

# The Foreign Teacher's Expectations of Japanese College Freshmen

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Native English-speaking teachers are often invited to teach English Conversation to freshmen at Japanese colleges and universities. According to a recent survey (Hiroshima University, 1979: 6), 78% of the foreign teachers in Japanese colleges teach at least one language course, with 22% teaching only language courses. It is most probable that these language courses are English Conversation, or conversation courses in other languages.

After being hired, the foreign teacher is requested by the college authorities to submit a course description and the title of a textbook. In most cases, this is the end of communication. The teacher is then left to fend for himself and he must fall back on his training, experience and perception to learn what his students are capable of and what they need. He knows that his prospective students have studied English for six years and that they have passed a difficult entrance examination to gain admittance to the university. He will decide on a book; the books will arrive late so that he will be forced to teach for a few weeks without one. On the first day of class, he may ask the students their names and general questions and he may see dull stares, shocked faces, nervousness and fear as he gets faltering responses, or none at all. He will go home totally depressed, convinced that he has made a serious mistake. What has happened?

In this paper, I would like to discuss the expectations and means by which the foreign teacher judges his students' ability in English. In the course of this discussion, various sociocultural and behavioral factors bearing upon the problems the foreign teacher encounters will be brought to light. I offer no suggestions to the foreign teacher on how to solve these problems. I only ask him and his Japanese colleagues to be more cognizant of their causes.

This paper will be divided into the following four sections: (1) the training and previous experience of the teacher (2) the linguistic skills of the student (3) the communicative skills of the student (4) the classroom behavior of the students. All of these have bearing on the native speaker's expectations and, hence, judgment of the students' level and ability in English.

## The Teacher's Training and Previous Experience.

The training of English as a foreign and second language teachers at universities abroad is often idealistic, and is concerned with arguments in linguistic theory, proper sequencing, and the ultimate superiority of one teaching method over another.

One need not become a theoretical linguist in order to teach English, yet this study

forms a large part of the teacher-training programs in many universities. Dulay and Burt (1975: 23) state, "Linguistic descriptions alone are not enough either, because although they systematically describe the language to be learned, they do not tell *how* a language is actually learned."

The proper sequencing of materials is usually discussed in great detail, yet little change has taken place in the sequencing and style of textbooks to keep up with the rapid changes in linguistic and psychological theory. Teachers may read of interesting influences on the student, but not have the resources to put these into effect.

Nor can one write new courses after each discovery. New methods seem to appear monthly in the United States, each with its proponents that Method X is the only, the best, and the quickest way to learn. It would be confusing for the students to have to learn a new set of 'rules for learning' each year. Evidence also exists that learners have their own internalized learning strategies, and "it often seems that students learn despite the method and despite the materials" (Dulay and Burt, 1975: 22). The teacher needs flexibility and exposure to as many methods and theories as possible to allow him to judge what is best for each situation.

The teacher's past experience as a learner will play a large part in determining his expectations. Most foreign teachers have learned a language successfully by the audio-lingual method, with language laboratories and good sets of tapes in a co-ordinated program with small classes and at least three hours of instruction during the week. He may also have done an intensive course, perhaps four to six hours a day. He was probably an industrious, conscientious and successful student in the language he chose to study. He has also been taught that 'language is spoken' and that 'language is communication'.

The Japanese student's situation matches none of the teacher's own experience. The student may not have been successful in English. Most college freshmen have learned by the grammar-translation method. Many have never been in a language laboratory; if they have, the tapes were not necessarily co-ordinated with their books. English is seldom spoken in their class of forty or fifty. In high schools, the programs are not very well co-ordinated, being mainly cram courses for college entrance examinations. English is not elective; there is no choice. Hence, there may be little motivation. Most Japanese view language as a written entity. Few students have a need to communicate in English.

Past teaching experience will also influence the teacher's expectations. If he has taught a mixed nationality group in a tightly-controlled intensive course in the United States, there are few motivation problems and students learn quickly as they need to use English everywhere, inside and outside the classroom. This is obviously different from the situation in a foreign country. Japan is also different from countries such as India and Nigeria where English is the language of education and government. Various countries have had great exposure to people speaking foreign languages, historical connections with other languages, and borders with various languages. Japan has not.

The title of the course, English Conversation, is also very confusing to the foreign teacher. Why is it separated from reading and writing? His past professional

experience is likely to have been teaching English—all the skills. Isn't he trusted to do work in reading? How can one converse well if he isn't well-read? Hearing the name evokes salon-style conversation: can the students really be so advanced?

The teacher would like to know how this course fits into the curriculum of the college. Since few colleges offer a second-year conversation course, it seems to be the end of something. He needs to know what went before it. In most cases, there are no conversation courses in high school<sup>1</sup>. Consequently, this strange English Conversation course seems to have no direct relation to anything. The foreign teacher may ask other Japanese teachers in his college what they are teaching. They will say Pound or Shakespeare. The Japanese teachers of reading may ask the foreign teacher the meaning of a word or sentence in a particularly difficult passage of an essay. Again, the foreign teacher will be led to have high expectations of his students, due to lack of information from the college and due to his own past.

All of the expectations will be shattered on that first day of class, when the foreign teacher goes into the classroom with his own set of preconceptions of what a Japanese college freshman should know and be able to do after six years of English, a supposedly advanced student of English.

### Linguistic Skills

What are the linguistic skills which characterize the beginning or initial advanced level? A description of ability might be based on the accuracy of grammatical forms and structures, a precise command of daily and good use of intellectual vocabulary, phonemic accuracy, basic English rhythm and intonation patterns and fluency.

Criteria employed in judging oral tests as well as the content of textbooks for intermediate students will give an indication of what the foreign teacher expects his students to have mastered before college.

The Society for Testing English Proficiency in Japan gives the examiners the following criteria for judging its national STEP test. For the First Class (top) Certificate, the examinee must show the "ability to understand a moderate range of ideas and to communicate intelligibly and fluently" (STEP, 1977: 1)<sup>2</sup>. Both delivery and content are assessed. Delivery consists of pronunciation, grammar and syntax, and fluency. More importance is given to phrasing and the natural flow of speech than to the pronunciation of individual words. Grammatical mistakes "may not be overlooked. Satisfactory grades imply orderly control of the language" (p. 3). Clarity of expression, success and ease in communication are more important than speed. Content is judged by the following subjective means: persuasiveness, interest, clarity, expressiveness and the organization of ideas and information (p. 4).

This First Class level would roughly correspond to the American Foreign Service Institute's Grade 2/3, with 5 being native speaker fluency. The FSI's oral proficiency test is administered for a longer period of time (from 15 to 30 minutes, even longer at the top level) and the examiners have more control of the precise syntactic patterns, vocabulary, and topical subjects they are seeking to elicit. A Grade 3 basically means that the examinee can understand and produce the fundamental grammatical patterns,

with a minimum of error, and sufficient vocabulary to live in a country where the language is used and to function in his particular job there. A Grade 2 is similar, minus the work requirement. A Grade 1, the lowest, would consist of greetings and general tourist needs such as reserving a hotel room, ordering a meal and buying something in a shop, with a minimum of structure and vocabulary expected. Thus, a teacher might reasonably expect the equivalent of a First Class Certificate in the STEP test or a FSI Grade 2/3 in oral proficiency from his college freshmen at the beginning of the term.

Mastery of the syllabus of a textbook is another approach widely used by teachers. Definitions of mastery abound. I will take Steiner's (1975: 48) criteria for mastery as 80%, for reasons which will be explained later in this paper. I would like to examine the syllabus of *Kernel Lessons Intermediate* written by O'Neill, Kingsbury and Yeadon (1971). This book is "designed for the 'faux débutant' or post-elementary student" (p. vii) who needs further practice in the fundamentals of English so the student can use them "correctly, quickly, and as automatically as a native English speaker does" (p. viii). The grammatical structures cover tenses, presented with adverbial time indicators, ranging from the simple present, past, future, continuous present and past, present and past perfect, present and past conditionals. Active and passive voice are practiced as well as reported speech. Parts of speech include count and mass nouns, which determine the use of *some, any, a few, a little*; differences between adjectives and adverbs and the comparison of these forms; auxiliaries such as *must* and *can*; and frequent gerund and infinitive constructions. The topics covered are those of daily life: the house, work, university life, food, restaurants, transportation, shopping, sports, music, movies, emotions, bad habits, accusations, sickness, repairs, accidents, strikes, natural disasters and spacecraft.

If the student has mastered these structures and the vocabulary related to the topics at the 80% level, either generating error-free sentences 80% of the time or generating sentences with a maximum of one error all of the time, one would be prepared to put his level at high intermediate/low advanced and say he has learned the fundamentals. Are newly-admitted Japanese college freshmen at this level? A few are. Most are below it.

How far below? If the students have not mastered an intermediate level book, have they mastered a beginning level text? I have examined the beginning text, *First Things First* by L. G. Alexander (1967). I have taken out the common structures which should have been mastered, but which seem to result in the most error by freshmen. See Appendix A. I have divided them into five types of error:

1. structural ——— oral production
2. phonetic ——— oral production
3. lexical ——— oral production
4. wrong response — due to lack of knowledge of the type of answer expected
5. no response ——— due to lack of comprehension

The structures not mastered are those which are not smoothly manipulated in drills, which contain a mistake when used in conversation, and which are avoided or, for

some other reason, not used in speech at all.

The phonetic problems are most easily predicted by contrastive analysis. The full range of mistakes can be found in any pronunciation book for Japanese students. It must be noted that pronunciation affects grammar, especially in third person singular forms, possessives, noun plurals and irregular verb forms in English. The teacher cannot always be certain which these mistakes really are: phonetic or structural. All of the same mistakes also appear in writing, although perhaps in different distribution.

The lexical forms selected are those which the student has forgotten, doesn't know, or those which are replaced by a word inappropriate either in style or governed by different semantic restrictions. Words replaced by Japanese-borrowed English words and used incorrectly are included, too.

The wrong responses in the fourth category may be viewed as some sort of confusion: either the student has misunderstood the question and is, in reality, answering another question, or he has understood the question but doesn't know what type of response is appropriate.

The last category of no response can be attributed to nearly anything, but I think most of the failure to respond is the result of not knowing the key word or not hearing it in the question because the teacher spoke too quickly or the student wasn't listening. The result is what is important here—no response.

Looking at the forms in Appendix A, one can easily see that the students have not mastered the very basic fundamentals of English. The students have very little control over the correct oral production of these forms, be they structural, phonetic, or lexical. Not only is the oral linguistic performance very poor, but it is also uniformly so. Thus, the students' linguistic skills have not measured up to the teacher's expectations.

### Communicative Skills

Another set of factors according to which the foreign teacher will judge the level of his students is communicative skills, for conversation is not comprised only of linguistic ability. Here, again, the foreign teacher will have his own set of expectations, based on his own culture. It is perhaps in this realm that the foreign teacher needs to be most sensitive. Communicative skills involve the organization of ideas, personality, manner of conversation, content and topic, and the place of speech in society.

English is said to be 'logical' in that ideas are usually presented clearly at the beginning of a talk or composition, discussed, and then repeated at the end. Japanese logic differs; good Japanese discussion and composition strategy has been likened to a circular spiral—beginning with vague, seemingly disconnected ideas on the periphery, swirling inwards until ending with the main point. The end point may not be very clear, giving only an indication of feeling. Translating this style into English and using it in conversation and composition will be ineffective. The foreign teacher will not be able to know or guess what the student wants to communicate because of these differences in the organization of ideas. He will give the student a poor mark.

Barnlund (1975) did a study of the role of personality in communication. He gave

a questionnaire to Japanese and American college students with a knowledge of both cultures, asking them to select 5 adjectives out of 30 which "best describe what Americans [and later Japanese] are like in talking to each other" (p. 49). The results of both groups looking at themselves and at the other group were remarkably similar. The order of frequency was also consistent. The Japanese were viewed as "'Reserved,' 'Formal,' 'Silent,' 'Cautious,' 'Evasive,' and 'Serious' in that order" (p. 50) while Americans were viewed as "'Self-Assertive,' 'Frank,' 'Spontaneous,' 'Informal,' 'Talkative,' and 'Humorous'" (p. 54). He goes on to state:

it is difficult to avoid concluding that they are nearly exact opposites. The qualities that one society nurtures . . . are the same qualities the other society discourages. (p. 57)

How do these characteristics affect the foreign teacher's judgment in English Conversation class? Conversation consists of two or more people talking and listening to each other. If one is silent, it may be called a lecture. If a student doesn't answer questions, the teacher will think, at best, the student cannot answer the question, has not studied, or does not know the answer and, at worst, that the student is stupid.

If the student is evasive in answering, the teacher will suppose the student is not sure due to lack of study or ability. Where there are two ways to express an idea, the Japanese student will have been taught and will use the more formal; the teacher will prefer the less formal. In verbs, the students tend to use one longer word, *enter*, for example, where the teacher will expect the two-word verb, *come in*. The students' use of formal language is quite different from ordinary conversational English; the style is inappropriate and may even be archaic in some instances.

Reserved, cautious and serious people are usually poor at informal conversation in Western society. They will think too carefully about their answers before giving them. Japanese students, too. The foreign teacher has his own timing for what he thinks can be practiced and accomplished within a certain time limit, the class period. This will be overestimated because the teacher must wait, sometimes as long as a minute, a long time in the classroom, for an answer. He may think slow responses are a result of slow thinking or a student ploy—"If I don't answer, he will call on another student and I need not try." Or he may think the student lacks ability or needs much more practice.

Barnlund points out further differences in manner of conversation or conversational style. In Japanese, questions are asked so that the answer is *yes*. Direct questions are avoided and the Japanese tend to avoid direct answers, especially if *no* is the answer (1975: 135). This is inconceivable to the foreign teacher in terms of classroom practice. Must he always ask questions so that the answer will be *yes*? How can he do this when he doesn't know the answer? How can he teach oral control of the negative forms? Can he always ask indirect questions? Of course not; he would ruin the essence of English and conversation.

Japanese students, having been taught by Japanese teachers for the most part,

usually do answer *yes*, when an American would say, 'I don't know.' This is frustrating to the foreign teacher when he can clearly see that the student doesn't know or understand. If the teacher suspects the *yes* answer isn't a 'real' *yes*, he may ask further questions which the student usually cannot answer or which elicit responses which are the direct opposite, clearly showing that the answer should have been *no*. He will possibly give the student a lower grade.

Direct answers present another problem. Japanese will go to nearly any means to avoid giving a *no* answer. Barnlund did another study focusing on the expression of negative feelings. He found that "silence, avoidance of eye contact, indirect and ambiguous replies were all used to avoid expressing outright disagreement" (1975: 136). The meaning of silence to the foreign teacher has already been discussed.

Foreign teachers rely heavily on eye contact. They watch the eyes of the students for signs of comprehension, confusion, and boredom. No matter what the words are, if the eyes seem vacant, the teacher will be suspicious. He will continue questioning until he sees a glint of understanding. If the student's eyes are cast down, the teacher has no idea of the student's understanding or reaction. Japanese students tend to look down during question-answer sessions, thereby taking away one of the teacher's means of judging their understanding.

Indirect and ambiguous replies also pain the teacher who is trying to elicit responses using certain grammatical and lexical forms.

Differences in manner of conversation are also important in relation to argument. A university student is expected to be able to argue well. Westerners like argument for argument's sake. Argument and debate are often taught to develop organizational skills, logic, listening ability and quick response. To eliminate this activity from the syllabus simply because Japanese do not like to disagree is silly. It will take the teacher a lot of time to teach how to argue, and the students will not excel at it, but it is good practice of one of the conversational styles of English.

Topic and Content are also necessary to communication. One needs a topic, something to talk about. Topics change according to the person spoken to. Certain subjects are taboo in society. So which topics are appropriate to the classroom? The now-passé taboos on sex, money, politics and religion in 'polite society' in Victorian times probably still hold true in the classroom today, although softened. Japanese seem to have a very weak taboo on age as evidenced in news reports, in letters-to-the-editor sections of Japanese newspapers, and in the inevitable first day of class question, "Teacher, how old are you?" Perhaps this last question, taboo in American classrooms, is the result of misunderstanding the range of topics permitted in English. The range in English is much wider than that in Japanese.

Barnlund has done an interesting study with college students on the interrelationship between topical priorities and the target person. If the teacher is to be considered a 'stranger', which he is during the first weeks or months of class, then what are the appropriate topics to Japanese and American college students? To the Japanese, topics including opinions on communism, integration, and interests and tastes in food, music, reading, television and movies, and parties are appropriate when talking to strangers.

To the Americans, additional topics of opinions on religion, sex and social standards ; handicaps, ambitions, associates and career choice regarding studies ; the financial topics of income and needs ; pride ; body adequacy and illness may freely be discussed with strangers (Barnlund, 1975: 88). Since the range of topics available to the foreign teacher is much wider than those expected by a Japanese student, the teacher, in discussing these topics, may alienate his students and cause them to give the 'I am uncomfortable' response of silence and avoidance of eye contact. In return, the teacher will be disappointed with his students' inability to talk about these subjects.

The content of discussions and short one-to-three minute speeches is likely to be far below what the teacher expects of college students. Students will begin a discussion with, "I like X" or "I agree with X" and then give one reason why they do so. In such a homogeneous society, where according to the *Mainichi Daily News*, 95% of Japanese society views itself as middle class, it might be possible to give an indication of the agreed-upon reasons why something is good or bad, agreeable or disagreeable with just one word, one reason. However, to the teacher coming from a heterogeneous society where everyone strives to be an individual, the reasons given for liking X seem overly-simplistic, poorly-defined, lacking in content, possibly even childish. This is especially likely to be true in teaching all girl classes. Societal stereotypes of the young Japanese girl as someone who must obey her elders (and parrot their ideas and attitudes) and as someone who is pretty and charming (defined as 'always agreeing') are quite different from the stereotypes of women in Western society. To the foreign teacher, the simplistic content of the girls' answers and content of discussions will mean she is an empty-headed dingbat.

The final and perhaps most important factor affecting communicative skills is the position of speech in society. To Americans, the ability to articulate ideas and feelings is highly respected. Barnlund further illustrates this attitude :

An ability to define problems and to formulate solutions to them is a highly prized and even an indispensable social skill. Words are regarded as the principal vehicle for preserving human contact, the most sensitive and flexible means of transmitting experience. (1975: 90)

In contrast, the Japanese seem to distrust speech. Barnlund states the following:

Speech, to many Japanese, is not a highly regarded form of communication. Words are often discounted or viewed with suspicion. Talk is disparaged... Sayings such as 'By your mouth you shall perish' reflect this basic mistrust of language as a vehicle of communication. (1975: 89)

Hidetoshi Kato has put it even more bluntly, "In Japan speech is not silver or copper or brass—but scrap."<sup>3</sup>



What then are the effects of such attitudes? First, if speech is highly respected, it will be consciously taught and promoted. In the American educational system, public speaking is often a required course. Debate is studied. Neither are taught in Japanese schools. There is a contradiction in the extra-curricular English-Speaking Societies (ESS) at college which have as their central activities participation in debate contests and speech competitions. It is incomprehensible that students are expected to participate in activities in a foreign language when they have no training for them in their own language.

Secondly, the curriculum of English studies is affected. Entrance exams do not have speaking sections due to the sheer number of examinees, and seldom have listening sections. Consequently, high school teachers do not teach these skills.<sup>4</sup> Their main responsibility is to teach their students enough to pass the dreaded exams. Junior high school teachers may teach a little of the spoken language, but the students forget what they have learned during their three years in high school. The colleges seldom offer more than a one year, two-hour-a-week course.

Thirdly, attitudes towards the English Conversation teacher are also affected. Japanese colleges sometimes hire foreign teachers as 'teachers of English Conversation' only; thus making another false distinction. Although the foreign teacher makes corrections of grammar in speech, he is not allowed to teach the grammar or reading courses, supposedly because he cannot translate everything back into Japanese or use Japanese as the language of instruction. Furthermore, some universities hire foreign teachers whose doctorate is in literature and give them a teaching schedule eighty percent of which consists of English Conversation classes.<sup>5</sup> Ignoring the foreign teacher's specialty seems a relatively common occurrence, which can be highly objectionable to those who have no interest in language teaching.

Another attitude prevalent at universities is that the study of literature, or the written word, is on a higher plane than the study of speech. This snobbishness may be genuine or a psychological defense by some Japanese teachers of their own poor ability in the spoken language. Some Japanese teachers do not feel that the spoken language is within the domain of college instruction at all. I have heard "Let them go to a language school if they want to learn to speak English."

Fourthly, the attitude that speech is a low-ranking activity, and thus can easily be learned, is reflected in the impossible expectation that students will learn to speak and understand English fluently in a mere forty to sixty hours of classroom instruction, although these skills have been badly neglected during the previous six years. It is especially impossible given the large number of students in the classes. Thus, the disdain for speech has clearly affected the teaching of English at all levels of education.

These attitudes are so very different from those of the foreign teacher that he may rightfully resent being viewed as a language teaching machine (Hiroshima University, 1979: 10) and as a lesser member of the faculty. He may also feel that a lot of time and student energy have been wasted in studying English. These differences in organization, logic, content, and attitude towards speech will affect the foreign teacher's judgment of his students' ability in English as much as, or more than, their linguistic

skills.

### Classroom Behavior

An active oral-aural class should be very different from a grammar-translation class. The foreign teacher can quickly observe these differences through the behavior of his students, for they have been trained in the latter. Although well-behaved, they often have no idea of what is expected of them in an oral class. The teacher often needs to spend time in training them in and practicing the activities with which he had expected them to be well-acquainted. The areas I would like to discuss in this section include skills, repertoire of techniques, pace, the language laboratory, homework, the grading system and motivation.

In *Performing with Objectives*, Steiner lists eight skills which "are needed if one is to converse with others with some degree of fluency" (1975: 73). She suggests that the regular practice of these skills be included in the first four years of language study. Thus, a college teacher might expect freshmen to perform them well. I have listed these skills along with my own subjective estimation of Japanese students' oral performance in class in Table 1.

TABLE 1

<i>Steiner's Skills</i>	<i>Freshmen Performance</i>
answering —————	average
combining —————	poor/average
restating —————	poor
questioning —————	poor
commenting —————	poor
initiating —————	poor-average
presenting —————	average-good (with preparation at home)
—————	poor (with no preparation in class)
interacting —————	poor/average

If a student is accustomed to lectures, memorization, translation and repetition of the teacher's ideas, then he will obviously be poor in the areas of restating, questioning, commenting and initiating. Japanese students need special practice in these areas.

Each teacher has his own repertoire of techniques, his professional 'bag of tricks.' The foreign teacher was taught to introduce new lessons orally, following the order of speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Most Japanese students have been taught in a different order: introduction and explanation in Japanese, reading, translation, writing. Consequently, most students feel the intense need to have a book for a course, and to have that book open during class. It is difficult to break them of the psychological dependence on the written word.

Doing drill work is very slow. Again, books are closed. Students, having had little practice doing oral drills, are quite slow at responding and have trouble doing

substitution drills involving parts of speech, verb tenses, and singular-plural nouns. They do seem accustomed to repetition drills of simple sentences, but the longer or more complex the sentence, the more difficulty they have.

Another technique widely used overseas is role-playing. The teacher will select two students, give them a character to play, define the situation; the students are expected to invent the dialogue. Japanese students are notoriously bad at this, causing many discouraged teachers to stop using this technique. The only way I have found to use role-playing in any form is to assign it for homework. The students then have time to plan the plot, to write the dialogue using dictionaries and two heads, to memorize it and to practice it before class. When they present it, the tendency is to rely too much on memorization and the effect is not natural at all; but they enjoy doing it and usually manage to inject a great deal of humor into the situation. However, the original aim of the activity is entirely lost. The same applies to other spontaneous activities such as short arguments, interviewing 'famous' people, and short one-minute talks.

The foreign teacher must also adjust his pace, or timing, in the classroom. He had been trained to speak at a slightly slower than natural speed and to use contracted forms and to make common vowel reductions. His students expect exceedingly slow, unnatural speed, with overly-careful articulation, no contractions or vowel reductions—thus reflecting their past training. The teacher does not normally expect to have to convince the students of the efficacy of understanding English "as it is spoken." His pace is also affected by waiting for the student to consult with his friend before giving his/their answer. The foreign teacher does not like to call each student by name, especially during fast-paced lessons, preferring to rely on eye contact. If the students look down, there is a problem. It may be impolite not to call the student by name, but it wastes time and slows down the class. Other students will not listen to the question if the teacher says, "Miss Suzuki, what is...?" They will tune out and only wake up when they hear their names called. Students do not listen to other students' answers. This is evident when doing a quick practice in reported speech. One of my former language teachers said that the pace of a language class should be such that the students and teacher alike heave a collective sigh of relief or tiredness at the end of class.

The foreign teacher has also been trained in the use of the language laboratory and views it as a useful pedagogical aid, especially when classes are large. English conversation classes range from twenty-five to ninety students, with the average being from forty to fifty. The foreign teacher has probably taught classes of from ten to twenty students. Therefore, he would like to use the laboratory to give all the students more active practice. Some universities, however, do not want the teacher to use the lab because they feel the student gets enough listening practice in the classroom, disregarding the fact that the students get more speaking practice in the language lab.

Although tape recorders are so prevalent here, Japanese students must be very carefully and explicitly trained in their operation in the lab. Students seem to think that tapes are for listening only. They must be taught what to do: how to listen

actively, how to respond to four-part drills, how to do certain types of exercises, the importance of self-correction, and the importance of replaying the tape. This also wastes valuable time.

Attitudes towards homework differ. When the teacher says, "Study this for tomorrow," he means, "Study this until you have mastered it orally and can manipulate it in its various forms." Students either misunderstand this implication or do not study at all. So the teacher will mark down the student because he has not done his homework. Yet written, or what the student considers 'real', homework will usually be done and handed in.

The grading system and the giving of final grades also reflect different attitudes. Japanese students are very exam-oriented. They expect a formal, written exam at the end of the semester, and they tend to think this one exam grade is the only important grade. Yet, foreign teachers give much credit to class work, how the student performs in class. He expects lively class participation.

The 60% line between pass and fail has been drummed into the students' minds. Yet, what does it mean if one can perform 60% of a certain level of language? And which 60% is it? And should language grades be curved? Steiner, throughout *Performing With Objectives* (1975), suggests breaking language activities into small pieces, giving clear directions and explanations of performance goals, and specific criteria. The criteria most often used by her are 4 out of 5, 80% correct, and 3 mechanical mistakes for an in-class paragraph or composition without dictionaries. Although 80% is perhaps too high for an end-of-semester pass line, it would be useful in daily classroom activities as it would raise the students' goals of mastery and perhaps encourage the students to work harder.

The adherence to 60% by the college would be beneficial. Some colleges allow the students to take one re-examination; others allow re-examinations, *ad infinitum*, until the student passes. This system is the least admired by foreign teachers who might be strongly encouraged by the authorities to pass students, no matter how non-existent the student's ability. Foreign teachers have voiced the following criticism:

The most serious shortcoming of higher education in Japan is the reluctance of the various institutions to dismiss (flunk out, wash out) students who are not applying themselves and who are not progressing in their studies. (Hiroshima University, 1970: 10)

The teachers further criticize the students who "expect that the university will see to it that they complete their four years of college, rather than make it their personal responsibility" (Hiroshima University, 1979: 10). This idea of personal responsibility is very important and seems to be present in many students' thinking. Sometimes a weak student will write "I'm sorry" at the end of the test. They do not write "I didn't study" or "I never came to class" which would show some personal responsibility. What do they expect when they write this—forgiveness and a passing grade? Then if a student does fail, he may telephone the teacher and try to absolve himself with a

self-righteous "I was never absent and I gave you all the written homework." But this student never answered in class, daydreamed and handed in careless, sloppy homework. This is not important to the student; it is important to the foreign teacher. Consistently good classwork, improvement in performance, acceptable written homework, passing marks on various tests and a certain level of mastery are the criteria most teachers use. It is the student's responsibility to judge how much time he needs to spend in order to achieve these results.

I will touch only briefly upon the last area, motivation, which plays an extremely important role in language learning. In the opinion survey, foreign teachers complained that "the present 'juken' or entrance exam system results in a lot of mentally exhausted (but intelligent) 18-year-olds in the 'elite schools'" (Hiroshima University, 1979: 9). Another common remark is the following, "I know of no other country where 'motivation' is such a problem at the university level as it is in Japan" (1979: 10). While it is true that some Japanese students view the university as a place for relaxation and recreation and not as a place for earnest study, and many are convinced that they will never be able to communicate in English because it is too difficult, it is nevertheless the teacher's responsibility to motivate the students by any means available and to teach as well as he can, given the various sociocultural differences. It is his job to somehow defossilize his students' beginning level English. How the task is to be done is left to the teacher.

To reiterate, the foreign teacher's expectations in English Conversation class have been discussed in relation to the teacher himself, to linguistic skills, to communicative skills and to classroom behavior. Conditions at Japanese colleges and attitudes of the students, teachers and administration are greatly different from those to which the foreign teacher is accustomed. If the foreign teacher follows his professional conscience, he will not allow himself to get bogged down in the 'Japanese will never learn English' syndrome, and may possibly succeed against, what seem to him to be, great odds.

## APPENDIX A

### 1. Structural Examples

#### *verbs*

What is he doing?

like/want distinction: I like coffee/ I want a cup of coffee (now)

forms of past tense: Did they go?

irregular past forms

#### *nouns*

possessives: It's Stella's. Whose handbag is it?

plurals: Are your friends tourists, too?

mass/count

#### *adjectives*

demonstratives: Are these your books?

comparison: tall, taller, tallest; bad, worse, worst;

much (many), more, the most; little, less,; the least; few, fewer, fewest

### *adverbs*

the day after tomorrow/the day before yesterday/the night before last/tomorrow night  
\_\_\_\_\_ago

this morning

yet/already (question and answer alteration)

ever/  $\phi$  (question and answer alteration)

comparison

### *pronouns*

one/ones: the red one/ This one?/ Which one?

a pair of shoes  $\rightarrow$  they

### *articles*

with count/mass nouns

### *prepositions*

on the right/left

in the middle

on Monday

in January

on January first

### *word order*

here is my book

here you are

do this for me

Give me a book, please.

put it on

ask him the way to \_\_\_\_\_

Can you tell me the way to \_\_\_\_\_

I want you to do it.

*style* (optional rules)

deletion: the pens on the table

substitution: give them to her

## **2. Phonetic Examples**

### *consonants*

correct sound		replaced with
/g/	$\rightarrow$ /k/	bag (in final position)
/v/	$\rightarrow$ /b/	vase
/f/	$\rightarrow$ / $\phi$ /	fat
/ $\theta$ /	$\rightarrow$ /s/	thin
/ $\delta$ /	$\rightarrow$ /d/	the bag
/z/	$\rightarrow$ /s/	peas
/s/	$\rightarrow$ / $\text{ʃ}$ /	see, sit (before /iy/ and /I/)
/j/	$\rightarrow$ / $\text{z}$ /	zoo
/n/	$\rightarrow$ /m/	run
/n/	$\rightarrow$ /ŋ/	ran
/ŋ/	$\rightarrow$ /n/	rang
/r/	$\rightarrow$ /l/	bring, read
/ər/	$\rightarrow$ /a/	shirt, writer

### *vowels*

production of lax vowels /I/, / $\epsilon$ /, /U/

confusion between / $\epsilon$ /~/ $\text{æ}$ /~/ $\text{a}$ /~/ $\text{ɔ}$ /

*syllable structure and rhythm and stress*

vowel added to every final C and between C's in clusters, speed of unstressed syllables, quality of unstressed syllables' vowels not weakened to /ə/

### 3. Lexical Items

#### *nouns*

- a. adjectives of nationality: French, Greek, German, Spanish
- b. names of countries
- c. jobs: typist, mechanic, barber
- d. addresses
- e. numbers: 33,221—521,672—1,234,567—45,621,019
- f. house: dressing-table, armchair, refrigerator, wardrobe, tap/faucet, stove/oven, bookcase, cupboard
- g. sicknesses: flu, measles, mumps
- h. geography: hill (confusion with mountain), banks (of a river)
- i. holiday/vacation/day off
- j. clothes: dress, blouse
- k. count/mass counters: a bar of soap, half a pound/kilo of sugar, a loaf of bread
- l. miscellaneous words: a meal, installments, deposit, youth hostel, X-ray, garage, driver's license, briefcase, clock, hammer, kettle, teapot, glue, front door, office, dairy, the grocer's.

#### *adjectives*

miscellaneous: thin, lazy, light (vs. heavy), blunt (vs. sharp), tidy/untidy, cool, mild (climate), rich (food), awful, round-trip (or return) ticket

#### *time words*

at noon

this morning, this afternoon

#### *adverbs*

hurriedly, thirstily, warmly

#### *verbs*

one word: dust, empty, shave, come/go, boil, like/want, retire, slip

two-word: fall down, turn on/turn off, put on/take off, run after, wait for, sit beside (next to), listen to, live at number, live on street, feel/look adjective, lean out of, come in, belong to

#### *idioms or phrases*

full of, clock is fast/slow, next door to, make the bed, do my homework, the sun rises/sets, stay at home, go to bed, watch television, on foot, in bed, have (the) flu, have a temperature, take medicine, make noise, stay at a hotel, stay at home, have a good time, pack a suitcase, for sale, on sale, in the country

### 4. Wrong Response

Q. How do you do?

A. How do you do. → Fine.

Q. What is it like?

A. It's big. → I like it.

Q. Have you ever been to Kyoto?

A. Yes, I have. → Yes, I have ever. /I have ever been to Kyoto.

### 5. No response

What make (brand) is it?

What's his job?

What's the matter?

What's the climate of \_\_\_\_\_ ?  
 Where did you stay ?  
 What about \_\_\_\_\_ ?  
 Close (shut) the door, please. → no physical response

Nice to see you.  
 Nice to see you, too. →  $\phi$

## NOTES

1. Some high schools may hire a part-time teacher for one 50 minute class period a week : but the school views it rather as a 'frill' and Japanese colleagues are seldom willing to try to give the oral class a place in their curriculum ; it remains a separate class, related to nothing. Some Japanese teachers encourage the foreign teacher to play games or to sing songs in these classes. Whereas these can be useful language-teaching techniques, the teachers didn't mean it in that way.
2. This is taken from the STEP *Information for Examiners* which is distributed to the judges before each of the examination sessions. Since I am not sure how secret this information is considered to be, I have use an old information booklet from 1977 ; the more recent information booklet is not much more explicit.
3. This may possibly be a translation of, or a reference to, a quotation attributed to Kukai, or Kobo Daishi. The quotation was in Barnlund (1975) who attributed it to Hidetoshi Kato, "Mutual Images: Japan and the United States Look at Each Other." Paper presented at the Conference on Intercultural Communication. International Christian University, 1972.
4. From discussions with high school teachers.
5. From discussions with foreign teachers, particularly those teaching at national universities.

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## The Foreign Teacher's Expectations of Japanese College Freshmen

Cyndee Seton

A number of foreign teachers are engaged in teaching English Conversation to freshmen at Japanese colleges and universities. This paper discusses some of the expectations the foreign teacher has and the means by which he judges his students' oral ability in English. The training and previous experience of the teacher, the linguistic skills of the students, the communicative skills of the students and the classroom behavior of the students are discussed in relation to expectations. Various sociocultural and behavioral factors bearing upon the problems the foreign teacher encounters are brought to light. No solution to these problems is given; the writer only asks the foreign teacher and his Japanese colleagues to be more cognizant of the causes and problems involved.