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Newspaper Subjectivity from Multimodal Perspectives

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Introduction

As an increasing number of newspaper reports these days carry multi-modal features with a great many visuals, such as photographs, graphs, charts, more conveyed messages in the medium have to be visually processed. In this trend, the role of readers as information receivers has shifted from that of readers to readers / viewers, without their notice because of the generality of the text. This phenomenon of multi-modality in news reports is noticeable, but research that focuses on the nature of the multi-modal medium and how it affects readers / viewers has just begun (Vestergaard & Schroder, 1985, p.32).

In this project I argue for the need to examine how the secondary mode (visuals) in newspaper reports functions and affects the overall nature of the medium, and what interpersonal relationship such text is trying to establish with readers. In this information age, a considerable amount of information people are exposed to has multi-modal structures, and as new technologies appear on the marketplace and quickly blend into people's daily lives, literacy requirements change (Luke, 2000). Acquiring necessary "multi-modal literacy" (Unsworth, 2001) to take critical viewpoints toward the information not only in the linguistic mode but also in other modes is then very important. In the case of multi-modal newspaper articles, different from verbal reports, the visuals in the medium are basically the products of text producers' or news company's choices, and, with the salience, they are able to play a dominant role in deciding the medium's nature.

Therefore, the aim of this project is to show the overall nature of newspaper reports as multimodal texts influenced by visual "orientation" and to re-examine the stereotype that a newspaper is an "objective" medium. My discussion is based on the

visual analysis of newspaper photographs and social conventions in the medium. Then, in addition to this point, I also discuss the latent influence such multi-modal texts exercises on readers / viewers. In this project, I take a *Systematic Functional* approach, established by Halliday, to the argument about the objectivity or subjectivity of newspaper reports. Before the methodology section of my research, I will briefly introduce theoretical backgrounds to clarify my analytical points.

Systemic Functional Grammar

Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) was advocated by Halliday. He takes a sociolinguistic view toward language and considers language as one of social sign systems (modes) created by interaction among people, with which they exchange and transmit shared value and knowledge both synchronically and diachronically (Halliday). He argues that culture is a composite of such various sign systems and language should be analyzed from this functional semiotic perspective.

SFG's functional approach to various social modes including language is characterized as three perspectives known as "meta-functions": *Ideational, Interpersonal,* and *Textual*. The Ideational meta-function represents the contents of human experience provided by mode-specific lexico-grammar, and in the linguistic mode, propositional messages, such as '*who* did *what* to *whom,'* as well as circumstantial information, are all expressed in this meta-function. The Interpersonal meta-function emphasizes the interactive aspects of communication realized by social modes. In this meta-function, people use modes as various functioning devices, with which they *inform*, *question*, *order*, *offer*, *or express* their ideas. Halliday and Matthiessen (2004) call the Ideational meta-function "language as reflection," and the Interpersonal meta-function "language as action." The textual meta-function, in addition to modal channel selection (written or spoken), deals with the information structures in propositional messages and controls the syntagmatic choices in them. In SFG, people select modes containing these three meta-functions, and with them, they send messages and get things done in an appropriate way.

When people read a newspaper, they receive information basically from two modes, linguistic and visual. If a newspaper report is an objective medium, the less manifestation of the interpersonal meta-function and more focus on ideational meta-

function should be one of the characteristics shared and expressed in the two modes. In SFG, it is natural to consider that all the propositions realized in texts basically contain both ideational and interpersonal factors. Accordingly, what determines the overall nature of texts is not the 'absolute' but the 'relative' focus on either mode. I define the "subjectivity" of newspaper reports in this project as the 'relatively' explicit manifestation of interpersonal meta-function, where the text producers try to form interactive relationship with readers / viewers or express their personal comment or judgment.

Newspaper Objectivity

Generally speaking, newspaper reports are considered to be objective, and people believe this nature of the medium is one of the factors that have made them establish a certain genre in their society. In such a stereotype, the "objectivity" in newspaper implies that the producers of texts send information to the readers only in the light of truth or as its primary source. Accordingly, in newspaper reports, the explicit display of the producers' subjective perspectives or their active postures to form an interactive relationship with readers is avoided. In other words, newspaper reports bear responsibility as an information mediator that avoids being conspicuous, and the selected modes in the texts are expected to realize such an objective nature.

In 2005, *The Japan Times* (2005, p.17) expressed its ideas about the objectivity of newspaper reports by stating, "The primary purpose of a newspaper is to send facts as they are. Therefore, it is improper to force reporters' personal feelings and opinions, or to help the government or other authorities to advertise their ideologies."

The relative objectivity of news reports suggested by the statement of this news company can be exemplified in the analysis on the mono-modal (linguistic) level.

First, Halliday and Matthiessen introduced what is called *Mood System* realized in the linguistic mode (p. 135). Under the system, they mention three basic sentence structures (*declarative*, *interrogative, and imperative*) as *Mood Types* that determine the basic speech functions of a sentence. For example, 'interrogatives' and 'imperatives' reflect text producers' desire to interact with audiences by questioning or ordering, establishing communication on a 'two-way' basis. In contrast, the choice of 'declaratives' defines the purpose of the communication as just sending information. In newspaper reports,

therefore, the unmarked Mood Type is not interrogatives or imperatives, and the medium shows the avoidance to establish interpersonal relationship with readers by employing declarative structures.

Second, the objectivity of news reports is verified by the avoidance of such linguistic features as auxiliary verbs, adverbs, or adjectives that reflect the reporters' involvement toward the value of the reported events. Third, the avoidance of using a second person pronoun "you" referring to the readers as well as a first person pronoun "I," "we" referring to the reporters themselves is a common practice. Fourth, choosing "neutral" reporting verbs, such as "say" or "ask," in the case of sending information from primary sources is also an important issue in the medium.

All these linguistic features in newspaper reports show that the focus in the text is on sending information (ideational meta-function), not on forming interpersonal relationship with readers (interpersonal meta-function). Therefore, as long as the analysis of the medium's objectivity / subjectivity is done only on the mono-modal (linguistic) level, there is, more or less, rationality in the argument that news reports are an 'objective' medium.

Visual Grammar

In the Systemic Functional approach, the people who share same cultural backgrounds use various social modes, expecting that they, whether linguistic or visual, fundamentally have similar, not completely the same, meaning-making systems. Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) applied the theory of SFG to visual analysis and exemplified the systematic configurations of visual lexes. In this project, I conducted a visual analysis of newspaper photographs, based on their ideas, and focused on the degree to which the interpersonal meta-function is realized.

Method

Analyzed Data

The first analyzed datum (see Appendix 1) is a newspaper article from the *International Herald Tribune* that appeared in *The Asahi Shimbun* on March 11, 2005 (p.3). This article is about the Chinese government's action to protect farmers' land rights and to spend more money on irrigation.

The second datum (see Appendix 2) is a newspaper photograph that was attached to an article that appeared in *The Japan Times* on February 13, 2005 (p.3). This article reports the Pakistani government's relief operation for the people who became the victims of torrential rains in the southwest of Pakistan.

Procedures

The analysis in this project consists of three parts. The first part is a visual analysis, where a news report photograph (see Appendix 1) is analyzed in terms of "Interactive Visual Meanings" (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996) in order to clarify what 'speech role' the photograph carries and what 'attitudes' the text producer expresses in it. The points to be analyzed here are fourfold: *Speech Function*, *Social Distance*, *Involvement,* and *Power Relation* (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996).

The second part is a cohesion analysis between the two modes (verbal and visual). In this part, I compare the visual and the linguistic modes, which share the same space and make the multi-modal text cohesive. First, I analyze the cohesion between the two modes in terms of interpersonal meta-function (interpersonal attitudes). Next, I analyze the cohesion from the standpoint of ideational meta-function (lexical cohesion), where I begin with a comparison between the visual and the verbal part, and then shift the comparison to the visual with its attached caption. The aim of this part is, by taking different perspectives, to cross-validate the results of the first part and re-confirm the subjectivity of the multi-modal news report's photograph.

In the third part, I examine another news report photograph (see Appendix 2) in terms of visual 'realism.' In this part, I discuss whether the newspaper photograph is actually representing the 'real' world, namely, human's exact visual perceptions.

Visual Analysis

Interactive Visual Meanings

Speech Function

Just as the Mood System in the linguistic mode determines the basic speech functions by categorizing sentences into declaratives, interrogatives, or imperatives, visual speech functions are characterized by the presence or absence of 'eye gazing' in the represented participants in visuals. According to Kress and van Leeuwen (1996), the speech

functions, allowed in Visual Grammar, are either ”demand” or “offer.” If a vector by eye-gazing appears in a visual, it implies that the represented participants are addressing the viewers with a visual “YOU,” ‘demanding’ viewers’ attention.

On the other hand, if there is no eye-gaze in a visual, the realized speech function is interpreted as an ‘offer.’ In this case, the represented participants have no intention to be actively involved with the viewers, and the roles of the represented participants are confined to “items of information” or “specimens in a display case” (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996, p.124).

Judging from this categorization, the speech function realized in the photograph (see Appendix 1) is ‘demand.’ In this photograph, the most salient represented participant (a little child) addresses the viewers and ‘demands’ responses from them with her eye-gaze. The child’s eyes imply that the demand should be considered seriously.

Social Distance

Social distance is a set of boundaries that determines the appropriate physical and psychological space between communicative participants. The second perspective of the analysis is about the social distance that the text producer wants to create between the represented participants in a visual and the viewers. According to Visual Grammar, imaginary social distance by visuals is determined by the depicted size of the represented participants in picture frames, categorized as, for example, a *close-up, medium shot, and long shot*, and so on (Kress & van Leeuwen). Then, each category implies the degree of interpersonal involvement.

In the photograph (see Appendix 1), the most salient represented participant (a child) is seen from the head to the waist. Considering the depicted size, the imaginary social distance is from a *close* to *medium* shot, where the implied social relationship is *intimate*, *friendly,* and *personal*. With this close social distance, the photograph creates an atmosphere in which the viewers feel a sense of intimacy with the child. Furthermore, this feeling is enhanced by the facial expression that viewers can recognize in such a close range.

Involvement

The degree of viewers’ involvement into a certain topic in a visual is affected by the

"horizontal" angles made by the represented participants in visuals. In visual grammar, the frontal angles of the represented participants require viewers' direct involvement, while the oblique angles of them cause the opposite effect, viewers' 'detachment.' In the photograph (see Appendix 1), even though the frontal plane of the viewers is not completely parallel to that of the child, the frontal angle by the child's face creates an effect that attracts viewers into the depicted event.

Power Relation

"Vertical" angles created by represented participants can symbolize 'power relationship' between them and viewers. If the represented participants in a visual are depicted from a high angle, it implies that they have more power, higher status, than viewers, while they are depicted from a low angle, the opposite effect occurs. Then, if they are at the eye level of viewers, this means that there is no power difference between the two parties. According to this definition, because the represented participant (the child) is seen at the eye level of viewers, the power relation realized in the photograph (see Appendix 1) is 'equal.' However, considering that as the visual participant is a small child, the photographer needed to lower his or her body to take this picture, this vertical angle in the picture creates stronger effects than normal equal angles.

Multimodal Cohesion

There are several types of multimodal texts, and in each text, the co-occurring modes have a reason to share the same space. The "synergistic" nature of such modes that creates various semantic relationships in a text is known as *Intersemiotic Complementarity* (Royce, 1999). In Intersemiotic Complementarity, the co-evolving relationship among different modes in the same text is made explicit by considering the orientations of SFG's meta-functions.

Interpersonal Level

From the visual analysis above, the speech function in the photograph (see Appendix 1) is 'demand,' which can be understood as an interrogative sentence under Mood System in the linguistic mode. However, as is often the case with news report articles, the verbal part of this text (see Appendix 1) consists only of 'declaratives.' From this fact, it is clear

that, while the visual emphasizes interaction with viewers (interpersonal meta-function), the focus of the verbal part is on sending information (ideational meta-function) without forming an active interaction with readers.

The comparison between the two modes in terms of 'level of involvement' also ends up with poor matching. Theoretically speaking, the realization of active involvement by the visual can be substituted in the linguistic mode by sentences that begin with the second person pronoun "you." However, the sentences in the verbal part (see Appendix 1) never use pronouns that make interactive participants visible.

Ideational Level

If I define that multi-modal lexical cohesion (Halliday & Hasan, 1985) represents the compatibility of the two modes in their functional orientations, this photograph shows contradictions. In the photograph (see Appendix 1), the primary represented participant is a small child, but, strangely, this participant in the visual is not mentioned in the verbal counterpart at all. In this case, the lexical *collocations*, such as 'education,' 'school fees,' 'education system,' 'rural students,' or '14 million students,' represent the existence of the cohesive ties between the visual and the verbal parts, but the strength of the cohesion is weak, compared with those realized by lexical direct '*repetitions*.'

Next, Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) apply "Identifying Relational Process" to explain the relationship between a newspaper photograph and its caption. According to their idea, the caption under a news report photograph has an identifying purpose that facilitates and guides the visual interpretation.

The caption attached to the photograph (see Appendix 1) consists of two parts as written below:

1. A little girl at a farmers' market in Beijing.
2. China plans to abolish agricultural taxes.

Even though the first one is not a complete sentence, it represents the visual proposition faithfully because the most salient represented participant in the photograph is realized as the "Theme" in it. However, the connection between the second sentence and this visual is not clear. Even though one word in the sentence, 'agricultural,' is related to the background in the visual, the relationship between them is not so strong. The cohesion between the two captions also gives an impression that they belong to completely

different stories even though they are lexically tied with "repetition" and "collocation," such as 'Beijing' and 'China,' and 'farmers' and 'agricultural.'

Visual Realism

When people communicate, they depend on the "reliability" or "truth" of messages. However, in SFG, these concepts are not considered to have an absolute value but, rather, vary according to the "Coding Orientation" (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996, p.168). Coding Orientation is a kind of precondition in which people judge something as *real* or *unreal*, or, *true* or *false*, depending on the specific purpose of the mode. Normally, people communicate and express their opinions or judgments under decided coding orientations, placing them somewhere in the continuum between *positive* and *negative*, or, *good* and *bad*. These degrees are collectively known as "Modality," and "any modality (unless it is reported as coming from someone else) is a sign that somehow the speaker is expressing a personal view rather than objective facts" (Thompson, 1996, p.73). In the visual communication, what determines the modality is color, context, detail, depth, and light (Unsworth, 2001, p.99)

Considering the coding orientation that news report photographs should carry, if the visuals are defined as *objective*, *photo-naturalistic* coding orientation should be selected as its "unmarked" realization. In this orientation, the image created by 35mm color photography has the highest (truest) modality because it gives viewers an image closest to what they actually see and experience.

However, examining the photograph (see Appendix 2) from this perspective, the visual representation is not 'naturalistic' even though the choice of monochrome photography in this case is due to the company's decision and it does not lead to modality deterioration. The picture shows overall delineation of detailed features, and this representation creates an impression that the represented participants in this picture are detached from the 'real world'. Furthermore, the "topical theme" (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004) in the caption is de-focused and depicted as a small and distant object in this photograph. As a result, added with the effect of illumination, this visual seems to be artistic rather than informational.

From the visual analysis of a photograph (see Appendix 1) in terms of Interactive Visual Meanings, the photograph functions to draw viewers' attention. In the

visual, the most salient represented participant is imaginarily talking to viewers with eye-gazing, which is enhanced by the visually represented 'close' social distance as well as the visual effects from both the horizontal and vertical angles.

Next, from the cohesive analyses between a visual (see Appendix 1) and its verbal counterpart, differences in their functional orientations appeared. In this multimodal text, while the visual element focuses on the interpersonal relationship with viewers in the realization of speech function and the level of involvement, the verbal element does not show such an explicit attitude of involvement.

This functional discrepancy also appeared in the lexical cohesion in the text. The most salient represented participant in the picture is not treated as the primary participant in the verbal part. Also, the level of the lexical cohesion between the photograph and its caption is weak.

In the end, the subjective nature in another news report photograph (see Appendix 2) was made explicit in the analysis of its modality manifestation. This analysis exemplified that the visual does not realize the objective truth by detaching itself from 'naturalistic' coding orientation. With the indistinct outlines, the semantically important participants in the news lose their status in the visual.

Social Implications of News Photographs

The issue about where and how to arrange articles in a certain page is very important for newspaper companies, and in the case of a multimodal news report, competition for space between the visual part and verbal part always happens. I argue therefore that visual selection in a newspaper is a direct reflection of the perspectives of the text producer or the newspaper company. The focus of visual text analyses normally has been on the *syntagmatic* choices "within" the texts. However, this project considers the *paradigmatic* choices by text producers "in their text-making process" (photographic choices).

Newspaper companies are, basically, not allowed to have subjective choices in their linguistic realization, but they do have freedom in selecting photographs attached to verbal reports. Accordingly, in the choice of the photographs, semantically important visual elements, such as represented participants, process, and circumstances, are all under text producers' discretion. In other words, "while the camera does not lie, or not

much, at any rate, those who use it and its images can and do" (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996, p.159). From these perspectives, I argue several points about the rationality in selecting newspaper photographs that emphasize different functional orientations from the verbal counterparts.

First, in their daily lives, people carry plural social roles. When they interact with others, one of the social roles that determine their "subject positions" (Fairclough, 1989) is unconsciously selected. For example, a middle-aged woman carries the subject position as a mother in front of her child, but she shifts her position to a wife in front of her husband. In the same way, the child in this photograph functions as a switching device accompanied by the eye-gaze and innocent facial expression. With these attributes, the viewers of this 'interactional' type photograph are unconsciously controlled and select their subject positions as "adult listeners." Then, as adults, they feel obligated to take care of the child and are forced to take the next step, buying the newspaper to know more about the situation around the child.

Second, by placing in visuals 'small,' 'weak,' or 'fragile' represented participants, such as a child, woman, or elderly people, text producers can exaggerate the seriousness or the gravity of reported events. People judge the size of an object in the comparison with the object next to it (Dondis, 1973, p.56)

This effect is commonly observed in newspaper visuals when they report mass demonstrations, natural disasters, or authoritarianism. With this photograph (see Appendix 1), the action of the Chinese authority against the small child appears 'relatively' big, strong, and even violent.

Social modes, linguistic or visual, can be effective and valid measures of communication only when the participants understand the realized meaning-making systems. Therefore, the functional contradictions or lesser degrees of cohesion between the modes that I found in this project are valid and meaningful only to those who can interpret the 'incoherent' as 'coherent.' In that sense, the readers / viewers of the photograph analyzed in the first part (see Appendix 1) interpret the semantic relationship between the visual and its caption as follows: "China plans to abolish agricultural taxes. Who is most affected by such a "great" wave? Maybe, the weak people like this child. The child's future is insecure. Can China really create a bright future for her?"

Semantic Organization and the Reading Path

Various authentic print-based texts have unique textual patterns, in which "individual segments of texts combined to form the logical structure of the whole and to form certain characteristic patterns" (McCarthy, 1991, p.155). Generally speaking, the logical and semantic relationships among segments in a newspaper report can be labeled as "elaboration," where the following information expands the previous information by restating, specifying in greater detail, or exemplifying (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, p.376).

This unique structure has developed because "time efficiency" is the dominant factor in determining news reports' text organization. In other words, under normal circumstances, newspaper readers have no intention to read until the end in each article (Grabe & Stoller, 2002, p.11). They usually stop reading at the point where they "feel" they have received enough information, and they move on to another article. To such readers, newspapers have to adjust the level of elaboration and present the news in multi-layer structures. Accordingly, those readers who do not have enough time for the reading can end up receiving only superficial information in the article, though this type of reading is widely accepted.

The reading path that readers form when they view a multimodal newspaper also needs discussion. The reason for the wide use of visuals in news reports and commercial advertisement is that they are salient. Their salience is determined by several factors, such as relative size, centrality, human figures, and strong colors (Unsworth, 2001, p.111). Visual information has an advantage in drawing viewers' attention by appealing to their emotions and feelings directly as a psychophysical force (Dondis, 1973, p.22).

According to Kress and van Leeuwen (1996, p.219), 'salience' creates reading paths in a text. According to the degree of salience, the readers / viewers move their eyes basically from the most salient elements to the less salient ones. Therefore, in addition to the normal eye-movement, from top to bottom, newspaper readers / viewers move their eyes, according to the effect of visual salience, from the most salient parts in news reports (headlines or photographs) to less salient parts (verbal elements) when they read / view newspapers. This means that in the process, the readers / viewers have more chances to be exposed to visuals than verbal parts when they encounter multi-modal

newspaper articles.

From the argument in this part, I argue that the readers / viewers of multimodal newspaper articles generally take the same route in their eye-movement, from the visual to the verbal, and if they stop reading the verbal part in the middle, the relative impression of the visual becomes stronger. Therefore, in the analysis of this type of multimodal texts in terms of functional orientations, only comparison between visual and verbal modes is not enough. Social conventions should also be considered as another factor.

Newspaper Subjectivity

In a multi-modal newspaper, text producers are able to give the visual and the verbal modes different functional focuses. While the focus of the verbal mode is on sending information objectively (ideational meta-function) and keeps the stance as an objective medium, the visuals are able to function to form an active interpersonal relationship with the unknown viewers, enforcing text producers' subjective judgment in their realization. Therefore, in spite of the fact that the visual subjectivity in news reports varies, depending on news companies' visual selection, or the degree of elaboration to which readers are exposed, I argue that multimodal newspaper reports diminish their social position as an objective mediator with the strong perceptual influence of attached visuals. Accordingly, if people maintain a stereotype that newspaper reports are an objective medium even in a multimodal composition, it is inaccurate and they can misjudge the truth. Even if photographs reflect the 'real' world, the people who make use of them can manipulate the visual messages.

According to SFG, all the propositions realized by modes have a unique balance of focus among ideational, interpersonal, and textual meta-functions, determining the overall nature of texts. In that sense, even verbal elements in news reports can involve a certain degree of interpersonal factors, but in this project, I want to exemplify the explicit manifestation of interpersonal meta-function in the visual mode that affects the texts' nature. It would be difficult to make definite conclusions about the degree of the objectivity or the subjectivity of newspaper reports, but if it is possible to observe the relatively high degrees of subjectivity in the multi-modal texts, then I claim that the text is subjective and my discussion is adequate.

Furthermore, about the functional contradictions revealed in this project between the two modes in news reports, I argue that this is one of the unique characteristics in multi-modal newspapers. Newspapers are not just a medium that reports news as a social intermediate, but also they exist as one of commercial products. Along with the function to send information objectively, the function to attract consumers, so as to have them actually buy the 'product' in the end, is necessary. With more people exposed to messages conveyed from various sources of media, often keeping pace with the progress of high technology, it is important even for a newspaper to 'evolve' to appeal to readers. For this purpose, it is not surprising that newspapers make use of visuals and the subjectivity in them as a tool to survive in competition with other newspapers and even with other news media.

Conclusion

Newspapers enjoy wide prevalence in a modern society. Everyday, people receive news through this medium, believing the 'truthfulness' of the reported events. However, as was revealed in this project, a newspaper does not always emphasize the objectivity of reported events. With multimodality, it can and does manipulate reported news for interactional purposes.

Normally, people are not conscious of the textual conventions of a newspaper, such as registers, genres, or mode functions. When they become accustomed to a certain type of text over a long time, they accept the textual conventions as they are and forget to take objective viewpoints toward what they see. However, this longitudinal process makes people unconscious not only of the textual configuration but also of the medium's "hidden power to function ideologically" (Fairclough, 1989, p.27). Behind the one-way communication, newspapers are forcing a text producer's ideologies on readers / viewers in an unconscious process.

Even though I cannot deny the indispensable roles of newspapers and the benefits of their multi-modal aspects, the ability to understand visually processed messages in addition to linguistically processed ones is necessary. If people are ignorant of how to evaluate truth from reported events, they have a chance to misinterpret facts and create feelings or judgment based on biased understanding. Visual messages appear vaguer than linguistic information in their functions, but they, nonetheless, influence

information receivers as well as offer important information. Furthermore, in addition to the subjectivity realized in the visual information in a newspaper report, other elements in the medium, such as headlines or the layout of reported events, are also subjective to text producers' choices.

In the end, I focused on the subjectivity of newspaper reports in this project, but there are also other types of multimodal mass media in society, which consist of a combination of different modes. For example, the television uses three modes: linguistic, visual, and sound (linguistic and musical). The radio uses two kinds of sound mode (linguistic and musical). In addition to the fact that each mode has its own ways to realize interpersonal meta-functions separately, when the involved modes interact with one another, they can form a unique synergistic relationship with information receivers, appealing to people's various perceptual organs.

In this 'information age,' people are surrounded by various social modes that send a variety of messages. To make use of these messages wisely, they need to develop "critical multimodal literacies that are necessary for taking an active interpretive role in the societies" (Unsworth, 2001, p.71).

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Appendix 1

Michael Reynolds/European Pressphoto Agency

A little girl at a farmers' market in Beijing. China plans to abolish agricultural taxes.

China vows to protect farmers' land rights

From news reports

BEIJING: The agriculture minister on Thursday promised to protect farmers' land rights and spend more on irrigation as China's Communist leaders seek to ease chronic rural poverty, seen as posing their biggest risk of anti-government unrest.

China's grain harvest last year rose by a record 9 percent, but farmers suffer from poor infrastructure and other problems, said Agriculture Minister Du Qinglin.

"There is still a long way for us to go, and an arduous task for us to shoulder," Du said at a news conference held during the annual meeting of China's legislature.

Chinese leaders regard chronic poverty in the vast countryside, home to some 800 million people, as their most pressing problem and worry that rising anger over the problem could lead to political instability.

Complaints that local officials seize farmland for real estate development and other uses with little compensation to farmers are a key source of discontent. Violent protests over such complaints have erupted in areas throughout China.

Chinese farmers cannot own land and instead use it under contracts that last up to 30 years. Despite promises to improve land rights, the government has not said whether it will allow ownership, which would let farmers use the land as collateral for bank loans.

Millions of farmers have no contracts or any other formal claim to land that they might have tended for decades.

The ministry introduced pilot projects last year aimed at arbitrating disputes over land contracts, Du said.

Du promised stricter protections for land and said disputes would be dealt with in a "very appropriate way," but didn't give any details.

Average annual incomes for farmers rose 12 percent last year, but still total just 2,936 yuan, or $355, per person, according to Du. By contrast, the government says annual incomes in China's booming cities average more than $1,000 per person.

"Overall productivity has improved significantly," Du said. But, he warned, "we should not be blinded by achievements made."

The central government will allocate $660 million to 800 major grain-producing counties, which can use the money for education, health care, or science and technology, said Zhu Zhigang, a deputy finance minister who was at the news conference with Du.

Premier Wen Jiabao promised in a nationally broadcast speech at the opening of the legislature on Saturday to eliminate farm taxes by 2006 — a promise repeated Thursday by the Finance Ministry.

China said this week that it would start cutting school fees in rural areas this year in response to growing domestic criticism that the country's education system is corrupt and discriminates against poor, rural students.

The new policy will begin with the removal of fees for 14 million students in the country's poorest counties and will continue until 2007. *(AP, NYT)*

Appendix 2

HINGOLE, Pakistan — Rescuers on Friday survey a bridge that was swept away by floods in southern Pakistan. REUTERS PHOTO

Pakistan floods, avalanches kill over 260

Authorities rush in troops to aid thousands after worst rains in 16 years

Citation

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Language Attrition of Japanese Returnee Students

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Introduction

While development of the second language skills is easy to imagine, it is difficult to imagine a situation that instruction in the second language has no influence. The term fossilization, first discussed by Selinker (1972) means to become permanently established in the interlanguage of a second language learner in a form that is deviant from the target-language norm and it continues to appear in performance regardless of further exposure to the target language. Thus, the term fossilization relates to second language attrition in that no matter how hard the second language learner tries to develop the second language, no improvement will be made. Further language ability might deteriorate without use, which would especially be true for those who have lived in an L2 environment for a while and returned to their L1 environment.

The question posed for this paper is regarding Japanese returnee students, since according to Hansen, the documentation on Japanese returnees' loss of ESL is still fragmentary (Hansen & Kurashige, 1999). This paper analyzes six primary articles that examine current attrition research of Japanese returnees in order to formulate pedagogical implications. The first two primary articles, which are more recent, state important findings in second language attrition; after returning to the L1 environment, L2 language skills continue to develop through a combination of classroom instruction and opportunities to use the L2 outside of the classroom. Three articles that follow indicate that attrition takes place at a slower pace for those who have studied the second language and acquired a threshold level. Finally, the sixth article, which examines a case of two siblings with differing ages, specifically questions if age is actually a significant variable in terms of L2 attrition. This study shows that the L2 learning environment could be a significant factor which influences attrition. The examination of all studies

demonstrate the importance of continuing second language education for returnees and provide ideas as to what returnees, parents and teachers can do for the returnees to retain and even develop their English as a second language.

Discussion of L2 Attrition Research of Japanese Returnees

Study I: Taura and Taura (2000)

First, Taura and Taura (2000) examined the linguistic attributes of L2 attrition of Japanese returnee children from English speaking countries. The purpose of this cross-sectional study was to help develop practical measures for returnee children to maintain their L2. In order to understand the overall language proficiency such as oral story-telling, writing, reading, listening comprehension and English/Japanese vocabulary, four experiments were conducted.

Six specific psycholinguistic aspects were investigated. This encompasses linguistic features including the number of words used, T-units, MLU (mean length of utterances in words), TTR (type token ratio), the duration of intra-sentential pauses, and features of writing samples taken by TOWL (Test of Written Language). The language data obtained from the experiments and the subjects' language background data were analyzed and discussed to answer three research questions. First, does attrition take place even when returnee children take 4-5 one-hour lessons a week? Second, does attaining high proficiency before attrition sets in lead to slower and less attrition? Finally, does the longer period of time after leaving an English speaking country lead to more observation of attrition?

The researchers claim that the returnees' English on return to Japan does not seem to suffer from attrition to the extent that previous studies show or the returnees themselves claim. The subjects, consisting of 6 experimental groups of Japanese returnee students with the mean age of 14.9 years old, were tested were including on a twofold basis. First, they must have had experiences of education in English speaking countries for more than three years at elementary or middle school level and second, they must have come straight to high school.

As for the explanation of the first component that the participants must have been educated in English-speaking countries for more than 3 years, Taura justified this with previous research (Harley et al, 1990; Minoura, 1991; Nakajima, 1998; Ono, 1994).

Research has shown that at least three years is necessary before Japanese students academically attain their grade norm skills in English after they move to North America, forming the basis of how this research is set up. Second, the subjects had to have come directly to the high school in Osaka where the research took place upon returning to Japan.

According to the first experiment, which used the Test of Written Language by Hammill and Larsen, the conventional component aspect which consists of punctuation, capitalization, and spelling, showed that greater the elapsed time since returning to Japan meant more attrition. However, for the context language aspect which is comprised of syntactic, morphological, and semantic elements, ones that have been back in Japan for the longest time frame scored better than the group that had been back the shortest time. Taura and Taura have noted that at least the context language aspect does not suffer from attrition, but further longitudinal and qualitative studies are clearly needed.

Moreover, experiment 2, where oral speaking skills were tested, showed that returnees' speaking fluency in English seemed to become more sophisticated as they stayed longer in the L1 speaking communities with continuing English education, which contradicts previous findings. This is an understandable phenomenon that comes with cognitive development as a result of maturation, as when students are in high school, they are expected to express themselves in more sophisticated ways and learn ways to express themselves with more complexity through studying their native language, which is Japanese. Since students become more sophisticated in the use of Japanese, when studying English using Japanese, they are also likely to become sophisticated in their use of English. In addition to this, the question that inevitably arises is the following: why should this occur where L2 is minimally supported? For this experiment, the students that receive a one-hour English lesson per day are in a unique educational environment, where they share the same school site with Osaka International School which provides ample opportunities for the returnees to use English outside their classrooms if they choose. Having this unique opportunity might be the reason for this phenomenon. The researchers have noted that more subjects need to be studied in order to make conclusive comments, since only 10 returnees were tested. Additionally, an argument could be made that the time of interaction with native speakers outside of the classroom should be recorded as part of the experiment because the amount of interaction outside of the

classroom might have had significant influences in terms of maintenance of the students' L2.

In experiment three, receptive skills that consist of reading and listening comprehension and productive writing skills were examined using the English Communicative Test. For all six groups, made up of 80 returnee subjects and divided by how long they have been back in Japan, no attrition of receptive and productive skills over time was indicated.

Finally, for experiment four, the English Vocabulary Test developed and scored by the Japan National Centre for University English Examinations, whose primary purpose is to test English vocabulary acquisition levels of Japanese returnee students as well as Japanese students currently living in English-speaking countries in comparison with English native speakers at the same grade level, was used. The subjects were 78 returnee students divided according to the amount of time elapsed since they left English speaking countries. It showed that there was gradual improvement of vocabulary as they stayed longer in Japan and studied at this school in Osaka where they are provided an hour long English lesson each day.

Study II: Taura (2001)

Another study was conducted by Hideyuki Taura (2001), where L2 attrition and retention of 26 Japanese returnee high school students were examined. The subjects were selected in the same way as his previous study. The research focused on two questions: whether attrition takes place even when the returnee children stay in touch with English in five one-hour long lessons a week and whether a longer period of time after leaving an English speaking country leads to more attrition.

The main finding of this research was that oral story telling skills improve the most in the fourth year back. Therefore, the subjects who have acquired the threshold level of English do not seem to suffer from attrition for at least several years after returning to Japan. This has been confirmed in Bahrick's (1984) research as well. He concludes: "[T]he total amount of content to be forgotten during the five years following training is relatively constant for individuals at different levels of training, but this amount becomes progressively smaller proportion of total knowledge with higher levels of training" (116).

In the fifth year back, there seems to be no decline in vocabulary abundance and complexity rate from the previous year, but the fluency rate and the total number of words significantly dropped. In the sixth year, there seemed to be no change observed in TTR but the complexity rate dropped. As for the future scope of the experiment, Taura believes that the number of subjects, which was only 26, should be increased.

The two studies indicate that while 5 one hour English lessons a week may not be enough to combat attrition given the difference in exposure from an L2 environment, taking lessons at this frequency seems to be helpful. The two studies make it obvious that some use in English is better than nothing. In order to prevent attrition of English, one needs to obviously use it. The more frequent the use, the more likelihood there is of avoiding attrition and even improving language skills. This supports Neisser's (1984) postulation: "some response strengths reach a critical threshold during learning: beyond that threshold they become immune to interference of decay" (33). It is interesting to note that for mature second language speakers, there seems to be an initial period when little attrition is observed despite language disuse. The improvement of English in Japanese high school returnees may have been due to the residual learning factor.

In another cross-sectional study of L2 loss in English which examined Japanese returnee children which contrasts mature second language speakers, Yoshida & Arai (1990) have concluded that for tasks that included repeating increasingly complex sentences, researchers found that the younger groups made significantly more errors than the older groups. However, this might simply be due to age, which means that younger learners have limited cognitive capacity, prohibiting younger learners from repeating complex sentences accurately.

Retention and improvement of English abilities might come from biological maturity and cognitive abilities as well as conceptual understandings that develop through maturation. Various age groups with various circumstances need different programs based on their levels of English and cognitive abilities for retention of English. Four more different case studies that examine younger age groups will be discussed hereafter.

Study III: Yoshitomi (1999)

Another study by Yoshitomi (1999) examined speech data of four female Japanese

returnee children under age twelve to avoid the inclusion of an additional variable that is introduced by the start of formal English education in Japanese junior high schools. The purpose was to first, verify whether some of the main findings in the field can be supported by the data obtained in the case study on Japanese returnees; and second, it was to discuss the pedagogical implications the results may have on improving language maintenance programs in Japan.

All subjects came from middle to upper-middle class families. The parents and children were aware that they would return to Japan after a stay of two to five years in America. Thus, they went to local American schools on weekdays and attended supplementary Japanese schools on Saturdays. After returning to Japan, they started to go to English maintenance schools on Saturdays. The subjects stayed in the US from three to four years. According to Nomoto (1973; cited in Minoura, 1981), English becomes the dominant language for most children after two to four years of stay. The children's incubation periods were anywhere between zero and more than 12 months.

Five tasks were adopted: free interaction, story description, planned speech, listening comprehension, and interview and questionnaire. Free conversation between the subject and a native-English-speaker came from partially planned topics that were believed to be relevant to the child, and the child was free to expand or to move to other topics of her interest. In story description, each subject was asked to describe stories by looking at picture books. The child looked through the whole book once, then went back to the first page of the book and described the story from the beginning at her own pace. For planned speech, the subject was asked to think about a topic discussed during free interaction and expand on that topic and plan a short speech about it.

A controlled listening comprehension test was given, using Comprehensive Language Evaluation (CYCLE) developed by Curtiss & Yamada to measure children's formal linguistic knowledge. The children's task was to select a picture out of a set that corresponds to the sentence they hear. Finally, interviews were conducted between the researcher and the child, and then between the researcher and the parents in order to obtain information on socioeconomic, educational, sociopsychological, and personality factors of children and parents as second-party observers. Each session was 150-180 minutes long and was videotaped.

There were three main findings in the study. First, the returnees exhibited little

language attrition over the data collection sessions. Although high retention in phonological skills was predicted, the retention observed in the returnees' ability to use other language sub-skills in production, including verb morphology, articles, and lexicon was better than expected.

Second, indications of language attrition were more evident in the regression of the returnees' ability to combine the language sub skills. They made more errors in their use of complex structures and produced less error-free clauses over the sessions. More subtle indications of loss include a decrease in fluency and change in their use of communication strategies.

Lastly, attrition seemed to have taken place while the returnees had little or no opportunities to interact with a native speaker on an individual basis. Yoshitomi (1999) asserts that intuitively appealing ideas such as the regression hypothesis, which states that language components might be lost in the reverse order which they were acquired, should be reinterpreted, since regression takes place from weakening and eventually disappearing neuronal connections of overlapping linguistic knowledge. This hypothesis that questions the regression hypothesis, called inverse relation hypothesis states that what is retained the most through use and reinforcement is what is learned the best (Hamideh & Hamideh, 2006). Pedagogically, opportunities to interact with native speakers should lead to combating attrition because children will have to use English in order to communicate, whereas there is no need to communicate in English with speakers of Japanese.

Study IV: Tomiyama (1999)

Tomiyama (1999) has done a longitudinal study of natural second language attrition within an individual in the first language environment. The subject was a Japanese boy coming from an upper-middle-class family. His parents were well educated and proficient in English. He left Japan at the age of one years old when he was transferred to California, and returned home at eight. Only Japanese was spoken at home, but according to the mother, English became his dominant language by the final year abroad. He entered a local public school in Tokyo upon his return to Japan as a second grader. There were approximately a total of less than 16.5 hours of data-collecting

sessions and 24 hours of English instruction over the period of a year and a half.

Six questions were highlighted for the study. First, are phonology, lexicon, morphology, and syntax differentially affected in attrition? Second, are productive skills more susceptible to attrition than receptive skills? Third, what is the speed of attrition? Fourth, how is fluency affected? Fifth, how does the subject compensate for the skills he is losing? Finally, can individual differences be observed?

Different linguistic skills including phonology, lexicon, morphology, and syntax were not affected in the same way by the attrition process. Attrition first manifested as lexical retrieval difficulty. There were some indications of attrition in morphology and syntax, but phonology and receptive lexicon remained robust during the course of observation. Additionally, although the subjects' productive skill in the lexicon was first to be affected in the process as evidenced by the lexical retrieval difficulty, the receptive skills was virtually unaffected throughout the observation. This is in accordance with studies of Weltens et al. (1989), Bahrick (1984), and Cohen (1989). At 19 months, the subject of this research was still speaking spontaneously and willingly with morphology being relatively unaffected despite lexical retrieval difficulty and decreased fluency.

It is possible that he was at a stage of initial plateau, during which skills are relatively unaffected. However, this terminology has been associated with adult L2 learners' attrition, and whether it is linked to attrition in children requires further investigation. It is also possible that the high level of acquisition made morphological elements stick. Another point to note is regarding the subjects' code switching. He might have no longer felt natural expressing emotions in L2; however, this may not be an indication that he has lost his L2.

The author asserted that classroom-oriented research, namely, application of L2 attrition findings to language maintenance programs needed to be launched. Then in 2000, research was launched by Taura, but there still needs to be more documented cases for clear conclusive statements to be made. Further, it is necessary to clearly distinguish between nonacquisition and attrition.

Study V: Kurashige (1996)

According to Kurashige (1996), in 1992, over 96 percent of Japanese children on a

prolonged stay in North America attended local schools as opposed to Japanese schools administered abroad by the Japanese Ministry of Education. This means that children who have lived abroad had considerable amount of exposure and training in English. Therefore, English as a Second Language scholars like Kyoko Yashiro and others have worked together to introduce foreign language study at the upper elementary school level, but the Ministry of Education has resisted expansion of the curriculum in Japan because it runs counter to the current objective of eliminating Saturday classes to give a full two-day weekend.

However, in 1993, a few target elementary schools throughout Japan were selected to begin teaching foreign languages, including English, in the fifth and sixth grades. It might be wise for parents of returnee children to have their children enter elementary schools where there is English instruction. Given the number of returnees from English speaking countries, and the increasing dominance of English as a global market language, there is a recent change in policy. MEXT has finalized a policy to introduce English education starting at elementary schools in 2011 (Butler, 2007). This was because 92 percent of the parents support English activity in elementary school, according to the MEXT survey conducted in 2004 (cited in Torikai, 2006).

In Kurashige's research, two questions were asked comparing three subject groups. The research questions were the following. First, what common changes and shifts over time occur in returnees' use of verb forms in ESL narrations? Can any patterns of change over time be identified? Second, do the personal characteristics of returnees' age, length of time abroad, length of time back, and proficiency level at study onset relate to their retention/attrition in using verbs? If so, what factors relate favorably to L2 retention? The three subject groups were 18 returnees, 10 Japanese children and 14 native English speakers. The three groups were compared in lexical and morphosyntactic assessments and then the study assessed the returnees individually two or three times during approximately 12-19 months.

The narrations were analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively. The measurements included type-token counts and ratios to determine vocabulary diversity and target-like usage assessments of accuracy in morphology. The qualitative analysis focused on comparisons between subjects' initial and final descriptions of the same story pictures. The average age of children was nine years old and they had lived abroad for

an average of 2.4 years. The native English speakers had lived in the United States continuously and attended school there.

The study of 18 returnees found common changes and shifts in the use of English verb in storytelling. On the theoretical side, the study findings support the inverse hypothesis that the higher the subject's proficiency, the lower the degree of attrition. It also substantiated the notion that attaining a critical threshold of competency militates against language loss. It further found that more than age or length of time abroad, proficiency in speaking was the best predictor for retaining accuracy in speaking. Kurashige argues that high-level students should maximize contextualized speaking practice, and this discourse should have time pressure. On the other hand, less proficient speakers need more explicit instruction including grammatical explanations.

Study VI: Tomiyama (2008)

Tomiyama (2008) in her recent study studied two siblings to find out whether any difference exists in the degree of second language attrition in terms of grammatical complexity, grammatical accuracy, lexical complexity, and lexical productivity based on their storytelling data collected over a period of 31 months. The siblings (one male, one female) have similar L2 profiles with respect to attained proficiency, including literacy, but differ in age. The ages of returning home were seven, an age reported to be more vulnerable to attrition, and ten, an age reported to be more resistant.

Their parents, both Japanese nationals, had college education and their mother, being a returnee from English-speaking countries herself, is particularly proficient in English. The older sibling, Eugene, was five years and eight months old and the younger sibling, Lily, two years and eight months old, when they moved to the United States due to their father's transfer to an office in Hartford, Connecticut. During their four years and four months of residence in Connecticut, they went through a local pre-school, kindergarten, and elementary school where the two were the only Japanese students. Thus they acquired English as their L2 in a natural setting. Eugene and Lily were both very active in extracurricular activities such as participating in sports, scouting, and summer camps, which shows that they were well immersed in American culture and L2 environment, receiving abundant L2 input from their daily lives throughout the year.

They were immediately placed in a local public school in Tokyo, Eugene in the

fourth grade, Lily in the first. Naturally, English input was drastically reduced in their surroundings. Other than occasional viewing of English videos and reading English books, the only opportunity for them to be exposed to English was an English maintenance program the school offered for returnees for one hour a week when the school was in session. However, their attendance was sporadic, and Eugene quit attending completely nine months after his return.

Their parents' attitude and intention towards the children's bilingualism was that they hoped to establish their Japanese identity and solidify Japanese language while they were residing in Japan, since there was a possibility of moving to an English-speaking country once again. This concern for Japanese identity versus bilingualism stemmed from the mother's personal experience as a returnee. Therefore, while she thought L2 maintenance should not be neglected, she considered it very important for the children to lead a 'normal life' as Japanese children, and that L2 maintenance should not be exercised at the expense of risking this opportunity. Initially, she was not even sure if she should enroll the children in the maintenance program.

The major finding from this study is that the siblings showed similar attrition patterns suggesting that an attained high proficiency level including the acquisition of literacy skills is an important factor in the maintenance of L2. One exception was grammatical accuracy, but the difference surfaced only after the second year, indicating that the period of disuse was differentially affected according to their ages. The younger sibling's data also suggest that maturational factors may play a role in successfully handling grammatical complexity and accuracy simultaneously.

Conclusion: Pedagogical Implications Based on the Six Studies

In terms of the pedagogical implications, the purpose of looking at second language attrition research for many teachers is to understand the process of second language attrition and to help prevent students from losing the language. According to an aggregate of second language attrition research, unfortunately, the reality is that language skills deteriorate without use. It would be ideal to see that once one has learned a language, one can always save those skills in perfect condition, just like pushing a save button when writing a research paper. Unfortunately, our memory capacity is limited.

Looking specifically at the first five specific primary research articles, there are

several findings that might be helpful for teachers to keep in mind. First, it is important to note that English education of one hour a day for five weeks is helpful to combat attrition. Returnees should take full advantage of educational opportunities at school. It may be possible for teachers to get some young students to intrinsically be motivated to study English by stating research findings such as Taura and Taura's that English education for one hour a day for five weeks is actually helpful in combating attrition and even developing English language ability. More returnee students may start paying attention in school if teachers make them aware of second language attrition findings.

In addition, if possible, an environment where there are opportunities to use English outside of school should be provided for students' L2 development. Second, research done by Yoshitomi, Tomiyama, and Kurashige indicate problems with fluency, including lexical retrieval difficulties of returnees, which suggest the need for continual use and or training, if English is to be maintained or developed. For building fluency, it is important to interact with English speakers (Taura 2001).

There seems to be a stress on interacting with native speakers, who are viewed as ones who have mastered their language, and serve as perfect models, whereas interacting with those who are non-native in the non-native language is not wise, for it is impossible, to master a second language according to the critical period hypothesis and the concept of being unable to acquire the universal grammar system if one is not native. The problem with native speakers as perfect models is that native speakers often speak ungrammatically. Even through interaction with non-native speakers, there are exposures and exchanges of unfamiliar vocabulary, which helps retain vocabulary. Finally, the practice of speaking in English itself even to non-native speakers would help maintain fluency in L2, since the more advanced L2 speaker could correct the less advanced in their native language.

Another claim made by those in support of interaction with native speakers is that it is more natural to interact with native speakers in their language. The controversial question is should people who are non-natives not teach high level students? A possible answer to this is that high level students would not need any explanations in L1 so non-native teachers are not necessary. In terms of the likeliness of the teachers' language to be standard English, perhaps, if a particular class is taught only in English, it might be wise for people hiring to hire native teachers to ensure that

teachers use standard English. However, as previously mentioned, native speakers produce English in non-standard ways all the time. Thus, if non-native teachers are native-like, I do not see problems in schools hiring them as teachers. One of the merits of hiring non-native teachers could be adding the depth of understanding the L2 through comparing the use of L1 and L2.

Unfortunately, the present norm in Japan seems to be that native-like speakers can teach high level students, but natives are preferred by many. It would be interesting to see comparative second language attrition research done based on high level students receiving instruction from non-native speakers versus students receiving instruction from native speakers, which may relieve tension on the ego battle of language teachers, and shed light on the reality of what teachers with certain backgrounds should teach students for them to keep improving.

The sixth article looks into the question of the significance of environment versus age. The two siblings, essentially being in the same environment followed a similar pattern of attrition. Let us take a hypothetical linear conclusion such as: it can be inferred from the study that since the two are siblings in a similar environment and they followed a similar attrition pattern, environment is a crucial factor. One cannot draw this conclusion since there are multiple factors in addition to environment such as age, personality, and attitudes towards language.

As can be seen from the studies, it becomes an arduous task to make distinctive conclusions about L2 attrition. This is clearly because language acquisition and attrition is composed of multiple factors as mentioned above. Trends and tendencies can be observed from looking at specific studies, but cases of attrition vary with the individuals. This is because all human beings experience different things where there is exposure and use of language. Not everything can be recorded and examined.

Looking at second language attrition data, however, several factors that tend to reduce L2 attrition are clear. First, classroom instruction is meaningful, even for the returnees. Thus, appropriate content should be taught for different levels. Second, opportunities to use the second language should be provided outside of the classroom, which will encourage maintenance and development. Finally, learners should be motivated and continue studying the L2 in order to retain the language once gained because maintenance or improvement cannot be sought without continual practice.

I am a returnee myself, who was educated in the United States from fourth grade to the time I graduated university. It has only been about three years since I have been back to Japan. Three months after I returned to Japan, I started working at an English conversation school, where I teach in English one hundred percent of the time and have a chance to speak to native speakers of English. In addition to that, six months after my return to Japan, I enrolled in an English-language graduate level education program where all courses are taught in English. Thus, even after returning to Japan, I have had ample opportunities for input and output in my L2. Even though any self-evaluation may be tainted with bias, I believe that I do not suffer from lexical retrieval difficulty as proposed in Tomiyama's research (1999). This could be explained by my having reached a threshold level in my L2 as Bahrick (1984) illustrates and have also been in touch with the language more than five hours a week as suggested by Taura and Taura (2000). I hope to combat attrition through continual exposure and use of my second language. Based on personal experience, I believe that returnees share the desire to maintain or even improve their second language after returning to their home country. Thus, it would benefit them in being provided with such opportunities as it ensures continual L2 development.

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Aspects of Phonological Competence in Japanese EFL Learners

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Introduction

Communicative failure is a common occurrence in verbal exchanges between native and non-native speakers or even between two second language (L2) learners. Causes are numerous and varied: pragmatic considerations, morphosyntactic errors and lexical shortcomings are all common. Repairs can take the form of circumlocutions or lexical/grammatical alternatives and are positive learning experiences for students and instructors alike. Often, however, native speaker or nonnative speaker (NS or NNS) listeners are unable to determine what has been said because the sounds the speaker (NS or NNS) produces are not recognizable to the listener and thus cannot be coded into meaningful speech. In these cases, repair must be undertaken in the form of increased accuracy of pronunciation. The question of whether Japanese students learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) at the university level have the phonological competence to succeed in such repairs is the focus of this study.

In the ongoing discussion and debate among theorists and practitioners over the relative importance of the various fields of linguistic study and the nature of their interrelationships, aspects of phonetics and phonology have gone from a position of primacy under the influence of the Audiolingual and Oral approaches in the mid-twentieth century, to a much de-emphasized level of importance under the dominance of more recent varieties of the Communicative Approach. In spite of the widespread acceptance of communicative methods, as of this writing there is little clear consensus on what role, if any, pronunciation instruction should play in the communicative classroom.

In Japan, EFL instruction is increasingly dependent on the representation of English pronunciation via the Japanese system of syllabic writing, or syllabary, known as *katakana* (see Appendix A for a brief overview of this system). Designed to represent sounds or phonological features of the Japanese language, this system is often ill-suited or inadequate to the task of representing English phones. Consequently, English words are often rendered in Japanese approximations of the actual pronunciation. Thus, *alphabet* becomes *arufabetto*, *elevator* becomes *erebeta*, *dilemma* becomes *jirenma*, etc. Even more problematic, because *katakana* has only five basic vowel sounds and significantly fewer consonants than English, several distinct English words are likely to be pronounced as homophones or near-homophones using *katakana* phonology. For example, the English words *cold*, *called*, *code*, and *cord* are all pronounced *kōdō* using *katakana* phonology.

The use of *katakana* to teach English pronunciation is a long-standing practice and has become increasingly popular in recent years. It is common for textbooks approved by the Ministry of Education, Science, Sports and Culture to explain the pronunciation of English words using *katakana* characters. Major publishers of educational materials such as Shueisha, Kenkyusha, Kodansha and others publish texts and dictionaries which utilize this Japanese syllabary to explain the pronunciation of English words. *Katakana*, as an instructional resource, is seen as a welcome and more accessible alternative to the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) which had been a staple of English instruction in previous decades (Mizui, 2001).

For the purposes of the Japanese educational system, the use of *katakana* proves little or no obstacle. Grammar translation continues to be the most prevalent method of language teaching in the nation and is well suited to the goal of preparing students for university entrance exams in their current form. Since English is rarely, if ever, needed for real communication, the matter of phonological competence is unlikely to arise during a student's middle school or high school experience. In addition, students are continually exposed to vast numbers of English loan words in everyday speech and the mass media. These are either rendered in *katakana* or in the Roman alphabet and spoken using a *katakana* pronunciation. These words are an integral part of normal communication occurring in technical language, colloquial speech, popular music,

advertising and every conceivable facet of popular culture. Thus, by the time a student enters university or college, exposure to spoken English for practical purposes, that is, for academic pursuits and daily communication, has been almost exclusively in the form of the Japanese phonetic system. The phonetic system of one language has effectively supplanted that of another, with the acquiescence and approval of all concerned.

Indeed, there is no reason why this situation should be questioned, since it is not in conflict with the purposes of students, educators or policy makers. *Katakana* English serves quite well for the purposes of grammar translation, entrance exams and day-to-day life among native speakers of Japanese and is largely legitimized by its cultural and educational role. This is not to suggest that Japanese EFL learners have no exposure to native or native-like English pronunciation. Rather, it is the *katakana* forms which are dominant and certainly the path of least resistance for the average learner.

The obvious pitfall in this situation is that, when *katakana* pronunciation is used in real-life exchanges, communication failure may result. Interlocutors are then called upon to make their output (pronunciation) more precise in order to affect repair. They must call upon their phonological *competence* to make up for shortcomings in *performance*. This can be a positive learning experience, provided the learner has the competence to undertake the necessary repair.

The purpose of this study is to determine to whether this alternative and parallel phonetic system (*katakana*) has become fossilized or stabilized in the participant group to an extent which interferes with production and recognition of intelligible English pronunciation. This determination will be made by addressing the following questions:

1. Are the Japanese native speaker (JNS) participants able to recognize English target words, spoken by a native speaker, from among a group of English words which would be represented as homophones or near-homophones in *katakana*?
2. Are English native speaker (ENS) participants able to recognize and distinguish the same English words spoken by a Japanese native speaker?

This purpose is significant in that it deals with important learner variables, i.e., characteristics of specifically defined learner populations, factors which might affect their success in L2 and what instructional and diagnostic methods might best meet their needs. Moreover, it addresses the relationship between the development of first language

(L1) and L2 oral and literacy skills and the extent to which learning in one language transfers to a second and what form such a transfer might take. Perhaps most importantly, it concerns questions of differential rates of success among groups from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds in L2 study (TESOL Association, 2000). At a fundamental level, it addresses the issues of whether L2 pronunciation can or should be taught, and what happens when it is not. Hopefully, this study will constitute a modest step toward a clearer understanding of Japanese learners' interlanguage phonology, possibly leading to new methods of teaching pronunciation and helping students to understand spoken English.

My interest in this area of research has developed over a period of years as I have noticed and recorded instances of communication failure due to either lack of phonological competence alone or a discordance between some combination of phonological, contextual, grammatical and lexical clues. This evidence is, of necessity, anecdotal, inasmuch as no one has yet succeeded in recreating the myriad permutations of such discordance in a controlled, experimental setting. Nonetheless, it is extensive. A representative sample of cases I have collected over a period of years is provided here:

(1) A native English speaker is watching a Discovery Channel documentary on the history of Italian sports cars and calls out to his Japanese girlfriend in the kitchen, "Look at this! These cars are amazing! I'd give anything to drive one!" To which the girlfriend responds with a one-syllable ethnic slur used for people of Italian ancestry, "Wop!"

"What did you say?" asks the English speaker.

The Japanese girlfriend repeats the original epithet, cheerfully.

Aghast, and convinced he is witnessing a shocking display of racial/ethnic insensitivity, the native speaker launches into a long-winded and patronizing homily on how culturally inappropriate it is in *American* culture to make disparaging references to ethnic origin. The girlfriend appears confused, then frustrated, then irritated. The American hesitates, sensing he's about to get a lecture himself.

"No! Wop! Wop speedo! The car is very fast! Wop!," at which time the American realizes she's saying "warp" as in *Star Trek*'s warp speed, not hurling ethnic slurs at Italians (*wop* and *warp* are homophones in *katakana* pronunciation). The truly

unfortunate thing is that she thought the expression was culturally appropriate and *au courant* and could not understand where she had gone wrong. The L2 learner was unable to improve accuracy because there was no knowledge of the existence of a target form and no native English phonological template to apply. In this context, native speech is the variant.

(2) An advanced-level TOEFL student, a professional woman who works at a major Tokyo bank, and her instructor, an American male, are talking after class. They have known each other many years and have often discussed the long, difficult hours of the student's job. At one time they also belonged to the same chain of fitness clubs and often discussed exercise and trying to stay healthy in the hectic pace of Tokyo life.

Student: "I'm sorry I was late for class but I overslept. I've started distance running at Hosei University."

Instructor: "That's great, but with your schedule, how do you find the time for distance running? You must be exhausted!"

Student: "Yes, I am. And I'm doing rows!"

Instructor: "Rows!...Rows? Well, rows are good exercise too, especially if you don't have time for running."

Student: "Yes, but it's so difficult!"

Instructor: "You know, you need to take it easy. You work so hard, why are you doing this suddenly?"

(Note that at this point, the interlocutors are blithely chatting along on two completely unrelated topics, unbeknownst to either of them.)

Student: "I need it for my work. I want to change departments."

Instructor: "You need distance running for your work?" (Finally, a clue that something is wrong.)

*Studen*t: "Yes, I'm doing it on-line."

Instructor (Not letting on that he's misunderstood): "Oh, you're doing it on-line! Distance *learning*! (*raningu* in *katakana*) And you're doing *laws*! (*rows* in *katakana*)

Uh, we just say 'law' because it's uncountable. But anyway, I hope it's interesting! Bravo! And good luck!"

(3) The following was related to me by an ENS employee of a large Tokyo-based construction company regarding the pronunciation of *want* and *won't* (homophones in *katakana*):

ENS: "So, I guess we'll have to schedule you on another day. Would Thursday or Friday be all right for you?"

JNS: "I won't Thursday."
ENS: "Very well, how about some time on Friday?"
JNS: "I won't Thursday."
ENS: (exasperated) "I *understand* that. We have several times open on Friday. Would you like morning or afternoon?"

JNS: (getting impatient) "No! I said I won't Thursday! Please listen to me!

ENS: "I *am* listening to you and if *you* would listen to *me* I told you I can take you on Friday!"

JNS: (really angry) "What is wrong with you! I can't come on Friday! I said I won't Thursday!"

At this point, the sun begins to break through the clouds in the eye of this hurricane and the ENS realizes that what he thought was a lexical or grammatical error was actually a phonological error and comprehension dawns.

These real-life communication failures go well beyond the minor annoyances of "rice" vs. "lice" errors commonly and understandably dismissed by educators as insignificant. They illustrate that L2 learners are often unaware that miscommunication may have a phonological basis and are unaccustomed to apply self-monitoring skills in that aspect of language. Further, they are examples of problems in recognition of L2 phones as well as production.

Literature Review

Phonological Competence

Pronunciation was once the starting point for language study. In the early years of the

twentieth century, the development of phonetics as a distinct area of study led to its pedagogical applications via the IPA as well as the primacy of spoken language and phonetic training for teachers and students alike. In the 1940s, 1950s and early 1960s pronunciation was emphasized from the earliest stages of the Oral Approach, Direct Method and Audiolingual curricula and their applications of Skinnerian/Bloomfeldian interpretations of language as habit formation.

Major changes of focus began to occur in the mid-1960s due to the impact of transformational-generative grammar theory (Chomsky, 1957, 1965) and analyses of language as rule-governed behavior. These changes were characterized by a de-emphasis of phonetics, phonology, pronunciation and other bottom-up aspects of language. With the notable exception of The Silent Way (Gattegno, 1972, 1976), pedagogical approaches to foreign and second language teaching tended to relegate phonology to much-diminished roles from the 1970s onward.

Concurrent with the gradual ascendance of communicative approaches in recent decades, much of the literature has tended to dismiss, depreciate or ignore explicit instruction of L2 phonology or discuss it in terms of how much could be left out of the curriculum. Indeed, many of the most prominent authors on communicative teaching such as Hymes, Widdowson and Candlin made little or no mention of phonetics and phonology in their work. Brown and Yule (1983) focused their discussion of pronunciation teaching in the classroom on "native-like" or Received Pronunciation (RP) production and maintained that "…many teachers now accept that the aim of achieving native-like pronunciation is not only unattainable but unreasonable…" (p.26). They also characterized a strong emphasis on pronunciation as "boring" to less competent students in particular.

Krashen and Terrell (1983) felt that classroom work had little to do with pronunciation ability, even when the courses were specifically aimed at pronunciation. Since formal teaching had such little effect in this area they posited that the best approach was simply to "…provide an atmosphere where the acquisition of phonology could take place…" (p. 90). No explanation of what the form or nature of such an atmosphere might be was provided.

In contrast, other authors and researchers have asserted that attention to

phonology and communicative methods, far from being mutually exclusive, are in fact complementary. Celce-Murcia et al. (1996) suggest that the concept of language as communication brings urgency to the teaching of pronunciation. They point out that if nonnative speakers fall below a *threshold level* of pronunciation that they will have communication difficulties regardless of their abilities in grammar and vocabulary.

Nunan (1991) enumerated skills which he determined essential to learners if they were to become successful users of a language. He described the skill of "…segmenting the stream of speech into meaningful words and phrases…" and "…the ability to articulate phonological features of the language comprehensibly…" (p.6-7). He also emphasized the necessity for top-down *and* bottom-up learning strategies, including the processing of phonemes (p.4). Nonetheless, his subsequent discussion omits the question of segmentals, focusing instead on stress and rhythm.

This is a common theme in more recent literature, i.e., that classroom instruction should focus on intonation, stress and rhythm rather than the teaching of phonemes and allophones. The distinction and emphasis are often rendered in highly subjective terms. Brown (2001) describes stress, rhythm and pronunciation as the most "relevant" features of pronunciation (p.283). His view echoes that of Wong (1987) who argues that "…because of their major roles in communication, rhythm and intonation merit greater priority in the teaching program than attention to individual sounds" (p.21).

There is a competing viewpoint to this emphasis on suprasegmental features which recognizes the importance of both segmentals and suprasegmentals. Authors such as Kenworthy (1987), Kelly (2000) and Celce-Murcia et al. (1996) have stressed the importance of a balanced approach to the teaching of phonological aspects of language, integrating segmental and suprasegmental features.

Interlanguage

If we discuss L2 learner phonological competence, it must be acknowledged that we are discussing their interlanguage and the possible effects of interlanguage processes such as language transfer, over-generalization and fossilization, or the degree to which incorrect features become permanent parts of learner language (Selinker, 1969, 1972). Most of the extensive literature on interlanguage deals with grammatical and socio-linguistic issues and are beyond the scope of this study. However, since phonology is an area where

errors are most likely to be interlingual rather than developmental (Beebe, Takahashi, & Uliss-Weitz, 1990), it is important to mention some representative literature.

In the 1980s, Ioup and Weinberger (1987) collected and published several significant studies which focused on interlanguage phonology. Among these, Tarone (1987) challenged the prevailing notion among researchers and educators that pronunciation was simply not important. She made the point that it was possible for learners to master L2 syntax but not phonology and that it was essential that learners be able to produce intelligible speech. It was also pointed out that this area of study has the potential to increase our understanding of speech perception.

Nearly a decade earlier, Beebe (1978) made the point that pronunciation always affects what we communicate and how well we communicate it and should therefore be part of L2 teaching for all levels. In a later work, however, Beebe (1987) asserted that a concentration on phonemic contrasts (the focus of this project) was ill-founded when aimed at non-beginners. This assertion was based on data she collected indicating that most pronunciation errors do not involve phonemic substitution or confusion. Rather, they involve phonetic approximation or overgeneralization of a target sound. The same study also found that in a large numbers of cases, pronunciation errors do not involve transfer of a native language (NL) variant. Many of such variants are "original" in that they cannot be found in either the NL or target language (TL).

Since this study concerns the reading of word lists it is important to address the question of style and its relation to interlanguage although it is difficult to extract the issue of phonological style from grammatical. Labov (1966) first described a range of speech styles for native speakers based on the central factor of attention to speech. In order of increased attention, these were *casual style, careful style, reading style, word list style* and *minimal pair style*. For second or foreign language learners, Tarone (1983) posited a continuum of style with *careful style* at one end and *vernacular style* at the other, suggesting that the highest degree of accuracy would occur in when reading lists of words. It is this accuracy and increased attention which I hope to elicit in this study.

The Study

It is important to point out that this is not an exercise in contrastive analysis in that no

attempt to predict behavior or develop prediction methods will be undertaken. Nor is it intended as a type of error analysis. The intent is not to classify errors or make retrospective comparisons between what has been taught and what is being produced. Further, any such errors will probably be much too diverse and numerous to analyze effectively within the constraints of this study. Rather, this study will be an examination of a strictly circumscribed aspect of the learners' interlanguage: their phonological competence. The purpose is diagnostic, not predictive or summative. It is intended to determine the accuracy with which the L2 learners in the participant group are able to produce and discern English phones with which the *katakana* syllabary system would not acquaint them, i.e., English phones which do not exist in Japanese. Once again, it is important to note that *katakana* is not the *only* form of English pronunciation to which these learners have been exposed. However, the realities of the learners' cultural and educational environment lead to the assumption that it is the *dominant* form of English pronunciation within their linguistic frame of reference.

Also, it should be mentioned that although there is a widely recognized value in collecting data on spontaneous speech performance, this study has a different objective. The assumption here is that once communication failure occurs, spontaneity is lost, and the issue becomes one of accuracy and attention to form. For this reason, conditions in this research were arranged to provide for the maximum accuracy of which the participants were capable.

This study was divided into two parts. In the first, the purpose was to determine whether Japanese learners could distinguish and differentiate English phones produced by a native English speaker. In the second part of the study, the purpose was to determine whether native speakers of English could distinguish or differentiate the same English phones produced by native Japanese speakers.

Part 1

For the first part of the study, I composed a list of 20 English word groups which would be represented as homophones or near-homophones in *katakana*, hereinafter referred to for the purposes of this study as *minimal groups*. For example, *cold*, *called*, *cord* and

code (mentioned earlier) would all be homophones in *katakana* and make up 1 minimal group. *Load*, *lord*, and *road* would be *katakana* homophones, while *lowered* (rendered as rō-ah-dō in *katakana*) would be a near-homophone of the same group. The words were of 1 or 2 syllables and there were 4 to 5 words in each group, determined by how many homophones exist in the minimal group. From this list, I made a multiple choice answer sheet of 20 minimal groups and chose a single word from each group to be read by the speaker.

Participants (Japanese listeners, English NS reader)

The participants were my first and second year Japanese university students from 3 universities: Kogakuin University (an engineering school), Nihon University College of Arts, and the Tokyo Women's College of Physical Education (TWCPE). None of the participants had received any explicit instruction in English phonology from me up to this point, but all were familiar with my voice, diction, intonation and accent (North American, Western New York State), having studied with me for several months prior to the study.

Procedure

Answer sheets were distributed and the exercise was explained. Each answer sheet included an explanation that the exercise was intended to illustrate some problems with English pronunciation and that it might also be used in research. There was a place where participants could indicate whether they had ever lived for an extended period in an English speaking country by circling yes or no. Answer sheets with affirmative responses were later deleted since the purpose was, as much as possible, to collect data on EFL rather than ESL learners.

The students were given a few moments to look over the answer sheet and I tried to be certain that everyone understood the procedure by modeling a sample item on the board. They were told to circle the word from each minimal group which they believed I was saying and to make their best guess if they were unsure. I then read the 20 words, repeating each word twice at a speed of approximately 1 word every 5-7 seconds. While

reading, I made an effort to move around the room and make my mouth visible to as many students as possible for those who were trying to determine place and manner of articulation. When the exercise was completed, I collected the answers sheets. It should be emphasized that this was not an attempt to replicate real-life conditions, but rather to access the students' actual competence by producing *optimal* conditions for recognition within the limits of the experimental setting.

Since I have a very large number of students, this part of the research produced an unmanageable amount of data. I therefore randomly drew 35 answer sheets from both Kogakuin and Nihon University and 30 from TWCPE for a total of 100 responses.

Part 2

Participants (Japanese readers)

For the second part of the study I needed a representative sample of native Japanese speakers to act as readers. For this purpose, immediately after the first exercise I asked for volunteers from my Kogakuin classes (using chocolate bars as an incentive), resulting in 5 readers from each of 4 classes. I explained that they would be recorded on digital video tape, which produced a certain amount of apprehension, but the students seemed to get into the spirit of the activity and their participation was characterized by considerable effort and a positive attitude. The use of volunteers was, once again, an attempt to produce the optimal conditions for production. I felt that volunteers would be more likely to exert the necessary effort and concentration to demonstrate actual competence than randomly selected participants.

Procedure

The student volunteers were taken to a free classroom, given copies of the word list and allowed to look it over for a few moments. I explained that each student would read only 4 of the 20 words and that each word should be repeated twice. I made every effort to lighten the atmosphere and reduce pressure but there was, of course, a certain nervousness knowing that they would be video-taped and heard by their fellow students.

It should be noted that many of the above conditions were intended to contribute to attention to form and accuracy. First, the student reading occurred *after* my native speaker reading of the same word list, giving the Japanese readers some foreknowledge of the content and procedure. Second, the students would be reading words they had already heard in a manner which had been modeled for them by a native speaker. Also, these readers were given time to read over the word lists, familiarize themselves with the content and mentally prepare for the task. Finally, each student's participation was kept brief (4 words) to minimize the effect of fatigue on their speech. The results were as near to the readers' optimal speech performance for the target words as could possibly be expected in any setting, experimental or otherwise.

For the next phase of the study I was faced with making a subjective judgment as to which group would be most suitable. I chose a group from the third period class consisting of 2 male and 3 female students since it was the only mixed-gender group I had recorded (the student body at Kogakuin is predominantly male). I felt the advantages of a mixed-gender group outweighed the value of random selection in this case.

I dubbed the Japanese reader video onto several VHS cassettes. The audio quality was quite good, far superior to an audio-tape I had made at the same time as the video. Apparently, the microphone on the digital camcorder was able to alleviate the poor acoustics of the classroom we had used. Voices on the video were clear and largely free of distortions or echoes. There was a clear and unobstructed view of each student's mouth as they read the words.

Participants (English NS listeners)

In addition to my own data collection efforts, I distributed the videos and answer sheets to several English native-speaker (ENS) contacts in Japan and sent copies to friends in the U.S. In spite of the gracious assistance of my Teachers College (TC) instructor, numerous TC students and several colleagues, I was only able to obtain 23 answer sheets from residents of Japan who are native English speakers. I obtained 31 responses from U.S. residents. There appear to be significant differences between the results from

the U.S. residents and Japan residents, so I have tabulated the data separately (see Tables 2 and 3).

Results

The most salient feature of the data collected in Part 1 of this study (Japanese listeners, ENS reader) is certainly the sheer number of incorrect responses. As shown in Table 1, the mean score was 9.44 correct responses out of 20, with a standard deviation of 2.59. If a correction for guessing formula is applied (Henning, 1987, p. 31), this score would be reduced to an average of 5.92 correct responses out of 20. The fact that the L2 learners were able to discern words spoken by the ENS in less than half the cases (or less than a third, corrected for guessing) is enough to indicate a considerable phonological deficiency.

Table 1

Error totals: English NS reader, Japanese listeners, 100 participants.

Correct answer	Error	Error	Error	Error	Error/percent
1. cot	caught(16)	coat (28)	court (19)		62
2. sin	thin (37)	shin (23)	seen (7)		67
3. cone	corn (43)	con (10)	colon (1)		54
4. birth	verse (3)	bath (2)	bus (1)		6
5. ramp	lamp (25)	romp (0)	rump (22)	lump (18)	65
6. road	load (19)	lord (16)	lowered (2)	rod (1)	38
7. called	cold (28)	code (24)	cod (1)	cord (17)	70
8. very	valley (3)	berry (16)	belly (2)		21
9. lobe	love (3)	robe (47)	lob (12)		62
10. pole	Paul (51)	par (0)	pore (11)		62
11. fall	hole (6)	foal (17)	hall (3)		26
12. done	Dan (32)	Don (8)	dawn (1)		41
13. bolt	volt (18)	boat (17)	vote (16)	bought (32)	83
14. want	won't (36)	warrant (0)	weren't (18)		54
15. who'll	fool (44)	wool (12)	full (17)		73
16. phone	horn (2)	fawn (5)	hone (3)		10
17. arks	axe (5)	oaks (14)	ox (27)		46
18. feet	fit (28)	hit (0)	heat (4)		32
19. rolls	laws (22)	rows (34)	lows (43)		99
20. backs	bucks (18)	barks (8)	box (12)		38

***Note*. Since there were 100 participants, figures in Table 1 represent both raw scores and percentages.**

Another significant feature is the variety of incorrect responses. The word *cot*,

for example, in Table 1 item 1, elicited a nearly even dispersal of responses among the choices *caught, coat,* and *court* indicating that a medial /a/ sound is an unknown quantity in these listeners' (JNS) phonological construct. The word *sin* in item 2 produced large numbers of both *thin* and *shin* responses even though the manner and place of articulation are different for both initial consonants. Similarly, JNS listeners apparently were unable to distinguish between initial /b/ and /v/ consonants in item 13 (*bolt*), although the same consonants in medial positions posed little problem in item 9 (*lobe*). Also, as one would expect, the much discussed and analyzed problems with /l/ and /r/ appeared in this study. Perhaps the most striking aspect of this problem is that in addition to the problems producing these sounds, initial /r/ sounds are often heard or interpreted as /l/, or vice versa, even though the /l/ sound does not exist in the Japanese phonetic system.

If one compares these results to those obtained by Beebe (1987) which showed that most pronunciation errors do not involve confusion of two phonemes, we find clear indications than many listening errors do. Beebe also showed that pronunciation errors often do not involve transfer of a native language variant. However, in these results, e.g., Table 1 items 1 (*cot*), 3 (*cone*), 8 (*very*), 10 (*pole*), we see what may be an interpretation of L2 sounds as native language variants: 1. /Ψ/ interpreted as /ow/, 3. /owr/ equated with /ow/, 8. /v/ heard as /b/, 10. /]/ equated with /ow/. In short, phonological competence is as much about recognition of L2 phones as it is about production.

The results from the ENS (Japan residents) listener study showed an even lower rate of comprehension than in the JNS listener study. This group had an average of 8.34 correct responses and a standard deviation of 1.72. Corrected for guessing, less than a quarter of the responses were correct (3.88 out of 20), which indicates that even with maximum attention to form, the JNS learner-speakers are having significant difficulty in producing intelligible speech (see Table 2).

Table 2

Error totals: Japanese NS readers, English NS listeners (Japan residents), 23 participants.

Correct answer	Error	Error	Error	Error	Error/percent
1. cot	caught (14)	coat (5)	court (1)		**20** / 87%
2. sin	thin (19)	shin (1)	seen (0)		**20** / 87%
3. cone	corn (13)	con (0)	colon (3)		**16** / 70%
4. birth	verse (1)	bath (6)	bus (0)		**7** / 30%
5. ramp	lamp (19)	romp (0)	rump (1)	lump (1)	**2**1 / 91%
6. road	load (15)	lord (0)	lowered (0)	rod (0)	**15** / 65%
7. called	cold (13)	code (0)	cod (0)	cord (1)	**14** / 61%
8. very	valley (0)	berry (13)	belly (8)		**21** / 91%
9. lobe	love (5)	robe (8)	lob(6)		**19** / 83%
10. pole	Paul (13)	par (0)	pore (2)		**15** / 65%
11. fall	hole (2)	foal (0)	hall (0)		**2** / 9%
12. done	Dan (7)	Don (4)	dawn (3)		**14** / 61%
13. bolt	volt (4)	boat (1)	vote (2)	bought (3)	**10** / 43%
14. want	won't (4)	warrant (0)	weren't (0)		**4** / 17%
15. who'll	fool (8)	wool (0)	full (5)		**13** / 57%
16. phone	horn (0)	fawn (5)	hone (0)		**5** / 22%
17. arks	axe (12)	oaks (1)	ox (5)		**18** / 78%
18. feet	fit (0)	hit (0)	heat (1)		**1** / 4%
19. rolls	laws (4)	rows (7)	lows (3)		**15** / 65%
20. backs	bucks (3)	barks (6)	box (4)		**13** / 57%

Note. **Error percentages in the far right column have been rounded to the nearest whole number.**

Once again, we can see parallels to Beebe's 1987 study. If we look at Table 2 items 1-3 (*cot*, *sin*, *cone*), 5 (*ramp*), 10 (*pole*) and 17 (*arks*), it appears that the students are producing approximants, or overgeneralized sounds, or perhaps they are simply being interpreted as such since /q/, /ər/, /æ/ and /]/ do not exist in Japanese and the listeners were told to choose the word which they thought the speaker was trying to say. Items 8 and 15 (*very* and *who'll*) show signs of native language transfer in that the English phone /v/ is being changed to a more manageable /b/ sound and /huw/, which does not exist in Japanese, is being changed to the Japanese syllable /fuw/.

One would expect that long-time residents of Japan (over 5 years, in this case) would have a better "ear" for Japanese pronunciation and be better able to determine what word the Japanese native speakers were trying to say. If one looks at Table 3, and the overall scores for U.S. resident ENS (average 6.64 correct, 2.19 corrected for

guessing, standard deviation 1.790), this certainly seems to be the case in that their scores are significantly lower than those of the Japan resident ENS (8.34, 3.88, 1.72, respectively). However, there are certain intriguing anomalies. On Table 3 items 1 (*cot*), 2 (*sin*), 10 (*pole*), 13 (*bolt*), 14 (*want*), and 15 (*who'll*) the U.S. residents, who, it is assumed, do not have regular contact with Japanese pronunciation, made fewer errors than their native speaker counterparts who were residents of Japan. The difference is particularly striking in items 9 (*lobe*), 14 (*want*) and 15 (*who'll*). I find this result baffling and perhaps an interesting avenue for further research. Are expatriates mentally projecting an anticipated pronunciation error which is not actually occurring?

Notwithstanding any attempts to reduce the incalculable variables of human performance to some form of statistical certainty, it is readily apparent that the L2 learners in this study have little or no working knowledge of English phonology, at least at the segmental level.

Table 3

Error totals: Japanese NS readers, English NS listeners (U.S. residents), 31 participants.

Correct answer	Error	Error	Error	Error	Error/percent
1. cot	caught(8)	coat (5)	court (13)		**26** / 83%
2. sin	thin (7)	shin (0)	seen (16)		**23** / 74%
3. cone	corn (14)	con (5)	colon (4)		**23** / 74%
4. birth	verse (0)	bath (25)	bus (3)		**28** / 90%
5. ramp	lamp (25)	romp (2)	rump (0)	lump (4)	**31** /100%
6. road	load (18)	lord (7)	lowered (2)	rod (0)	**27** / 87%
7. called	cold (22)	code (5)	cod (0)	cord (3)	**30** / 97%
8. very	valley (0)	berry (10)	belly (19)		**29** / 94%
9. lobe	love (2)	robe (10)	lob (2)		**14** / 45%
10. pole	Paul (11)	par (0)	pore (8)		**19** / 61%
11. fall	hole (4)	foal (8)	hall (2)		**14** / 45%
12. done	Dan (7)	Don (6)	dawn (6)		**19** / 61%
13. bolt	volt (0)	boat (5)	vote (1)	bought (4)	**10** / 32%
14. want	won't (0)	warrant (0)	weren't (0)		**0** / 0%
15. who'll	fool (3)	wool (4)	full (4)		**11** / 35%
16. phone	horn (2)	fawn (12)	hone (0)		**14** / 45%
17. arks	axe (7)	oaks (1)	ox (22)		**30** / 97%
18. feet	fit (3)	hit (0)	heat (0)		**2** / 6%
19. rolls	laws (7)	rows (4)	lows (14)		**25** / 81%
20. backs	bucks (4)	barks (7)	box (14)		**25** / 81%

***Note*. Error percentages in the far right column have been rounded to the nearest whole number.**

Discussion

Over the course of the last 3-4 years, as I've gradually selected material for this study and discussed it with my colleagues, instructors and other people in the field, I have received two distinct types of responses. One group of people views this issue from essentially the same position as I do, i.e., that Japanese learners are being hindered in

both intelligibility and listening comprehension by their lack of phonological competence and that some type of remedial approach would be beneficial, if some consensus could be reached on its necessity and value.

A somewhat larger group has responded negatively and often indignantly, the most common remark being something comparable to "What's the point? They can get the meaning from context!" One respondent wrote at the bottom of the answer sheet for this study, "These poor students! I feel so sorry for them! What's the point of this?"

At this point I feel it is appropriate to mention that I am a product of the Audiolingual Method. In 1963, our school district, in a post-Sputnik furor over educational standards, introduced French language instruction into our 4th grade class. A part time instructor met with us 3 times a week for roughly 40 minutes. We began, of course, with the phonetic system and its orthographic representation.

Some 25 years later I began my study of Arabic in a similar fashion, by learning the sounds and how they were represented in the written language. I confess that in spite of all I have learned about modern approaches to language teaching, I have never felt handicapped by studying the phonology of these target languages; quite the opposite, in fact.

No scholar would suggest that a language student could proceed in a study of any Sino-Tibetan language without a solid foundation in the tonal system. Nor would anyone propose that Arabic or Modern Hebrew could be learned without some explicit instruction in the pharyngeal fricatives common to those languages. Nonetheless, as pointed out earlier in this paper, many prominent theorists and practitioners have either down-played the importance of English phonology, assumed that it could be "acquired naturally" or ignored the topic altogether. Some ENS residents of Japan have suggested to me that it's clear that L2 phones can be acquired without explicit instruction, because they had so little difficulty learning Japanese pronunciation, overlooking the vast number of English phones which do not exist in Japanese. Whether this is some extreme form of academic denial or simply linguistic ethnocentrism is impossible to determine, but the sheer pertinacity of this viewpoint is awesome to behold. Whatever the reason, it is important to recognize that knowledge of nonnative phonology cannot simply be "picked up" or acquired by second language learners without some type of pedagogical

support. Indeed, research in developmental psychology is demonstrating that we lose our ability to even perceive, much less acquire, non-native phones *in infancy* (Werker & Vouloumanos, 2001).

This study makes clear that our students, after six or seven years of English language study, are having serious difficulty pronouncing and perceiving the sounds of everyday spoken English. Even if one chooses to set aside or avoid the controversy surrounding the importance of pronunciation, we are left with the daunting challenge of helping our students to improve their perception and comprehension of the spoken language. Few EFL educators would argue against this objective.

Which leads us to important areas for further study: How can the perception of nonnative phones be evaluated, analyzed and improved? Which phones, and in what combinations, are the most problematic? What type of classroom work is effective in improving phonological competence and everyday performance?

Conclusion

If this project has a political message, I would hope it to be that languages are holistic systems rather than hierarchical. Contextual features of language are not superior to others and certainly no panacea to understanding. Comprehension comes about by drawing on all of our linguistic resources and where one area is found wanting, often another must be called on to compensate. We employ circumlocution to make up for lexical shortcomings. We simplify grammar to avoid ambiguity. We change registers to adapt to the socio-cultural milieu. But to employ these strategies, we must first be aware that problems, or potential problems, exist. This study suggests that, in terms of making students familiar with possible phonological pitfalls and ways to overcome them, current EFL approaches in Japan are coming up short.

As educators, one of our objectives should be to show the ways in which aspects of language interact and complement each other. Language learners, whatever their level of proficiency, need to recognize the complex interplay and balance of lexicon, grammar, discourse, culture and phonology to become effective self-monitors. Our first task in helping our students is to be certain we appreciate this balance ourselves.

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Appendix A

A brief overview of the Katakana syllabary

The kana (characters) and their Roman character counterparts

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

The above chart should be read top-to-bottom, left-to-right as follows: a (ah), i (ee), u (ōō), e (eh), o (oh); ka, ki, ku, ke, ko, sa, shi, su, se, so, ta, chi, tsu, te, to; na, ni, nu, ne, no; ha, he, fu, he, ho; ma, me, mu, me, mo; ya, (yi), yu, (ye), yo; ra, ri, ru, re, ro; wa, wo, n.

Note: (yi) and (ye) are now considered archaic and are generally replaced with ‘i” or ‘e” *kanas* respectively.

Special symbols and diacritics:

° changes ‘h’ and ‘f’ *kanas* to ‘p’ *kanas*

— lengthens preceding vowel

ッ doubles following consonant

〃 changes: ‘h’ and ‘f’ *kanas* to ‘b’ *kanas*; ‘k’ *kanas* to ‘g’ *kanas*; ‘t’ *kanas* to ‘d’ *kanas* (and

'*chi*' to '*ji*')

Kana Combinations

u plus small vowel = *wi, we, wo*

te plus small *i* = *ti*

fu plus small vowel = *fa, fi, fe, fo*

de plus small i = *di*

ni, shi, etc. plus small *yu* = *nyu, shyu*, etc.

de, fu plus small *yu* = *dyu, fyu*

ki, ji, etc. plus small *ya* = *kya, jya*, etc.

chi, shi, etc. plus small *yo* = *cho, sho*, etc.

chi, shi, etc. plus small *e* = *che, she*, etc.

tsu plus small *a* = *tsa*

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Oral Proficiency Interviews and Student Motivation

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Introduction

This article looks at the motivational benefits of conducting an Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI) with younger EFL students, aged 12 to 15, and especially how teach ers might approach the planning and administering of a successful OPI. My co-teacher and I became very interested in OPIs while investigating ways to provide our EFL students with distinct short-term goals for their studies.

Although at this age some students may entertain vague ideas of study abroad, for most students The EIKEN STEP test second stage, perhaps the most influential and well known oral test for younger EFL learners in Japan, contributes much more substantially to concrete student interest in their oral communication studies. We hoped that by introducing regular OPIs we could set a clear goal for all students and to some extent simulate the extrinsic motivating effects of the EIKEN test. Unlike the Eiken test however, which primarily seeks to evaluate students, our emphasis was on providing a goal through which students could build confidence and experience success in their EFL course.

Student Motivation and OPIs.

For the past five consecutive years my co-teacher and I have conducted OPIs with our students, EFL learners aged from 12 to 15, as one way to provide students with a purpose for their study regarding the spoken elements of their EFL study program. Each term the classes finish with an OPI designed to test the oral components covered in the term. For the students this represents a final evaluation, however, from a teacher perspective it is also important to have students complete the OPI with a feeling of success and

progression.

Through questionnaires and informal feedback from students after taking the OPIs we have seen a steady increase in the positive feedback. We asked students to complete short evaluation forms directly after each interview in an attempt to gauge whether students felt they were enjoying the interview process and whether it was having a positive influence on their motivation regarding their attitudes toward their study of English. In our last recorded data we found that in a group of 200 third year JHS students 88% of students indicated that they strongly agreed that they had enjoyed the process of taking the interview, while 96% indicated that after taking the interview they felt they would like to become more proficient English speakers. Furthermore, from a qualitative point of view we feel strongly that since incorporating these interviews into our curriculum on a regular basis, oral communication classes in general have improved in student focus and participation. Many educators have commented on the links between achievement and motivation. Littlejohn (2008) comments: "opportunities for learners to see what they can do are important in developing a sense of competency and purpose" (p.219). By implementing OPIs teachers can give each and every student such an opportunity to achieve well and thus gain in motivation.

That language testing provides students with considerable short term extrinsic motivation is clearly visible in the hours of effort and study students spend preparing for such tests. However, our particular aim was to give individual students positive and confidence building experiences that would bring them to our oral communication class with greater motivation and interest. We have, over the past five years constantly tested and refined the various elements of the interview to come up with a set of basic strategies for designing and carrying out the interviews successfully.

Strategies for Conducting Successful OPIs

1. Keep pressure to a minimum.
2. Gradually increase difficulty but finish at a level comfortable for the student.
3. Thorough preparation.
4. Positive body language.

To avoid unnecessary pressure on students, teachers should schedule sufficient

time to conduct the interviews. In my experience a 2-minute OPI is sufficient for younger EFL learners. As classes in Junior High are limited in time it is important that the rotation of the students through the interviews runs smoothly and efficiently. Rather than calling students up, which wastes time locating and getting them to the interview room or space, arrange for the next student to be interviewed to be ready and waiting just outside the interview room or close nearby to the interview area. This will greatly help to facilitate the process. Also, to reduce pressure on students, try to use an empty available room close to the classroom so that students feel more at ease. Many students feel very self-conscious speaking a foreign language in front of their peers and will behave nervously if forced to do so, seriously diminishing the positive effect of the process. If the class is large in numbers schedule the OPI over 2 lessons, providing other students with textbook activities or some other appropriate class work.

During the OPI itself care should be taken that the OPI increases in difficulty until the student is no longer answering questions with confidence. At this point the Interviewer should return to a level the student is comfortable with to allow the OPI to finish on a positive note. To develop a feel for when students are no longer feeling challenged but threatened by the difficulty admittedly takes plenty of practice administering the interviews, however considering you may administer 20 interviews in a 45 or 50 minute class new teachers will quickly develop a sense for when the difficulty of interviews needs to be adjusted to avoid discouraging students.

Preparation is vital to students completing the OPI successfully and leaving with a sense of satisfaction and achievement. Teachers should give out simple and thorough outlines of what is expected, well in advance and run practice interviews, with the class as a whole. As students become more familiar with the situation and challenges of taking OPIs, more responsibility can be shifted onto them to prepare for the interview individually and creatively. For example, with our first year students we ran interviews consisting of very simple question and answer routines, however by their third year students were creating original short talks with the teacher's role being to ask some follow up questions based on the short talk (see appendix 1).

When conducting the OPI teachers should greet the student with a welcoming warm smile and a friendly greeting using the student's name. I have found that by simply

using the student's name the atmosphere of the OPI is greatly improved and the student feels much more at ease. Teachers should also consider the factor of seating arrangements when conducting interviews. *The Book of Definitive Body Language* describes sitting directly opposite someone as, "defensive", "likely to argue", and "competitive". Thus it may be better to sit at a slight angle to the student to avoid these feelings of negative pressure.

Conclusion.

Providing students with a clear short-term goal and feelings of success through regular OPIs can help give focus to an EFL course of study especially for younger learners. By careful planning and implementation of Oral Proficiency Interviews teachers can also expect to see higher and more engaged participation in regular class communicative activities. I highly recommend all teachers to try out using OPIs with their classrooms following these simple guidelines, by doing so both teacher and student should finish the interview with a big smile on their face.

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Further Reading.

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Appendix 1.

Possible OPI outlines.

Example: First Year JHS Students OPI, Term 1.

Goal: Student are required to ask the teacher 5 different questions from a list of ten.

Students must initiate all questions.

Example Third-Year JHS Students OPI, Term 3.

Goal: Students talk about their plans/goals and hopes at High School next year for 1 minute and respond to 3 spontaneous and undecided questions from the teacher.