversations on the same topic with students of other nationalities.

6 Conclusion

The oral participation skills proposed here are designed to empower Japanese and other learners to function independently in the unpredictable environment of an EMI college classroom, especially in a foreign English-speaking country such as the U.S. or Australia. Nevertheless, when setting learning objectives, EAP instructors should also keep in mind that Japanese students' successful participation may look quite different from that of successful American, British, or Australian students. Japanese students may talk less, for example, although their contributions may be equally thoughtful and carefully planned. University classroom observations of NNS students in the UK have in fact shown that the length of time each student spoke was more indicative of classroom discourse quality, rather than simply the number of times students spoke (Smith & King, 2017). An appropriate learning objective for Japanese students might therefore be that students will be able to contribute one or two thoughtful ideas per discussion while remaining an active listener of their peers, rather than simply aiming to speak as much as possible.

This article aimed to show that the general concept referred to as "participation" in college classrooms can be broken down into multiple elements that may or may not be in line with a student's deep-seated cultural norms or communication style; thus, making Japanese students comfortable speaking in these classes is not always a straightforward matter of reducing their anxiety and giving them more time to think, but instead requires teachers to select and equip students with concrete, bottom-up skills. Teaching these skills becomes more effective when they are identified based on an analysis of Japanese culture as well as the students' own individual reasons for not participating.

While the number of Japanese students studying abroad in the United States decreased by 53 percent between 2001 and 2004, the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT) has initiated several programs in recent years to promote studying abroad of Japanese students (Bradford, 2015). It is hoped that the suggestions presented here are a small contribution to the body of knowledge EAP teachers have at their disposal to prepare Japanese university students for studying abroad.

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