

**THE EFFICACY OF GRAMMAR  
INSTRUCTION IN EFL  
CLASSES IN JAPAN**

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# Chapter 1 A possible correlation between grammar and proficiency

## 1.1 Background: the plight of English education in Japan today

One of the main reasons Japanese students study English is to pass college entrance exams. Another is to acquire skills to communicate with people from different countries. The emphasis on college entrance exams has always outweighed other reasons that require communicative skills. But over the last few decades, a cry for better communication skills has been ever greater. “Although we study English for all of ten years we still cannot speak it.” This is a phrase often heard in Japan. This is probably the summary of English education most often repeated by students and teachers and parents over the last two decades. However, this phrase is both misleading and true at the same time. It has implications for several aspects of foreign language learning and teaching in Japan. First of all who are *we*? And do *we* really study English for ten years? *We* implies average college graduates who spent most of their school years in Japan. The fact is that we don’t study English for ten years. We may be in English classes for a total of ten years if we are English majors in college, but if not, very few of us can say we have studied English for ten years by the time we graduate from college. We may be required to sign up for English classes for the first two years of college but that does not add up to studying English for ten years.

Let’s look at this system from junior high school up. Japanese students usually start learning English when they enter middle school, that is, when they are thirteen. They have three classes of English a week. Each class is fifty minutes. Unfortunately, not all of these fifty minutes is devoted to learning English. The teacher has to calm down the class before s/he successfully gets the students to concentrate on the English lesson. S/he may have to tell a joke or two in Japanese to wake up some sleeping

students. There are holidays and spring, summer and winter breaks. So the total hours of English classes a year is roughly  $2.5 \text{ hours /week} \times 36 \text{ weeks} = 90 \text{ hours}$ .

By the time the students graduate from high school, they have spent roughly 540 hours studying English at school. It may seem a lot, but come to think of an average two-year-old beginning to produce a few words and short phrases, the readers should realize that's not much at all. An average baby is awake for about twelve hours during his first years, ([http://us.pampers.com/en\\_US/content/type/101/contentId/2363.do](http://us.pampers.com/en_US/content/type/101/contentId/2363.do)), while perhaps hearing their mother tongue half that time in the second year.

By the time a two-year-old in an English speaking country produces the first phrases, s/he has been exposed to listening to their mother tongue perhaps for an average of 2200 hours.

Of course we can not simply compare the hours put in in native language acquisition with those spent on L2 (second language) learning, but we can at least see very little time is spent on English learning in Japan.

The two-year-old toddlers begin to speak simple two-word-sentences after being exposed to spoken English for 2000<sup>+</sup> hours. How much do you think they improve in three months' time? Not much. They pick up new words and phrases very quickly, but the sentences are mostly incomplete and often ungrammatical. But this is exactly how much Japanese students get to learn English while in school; a total of 540 hours, that is, three months, that is an equivalent to the amount of time English speaking toddlers are exposed to their mother tongue if they are exposed to the language for six hours a day.

One may argue that acquiring your native language is one thing and learning a foreign language at the age of thirteen is quite another. In fact this is right on the mark. Mixing these two notions of L1 (first language) learning and EFL (English as a foreign language) is the most serious mistake made over the years by a lot of English education professionals in Japan, including immersion program supporters and communicative approach advocates. This is a crucial area where we have failed in English education.

Language professionals should be well aware that the key to successful EFL is explicit grammar instruction. This is where L1 acquisition and L2 learning differs. Another aspect of English learning we should not be ignorant of is the fact that most of the students are learning English in order to pass university entrance exams, not

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for communicative purposes.

In order to improve the dire language-learning situation, Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) recently made drastic changes in their education policy. They announced in their press releases of 2002 that they would develop a strategic plan to cultivate “Japanese With English Abilities”. Their objectives are as follows.

(<http://www.mext.go.jp/english/news/2002/07/020901.htm>)

With the progress of globalization in the economy and in society, it is essential that our children acquire communication skills in English, which has become a common international language, in order for living in the 21st century. This has become an extremely important issue both in terms of the future of our children and the further development of Japan as a nation.

At present, though, the English-speaking abilities of a large percentage of the population are inadequate, and this imposes restrictions on exchanges with foreigners and creates occasions when the ideas and opinions of Japanese people are not appropriately evaluated. However, it is not possible to state that Japanese people have sufficient ability to express their opinions based on a firm grasp of their own language.

Accordingly, we have formulated a strategy to cultivate “Japanese with English abilities” in a concrete action plan with the aim of drastically improving the English education of Japanese people. In addition, we aim to make improvements to Japanese-language education.

Although MEXT expressed determination to improve the situation, it has made a concrete move contradicting their claim, rendering their renewed strategy totally unrealistic.

In 1970 public schools offered five hours of English a week, but now they have been reduced to three or less, starting in 2000. Many teachers feel forced to rush to finish the textbook. As English teachers are required to teach every detail in a textbook, they often end up unable to take their students’ individual needs into consideration and feel frustrated.

In light of MEXT's claim that they would do anything to promote competent English communicators, a second decision, to cut back on the compulsory vocabulary in middle school, seems contradictory. According to the new English education policy guidelines published by MEXT, the number of words middle school students were required to learn in three years dropped from 507 to 100. This is a drastic change, not toward higher competence but more relaxed study behaviors prompted by "pressure-free" education policy. This pressure-free education policy has created much controversy and suffered harsh criticism from all parts of the general public.

On April 22, 2005, one of the high school students had a chance to talk to MEXT official at one of the conferences sponsored by the Yomiuri Newspaper. The student complained that the "pressure-free" policy rendered his peers less competent in all the important academic subjects compared with the older students who were not affected by the infamous policy. To his complaint, the official was reported saying the "pressure free" education was a wrong move and that the MEXT should have made sure that every student in Japan receives high-level education without going to "juku" (a cram school) (*Yomiuri Shimbun*, April 23, 2005). This is totally unrealistic, because during my thirty five years' career in EFL teaching in Japan, I have met a very few students who made it to a state university or a prestigious private college without the support of juku.

## **1.2 The purpose of this dissertation: To emphasize grammar teaching is vital in foreign language learning**

The purpose of this dissertation is to emphasize that grammar teaching is vital in foreign language learning and that recent de-emphasis on this has been at the root of many of the problems discussed in section 1.

Before moving on I would like to make sure what I mean by grammar in this dissertation. By grammar, I mean what EFL teachers not only in Japan but in other countries know as grammar. It is practical English grammar taught in EFL classes all over the world. Among many of the best-sellers are *English Grammar* (Azar, 1999), *Practical English Usage* (Swan, 2005) and *English Grammar in Use* (Murphy, 1997). I do not mean works based on more current theories of grammar such as Transformational Grammar or Head Driven Phrase Structure Grammar.

For example:

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1. What the parts of speech are.
2. What the definitions and functions of verb, noun, adjective, adverb, participle, gerund, infinitive, relative pronoun, and others are.
3. Statements such as: Why, for example, sentences such as *The in front of the house car red was fix my father* and *I no English speak* are wrong.
4. Statements such as: A gerund follows such verbs as *enjoy, finish, avoid*, but verbs such as *decide, expect, pretend, want* are followed by an infinitive.
5. One must use a plural form to express plural countable nouns and the verb that follows must agree.
6. Time phrases indicating a certain past period of time such as *yesterday, last year, in 1950* are not to be used in the same clause where a present perfect tense is used.
7. A relative pronoun *whose* cannot be omitted.

There are many more points of similar nature in what EFL teachers call grammar. More detailed examples of what is defined as grammar in this dissertation are found in section 7.2.2. In that section, the way native speakers and Japanese teachers answered grammar questions often asked in EFL classes are shown. One example from section 7.2.2. is why *This is the movie that we saw it last week* is grammatically unacceptable. Two Japanese EFL teachers' answers are:

1. *It* is unnecessary. This sentence is a combination of two sentences.

- a) This is the movie.

- b) We saw it (the movie) last week.

Step 1. Change the object of the sentence (b) to a relative pronoun.

(*which*, or *that*)

Step 2. Combine the two sentences, placing the relative pronoun as close to its antecedent as possible.

Step 3. Don't add an extra element to repeat the relative pronoun.

In other words, omit it.



2. You don't need *it*. First try to compose two separate sentences out of (3).

You get (a) This is the movie. (b) We saw it last week. Look for a noun which is repeated in both sentences. You will find *the movie* and *it* are the same thing. Change the pronoun to a relative, *which* or *that*. *the movie* is called an antecedent. Move the relative pronoun *that* to follow the antecedent *the movie*. Move the rest of the sentence (b) to follow that relative pronoun. The key is not to repeat the same element when the sentences are combined.

This is what I call grammar in this dissertation.

Unlike L1 acquisition, L2 has to be taught. Outside a community where a L1 is spoken as a native language, without being taught, you don't learn to speak, read, and write a foreign language. You may be able to exchange simple greetings and express emotions using short phrases, but without a good grasp of sentence construction, you most likely end up producing sentences and utterances that at best mislead listeners. It is such an obvious fact but many fail to see the truth. There are researches who claim that grammar instruction is unnecessary, even harmful in EFL classrooms (Rossell,1994; Krashen,1993,2004). These researchers blame the unsuccessful language teaching on grammar instruction in class.

During my career as an EFL instructor both at juku and college, I have always had an impression that those with good grammar do well in English proficiency tests and entrance exams. They write better and their reading ability is more accurate. When they speak the utterances are in more complete sentences with fewer grammatical errors. Their listening performance is often superior. Students can handle lower levels of English proficiency tests such as The Eiken levels 5 and 4, even 3 by mere memorization, but when it comes to higher levels or college entrance exams, those relying on their memory alone often fail. Grammar always seemed to play a vital part in learning English in Japan.

Over the last two decades the traditional grammar translation method has often been the target of criticism, but as far as I have observed, those students who study English as a school subject and do a lot of grammar translation have turned out to be "Japanese With English Abilities" later. It can be safely said that those who

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didn't study much grammar rarely turn out to be "Japanese With English Abilities" as MEXT wishes.

Since these are my personal observations, I needed some concrete data to support my impression. This led me to do some experiments to see if what I had observed was valid. It turned out that my observation was to a great extent true. The research and its results are presented in Chapters 5 and 6.

Thus, in this dissertation, I challenge the claim of the L2 experts and show that grammar instruction, whether in an isolated item or in contexts, plays an important role in students' English acquisition.

### 1.2.1 Demonstration 1: To show that competent speakers (the Eiken 2nd grade holders) are better in grammar than those without

Not only MEXT but also the Japanese general public are very keen on the scores of English proficiency tests, such as the Eiken, an abbreviation of Jitsuyo Eigo Ginou Kentei, the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) and the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC). All these test makers and the authorities say these tests are for communicative English. They are used to measure students' practical knowledge and understanding of English. They never openly say they need grammar. There are expressions such as practical usage, idioms, and communicative approach in their handbooks, but not a word of grammar is found in the preface of the book by Nihon Eigo Kyouiku Kyokai (*Step test*, 1998).

On the other hand, Japanese instructors of English both in high school and college have been well aware that grammar plays an important role in these tests. Some evidence can be gathered from the fact that out of ten books on the Eiken published by one of the major publishers, five featured in English grammar for the Eiken. Although the Eiken books don't openly say test-takers need grammar, we know they do. Nagata, who has written a number of books and exercises for the Eiken, TOEFL, and TOEIC, says checking your grammar knowledge along with vocabulary is an absolute must in getting high scores in English proficiency tests. (Nagata, 2004, chapter 4). Additionally composition would be impossible without knowing the sentence order rules. For English compositions no matter what type they may be, a good grasp of grammar and sentence structure knowledge are vital. (Ichimura, 2003).

In Chapter 4, the correlation between the student's grammar skills and the Eiken

scores is shown. The test subjects had been controlled before they were given the tests. They were given questionnaires to confirm:

1. that they hadn't spent more than 3 months in an English speaking country.
2. that they didn't have an English-speaking member in their family.
3. that they weren't exposed to early English education.
4. that they weren't involved in English immersion programs.
5. that they were between the ages of 17 and 21.
6. that they had studied English for an average of 6 to 8 years.
7. whether they had passed the Eiken 2nd level or not.
8. that they had not lived with an English-speaking roommate.

The subjects were given three types of tests. One is an error finding test (Test 1) and another is composition (Test 2), and in the third, the test takers are asked to describe the semantic difference between similar looking sentences (Test 3). After analyzing the results it became clear that there is an obvious relation between grammar knowledge of the test takers and their scores. The more knowledgeable in grammar they are, the higher the scores.

### **1.2.2 Demonstration 2: To show other English proficiency tests and college entrance exams require grammar recognition**

There are other English proficiency tests besides the Eiken, such as TOEFL and TOEIC. Although they ask a test taker's vocabulary and sentence skimming abilities, they too require grammar. Especially the error hunting part of the test demands a strong grammar skill to discern a good sentence from a bad one.

A few simple examples can be seen in the following sentences. (ECC, 2004, Nando) Test takers are supposed to find errors, if any.

Sample sentence 1: I can sympathy with you because I know how hard it is to work with them.

Test takers should know that *sympathy* is a noun. The sentence requires the verb *sympathize*. What would you call this skill, if you didn't say it's grammar? Could they

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memorize all this without knowing how to differentiate verbs from nouns? Wouldn't they have to know that a root form of the verb must follow an auxiliary verb *can*?

Sample sentence 2: Many European engineers and scientists have attracted to the United States by the promise of higher salaries.

The subject of the sentence is *Many European engineers and scientists*. They have been attracted to the US. The sentence has to be in a passive voice. It would be impossible for test takers to find this error, if they didn't know the distinction between passive and active voices.

Sample sentence 3: One of the senior managers asked why were there so few seats in the reception area.

This is an indirect question. In an indirect question here, a subject-verb inversion occurs. This simple grammar rule is the key to finding the error. But without knowing this basic grammar, test takers would be at a loss.

Here is another one from TOEFL preparation material (Ikuki, 2003, Nanundo).

Sample sentence 4: The citizens of that country do not even appreciate it their freedom, which they simply take for granted.

The verb *appreciate* takes only one object. The original sentence has two objects *it* and *their freedom*. Test takers should drop the first object *it* to make a correct sentence.

The students who have relied a lot on memorization may very well be stuck in this one, because they often confuse a simple, often used expression, *I appreciate it* with this sample sentence. This is where grammar comes in. Little learning without grammar clarification is a dangerous thing. In order to spot the error, test takers have to be able to identify the error by reasoning.

Some insist that college examinations are changing and they don't require as much grammar and translation skills as before.

Time and time again it has been shown that university entrance exams do not demand nor focus extensively on English-to-Japanese sentence translation or grammar skills....

This is a vital reading skill and, again, falls outside the sentential and atomistic (word-by-word, item-by-item) approach that yakudoku instruction usually entails.... the questions demand a variety of skills: holistic

reading, sequencing, reading between the lines, paraphrasing, interpreting and making inferences.... In conclusion, ...The skills required correspond to what most highly regarded reading textbooks and teachers demand, especially in terms of meaning-based reading and holistic comprehension.... The irony is that, despite some high-school teachers' belief that teaching students yakudoku will enable them to pass the entrance exams, such an approach may actually hinder the students' chances (Guest, 2004).

Guest doesn't seem to be aware what is going on at yobiko, a type of prep-school where students actually learn what they need to know to go to a prestigious universities. There is practically no yobiko where grammar is not a regular class in their English course. Instructors there know how vital grammar in reading is.

In school English classes, students often consult dictionaries and find the translation for the words they don't know and make up their own sentences in Japanese not really knowing how the sentence can be grammatically analyzed. They would get nowhere. They have to know the sentence structures to see what the sentence really means (Ito, 1984).

Ito, famous nation-wide as an expert yobiko instructor shows an example. When students were shown the sentence *To train dogs, it is necessary to be wiser than dogs*, three out of ten students didn't realize train was a verb. They thought it was a noun, one of the means of transportation, as in *I went to Tokyo by train*. Such poor grammar students are unlikely to be successful in college entrance exams. They are also unlikely to become "Japanese with English Ability".

### **1.2.3 Demonstration 3: To show that the communicative approach doesn't work, nor does Krashen's free reading**

In spite of all the applause for the less grammar movement, I have been skeptical about Krashen's alternative "free reading" scheme. Krashen claims that exposing the second language learners, young and old, to as many reading material possible is the best way to help them acquire the target language. Krashen and Terrell call it the Natural Approach (Krashen & Terrell, 1983; Terrell et al, 1997). I have always had a negative impression of his "free reading". But since my view can be dismissed as a mere subjective impression, I need to show by concrete evidence if his method actually

## 1.2. THE PURPOSE OF THIS DISSERTATION: TO EMPHASIZE GRAMMAR TEACHING IS VI

yields the positive results in learning English, which is structurally very different from Japanese.

In order to establish concrete data, I designed a research program. I taught three classes of college girls differently; one with explicit grammar instruction and exercise to reinforce and internalize the ideas but with very little reading, another with ample reading without grammar instruction, and the third with both grammar and reading, a method I have informally used over several years. The results are shown in Chapter 5. It became clear that teaching English to Japanese students without grammar instruction is fruitless.

Krashen (2005) also uses Japanese college girls as research subjects. His aim is to see whether they could increase the power of reading by adding more input or correction. He and his co-author conclude that there is no obvious effect of adding additional output in English or output with correction. Reading alone produces the same results, and is far more time-efficient. This result is consistent with the input hypothesis, but inconsistent with output and instruction hypotheses.

In my opinion, Krashen is not really qualified to write an academic paper on Japanese students because he has never taught English to Japanese students. He doesn't know how Japanese students learn and how much grammar instruction they had already received before entering college. He doesn't take into account the fact that many subjects he used in his research are already grammar conscious.

Another piece of evidence that shows Krashen is not competent to write a paper on Japanese-English teaching in the first place is the fact he uses the following passage as support for his paper.

A recent confirmation is Tsang (1996), who reported that EFL students in an English-medium school in Hong Kong who engaged in self-selected reading for 24 weeks made significant gains in writing (overall impression, content, and language use), but those who did extra writing did not (Krashen, Mason, 2005).

The passage above shows how little Krashen knows about Japan's English education. It's totally different from that of Hong Kong, which had been under the British rule until 1997 and where English has been their official language. These two groups,

namely Krashen's college students and Tsang's EFL students, cannot be compared on the same basis.

Therefore, he is mixing the first language acquisition and second language acquisition and foreign language learning, which are three different things and thus should be dealt with in different manners with different goals and aims. It may be true that explicit grammar instruction is not necessary when we acquire our mother tongue, but learning a foreign language after the mother tongue has already been acquired is a different thing.

Krashen's claim also seems to suggest that the target language learners naturally and easily pick up the diversified meanings of such idiomatic phrases as *have to*, *have got*, *have got to*, *got*, without being given a specific grammar instruction in their mother tongue. He claims a lot of "free reading" helps students see the differences in contexts. It sounded implausible to me. I needed to see if it works as he says. So in order to see the validity of his claim, an experiment has been carried out, and the results are presented in Chapter 8.

### 1.3 The role of grammar in L2

#### 1.3.1 Listening without grammar

Many people seem to believe that listening performance doesn't require grammar. But is it really so? I very much doubt it. Language learners in general say they would like to learn how to understand the spoken target language. A substantial number of learners seem to have difficulty in acquiring this listening skill. There are a lot of plausible suggestions such as "1000 hours of listening will help you become an excellent listener" (ALC, 1997) or "Just listen, don't study, and you will hear like a native" (Kim, 2001). Books on listening strategy are among the best sellers. But other researchers say just listening away at the spoken chunks of sentences doesn't help you improve your listening skills (Matsui, 2003). This dissertation shows that listening need grammar. Listening without grammar leads you nowhere. Building your vocabulary is one of the most important aspects in improving your listening skills, but my experiment on listening (Chapter 8) shows grammar also plays an important role in understanding spoken English and improving your listening.

Toddlers who just begin to talk, just by listening, learn their mother language and try to imitate and produce sentences and phrases that sound close to the original but

the latter can carry completely different, often funny and amusing meanings. One such example is that little children sometimes say *Sour you* when they try to imitate *So are you*. They often think there is such expression as *the smorning*, when in fact it's *this morning*. Similar cases can be observed in EFL classrooms in Japan. When students are asked to write down a chunk of sentences they thought they heard, they write all kinds of sentences. Those with poor grammar often write ungrammatical sentences that often just don't make sense.

Here are a few examples: The sentences in parentheses are correct.

I'm so many to choose from. (I've so many to choose from) I think of give them a call. (I think I'll give them a call) How got a happen? (How'd that happen?) I hear is really hard. (I hear he's really hard)

Those with good grammar make fewer of these errors. It is easy to assume you can't hear what you don't know. When you hear something unfamiliar or something you haven't yet learned, you change what you thought you heard to something you already knew, even if it doesn't make sense or makes implausible sense. You usually can't put the simply memorized phrase to practical use, either. For example *What's this?* and *I don't know* are relatively easy and very common and useful phrases. In Communicative Functional classrooms, these phrases are probably some of the first ones to appear. In Unit 4 of *New Horizon*, a MEXT approved English textbook for 7th graders, the following dialogue is included.

Mark: What's this? Demi; I don't know. Is it an animal?

There is an explanation for the sentence *What's this?* The textbook says that in everyday talk, *What's this?* is used more often than *What is this?* It doesn't say that 's is an abbreviation of the be-verb *is* and has to be changed to either *am* or *are* as the subject of the sentence varies. The same thing can be said about the sentence *I don't know*. It is considered a better option to memorize it as a set phrase and that's fine for total beginners or very young children. But the learners would not be able to use it in different contexts without knowing the sentence construction. They usually can't say *We don't know*, or *she doesn't know* even when there are more than two of us or a third party who *don't know*.



### 1.3.2 Reading without grammar

Since grammar translation has been criticized harshly in and outside of school over the last two decades, English teachers have had to find something else to go with. A lot of them jumped on the bandwagon of “free reading” or “extensive reading”. This trend has been further strengthened by an ever increasing number of native English speaker instructors who came under the government sponsored JET Program that started in 1987. Since that program was implemented, more and more native speaker instructors began coming. Because they are not keen on teaching grammar, the vast majority have never studied it. They began to insist students didn’t need grammar to learn English. The most serious problem is that instructors, most of whom are native speakers, often regard L1 learning the same as L2 acquisition.

Hillocks and others claim as follows.

The most common reason for teaching grammar as a system for analyzing and labeling sentences has been to accomplish some practical aim or aims, typically the improvement of writing. For decades, however, research has demonstrated that the teaching of grammar rarely accomplishes such practical goals. Relatively few students learn grammar well, fewer retain it, and still fewer transfer the grammar they have learned to improving or editing their writing (Hillocks, 1986).

None of the studies reviewed for the present report provides any support for teaching grammar as a means of improving composition skills. If schools insist upon teaching the identification of parts of speech, the parsing or diagramming of sentences, or other concepts of traditional grammar (as many still do), they cannot defend it as a means of improving the quality of writing (Hillocks, 1986).

For most students, the systematic study of grammar is not even particularly helpful in avoiding or correcting errors (Elley et al., 1976; McQuade, 1980; Hillocks, 1986).

How little they know English grammar is evident in my MA dissertation. Their claim of grammar not being necessary is absurd, but no one really voiced counter opinions but simply allowed this non-grammar trend to prevail. Even MEXT began to cut back on grammar instructions in an attempt to improve the situation. Their aim

was to replace grammar instructions with more communicative materials to produce “Japanese with English Abilities”.

With this policy in the mainstream, students were given English materials to read without much grammar teaching. To supplement this lack of grammar, alarmed teachers had the students buy extra grammar instruction books beside the MEXT approved textbooks. But this was only allowed in private schools, and thus the students in public schools had no choice but rely on “juku” cram schools for help. The statistics shows that 86.7% of 9<sup>th</sup> graders went to juku in 1991 (<http://homepage3.nifty.com/kashikoi/kiso.htm>).

A TESOL professional insists, “grammar correction is useless and can even be harmful” (Truscott.1999). This dissertation totally disagrees with his claim. I would imagine over-correction may yield negative effects on the students. Since the circumstances under which teachers and students work vary, there can be situations where correction may not serve its purpose. But how can students learn to read, write and speak without being corrected? It’s obvious that correction is needed. Even native speakers are sometimes corrected in writing and speaking their native language, especially when they are in their learning stage. So why should non-native learners not be corrected when they are learning a foreign language?.

In order to prove my point, I did an experiment on reading skills and the results are given in Chapter 5. The students are given a reading materials and after reading it, they are asked to mark T for true or F for false on each sentence given at the end of the story. Those who were given explicit grammar instruction made fewer errors showing their understanding of the reading material was better than those who did not receive explicit grammar instruction. For example, the grammar group made fewer errors in regard to active and passive voices. The non-grammar group often misunderstood who did what, in other words they often misunderstood whether the subject killed someone or the subject was killed. It makes a big difference.

### 1.3.3 Composition without grammar

When the MEXT announced their aim to produce “Japanese With English Abilities” in 2002, one of the specific aims was to help learners to speak English. When we mean “speak” English, we mean to utter some meaningful sentences to express our thoughts and feelings and to understand what the other person or party also express verbally.

Most people blame their poor pronunciation for not being able to communicate in English. I agree this is one of the reasons, but they often fail to see another underlying and more damaging reason. They cannot compose correct sentences in the first place. Many of them can read much better than they can write. Even the advanced readers are often poor writers.

How can they speak what they cannot write? After all speaking is making up sentences in your mind before verbally producing them. This is so simple, but many of them fail to see this hidden point. Neglect in compositions makes the learners incompetent in writing and speaking. Here, I'm not talking about simple greetings such as *Hi*, *How are you?* *How about you?* *Good*. *See you later* etc. These can be acquired without grammar, writing and reading. But when it comes to conducting meaningful, more mature conversations or email exchanges, a good composition skill is essential. When you first speak a foreign language you have to consciously create sentences to express what you would like to say. Gradually the learners can produce good sentences without spending much time thinking, but without a good composition skill, meaningful speaking is greatly handicapped.

#### 1.4 Current English teaching in Japanese schools

Since Japan has adopted, experimented, discarded, and mixed different methodologies of English teaching over many decades, the current trend is actually a mixture of several methods. A Communicative Functional Approach might describe what it is. One thing is certain; less grammar is taught, at least in the regular curriculum at school.

Due to fewer class hours and lower study loads, academic performance of Japanese students has suffered to a great extent. More than 80 percent of respondents to a recent Yomiuri Shimbun survey voiced concern about declining academic abilities among children. The figure was overwhelmingly larger than the total of 16 percent who did not express concern. The survey was conducted on Jan. 15 and 16, 2005, through interviews on 3,000 voters nationwide. 50 percent of the respondents blamed it on the reduction in course hours. More than 70 percent said they did not support the government's policy of pressure-free education. The decline in children's academic abilities began to be regarded as a serious problem, when an international academic ability test clearly indicated a drop.

Sawai, a linguist and lecturer at one of the top yobiko, (prep schools), who has written a number of textbooks for advanced level students, says that the academic level of the students have declined sharply over twenty years. (Sawai, 2001) He goes on saying that he wrote *Perspectives on Our Time* for high school students in 1985 and at that time it was received very well and many schools adopted it as their textbooks. But ten years later the publisher asked him to rewrite some of the contents because the feedback from high school teachers revealed that the text was too difficult for the students. Reluctantly and unwillingly he rewrote some contents to make it less difficult. But a few years later, the publisher again asked him to make it even easier, so that the book would sell. He lamented the phenomenon, but again was obliged. He felt certain that the academic level of not only the students but also that of the teacher was declining. High school teachers began complaining that they were having a hard time understanding the teacher's manual. Sawai was disappointed but that was a fact.

I have looked over more than 300 college textbooks over these years and found a few things to note. One of them is that some teacher's manuals are thicker than the texts themselves. A composition textbook for students, *Modern Japanese into Modern English* (Seibido, 2003) has 120 pages but the teacher's manual has 165 pages with much smaller print, which means more contents than students' books. Publishers say without thick manuals with plenty of basic explanations, textbooks don't sell. This clearly suggests teachers' understanding has declined.

When *Progress in English* was first published in 1964, the teacher's manual was written in English, but 10 years later it was translated into Japanese. What does this suggest? English teachers in the 1960s were able to read the manual in English with ease or at least tried to read it in the target language. After all they were there to teach English. Ten years later teachers may either have lost their enthusiasm or their reading ability must have declined.

In spite of this grim reality, the MEXT always tries to find an excuse to defend their position. In March 2005, the test results of academic aptitude tests conducted for all junior high schools in Japan was announced. The results were better than they had anticipated. The MEXT didn't lose a second before taking advantage of this opportunity to announce their "pressure free policy" was not bad after all. But nothing could be farther from reality. More than 80% of junior high school students go

to juku. Juku was the key to success. This view is confirmed by a Yomiuri Shimbun article by Ide, on May 2, 2005. He says there is no research done to show how much juku contributes to the overall achievement of all the academic subjects including English, but it is obvious that juku plays a vital role.

As far as I know there is no yobiko or juku that does not teach English grammar. They allot a substantial amount of time and textbook pages for English grammar. At one large scale yobiko, English courses are divided into several classes according to the level of the students. In every class they use grammar exercise books and they emphasize the importance of being able to analyze the sentences before translation. In error hunting, instructors just don't tell the correct answer but give a good amount of grammatical explanation why the sentence is wrong. They know from their long experience and success that without grammar they can't help their students or customers to attain their goal.

On the other hand, with Communicative Functional Approach becoming mainstream in classrooms, grammar teaching has been relegated to the margins. In order to compensate for this lack of grammar teaching in class, many alarmed schoolteachers tell the students to buy grammar books available in city bookstores. Although there has been a substantial amount of research on textbook analysis, there is very little, if any, research how these textbooks are actually used in schools, so what I'm going to say here is my subjective observation. But the readers have to keep in mind that this observation of mine is the accumulation of 35 years of experience as an EFL instructor both at school and Juku.

In many of the private schools, the MEXT approved textbooks are given to students free of charge but not used. Sometimes they are used only occasionally, but in many schools, students never touch them. The textbooks are tossed away without being used at all. So, what do they use? Some schools, such as Doshisha Junior high school in Kyoto and Takatsuki Junior and Senior High School in Osaka, compile their own textbooks along with grammar exercise books readily available in town, such as *Forest* by Kirihara Shoten, or *Learners* by the Chart Institute. Both of these 350 page books cover all the grammar points explained with some sample sentences and exercises. In *Learners*, Chapter 5 is dedicated to passive and active voices. It begins with the definition of the term *passive voice*. It goes on to explain that in order to change an active voice to a passive voice, the sentence first has to be analyzed. It's a

must to find an object of the sentence, which will be the subject of the passive voice. Then the verb has to be in past perfect form with a *be*-verb. The *be*-verb has to agree with the subject and the tense has to be shown by a *be*-verb. This book uses 10 pages for active and passive voices. At the end of the chapter, they have exercises. Here are some examples.

Change the voice.

1. Did he paint the mailbox?
2. All the drivers should obey traffic rules.
3. Jane didn't introduce the man to us.
4. When did they find the island?
5. They believe that seven is a lucky number
6. What did the students decide?
7. We elected Mr. Maple mayor of our city.

These exercises are about one eighth of all the exercises for this chapter. Since grammar instruction has largely been eliminated in school curriculum, which resulted in declining ability of Japanese EFL students, alarmed schoolteachers are supplementing instructions with these grammar exercise books to make up for the lack.

I discussed some problems in English teaching in Japan in chapter 2. They include historical problems, cultural problems, problems on teaching side and learning side. Each seems to prevent students from learning the target language as quickly and extensively as they wish to learn. I also gave some examples of grammar usage and points, which present problems. There are certain grammar areas, which look unnecessary in the curriculum. Some grammar points are not taught properly, others are introduced too late, still others are too archaic, and still others sound unnatural. There are some common usages that should be taught but are not. Textbooks still leave a lot to be desired for improvement and some old grammar teaching should be replaced with practical grammar teaching.

Some of the current instructions on usage focus on such insignificant point almost to the point of nit picking. The students are taught to put a comma before *too* as in *I like your sweater, too*. On tests, a point is taken minus. This is ridiculous and

discouraging fueling the over perfectionist trait. There are many others. In chapter 8, the paths we should follow, and the paths we should not follow are suggested.

After all, as my experiments showed, grammar instruction is vital in EFL classrooms. It plays an important part in all four skills of language learning; speaking, listening, writing and reading, although my experiment did not include speaking part. But it is easy to imagine, EFL students would be unlikely to orally produce meaningful sentences without being able to construct correct sentences. From many years of experiences as an EFL instructor and a life-long learner of English, I can safely say that the ability to compose good sentences is proportional to good speaking ability with clear pronunciation even with some regional accent. Without grammar instruction, the EFL does not yield positive outcome. EFL without grammar does not produce “Japanese with English abilities” as MEXT announced in their press release in 2001.

# Chapter 2 History of English education in Japan

## 2.1 Historical background of English education in Japan

In this section, I'm going to describe the nature and history of several foreign language teaching methods that have been used in Japan. For brevity and consistency internet resources are sometimes used. After each method I will evaluate them based on the long experience of my own education in Japan and also of my daughters and many students I've taught over thirty-five years both at juku, a cram school, and college. I realize that these evaluations are based on my personal reflection, but the readers should note that my experience is extensive and my judgments are not the research core of this dissertation, which is presented in later chapters. My evaluations in this chapter are to set the stage for the following chapters.

One confusing aspect about these methodologies is that there is no clear line between each method. Some characteristics of each overlap with others. This is natural because it's almost impossible to erase all traits of the former method and switch to the next overnight. Yet, traditional Grammar Translation is clearly very different from the Direct Method, but the audio-lingual method and Semi-Immersion have some characteristics in common. Moreover, the Communicative Approach has an extensive definition which covers a large range of needs and demands. The definition of communicative competence, for example, greatly varies depending on the age and needs of the learners. Adult ESL (English as a second language) learners living in the US may need such communicative competence to buy an insurance policy, to settle a mortgage, or to send a letter of complaint to the manufacturer if necessary. Younger learners may just need simple greetings and answering questions and responding to everyday phrases such as *Don't play here* and *Come home before dark*.

Japan has a long history in foreign language teaching. It has always been very keen on learning from other countries. Learning a foreign language has been, is, and will be a vital part of Japan's existence and survival. The following is a short



summary of the history of English teaching methodologies in Japan from the early 19<sup>th</sup> century to the present day in 2005. Information from Grammar Translation up to the mid and *Late* – 20<sup>th</sup> century history comes from the archives of the TESL-L Electronic Discussion Forum for teachers of English as a second or foreign language and *The Onestop Magazine*, a magazine for English language teachers.

### 2.1.1 Grammar Translation

The grammar-translation method was the dominant foreign language teaching method in Europe from the 1840s to the 1940s, and a version of it continues to be widely used in some parts of the world, even today. Japan was one of them. The Grammar Translation method, broadly speaking, sees foreign language study as a mental discipline, the goal of which may be to read literature in its original form or simply to be a form of intellectual development. The basic approach is to analyze and study the grammatical rules of the language, and then to practice manipulating grammatical structures through the means of translation both into and from the mother tongue.

The method is very much based on the written word and texts are widely in evidence. A typical approach would be to present the rules of a particular item of grammar, illustrate its use by including the item several times in a text, and practice using the item through writing sentences and translating it into the mother tongue. The text is often accompanied by a vocabulary list consisting of new lexical items used in the text together with the mother tongue translation. Accurate use of language items is central to this approach. Generally speaking, the medium of instruction is the mother tongue, which is used to explain conceptual problems and to discuss the use of a particular grammatical structure. It all sounds rather dull but it can be argued that the Grammar Translation method has over the years had a remarkable success. Millions of people have successfully learnt foreign languages to a high degree of proficiency and, in numerous cases, without any contact whatsoever with native speakers of the language. Japan has produced one of the largest volumes of translated literatures of many foreign languages, Russian, English, Chinese, German, French, to name a few.

There are certain types of learner who respond very positively to a grammatical syllabus as it can give them both a set of clear objectives and a clear sense of achievement. Other learners need the security of the mother tongue and the opportunity to

relate grammatical structures to mother tongue equivalents. Above all, this type of approach can give learners a basic foundation upon which they can then build their communicative skills. However, even as early as the mid-19th, theorists were beginning to question the principles behind the grammar-translation method. Changes were beginning to take place. There was a greater demand for ability to speak foreign languages, and various reformers began reconsidering the nature of language and of learning.

As the above information from *the The Onestop Magazine* says Grammar Translation, although criticized, has been in the mainstream for many years. I would say it still plays a vital part in English learning in Japan. Most of the top universities ask examinees to show their high-level grammar translation skills. This attitude remains strong even today. Evidence can be seen in the college entrance exams. Here is one of the sentences asked in 1984 at Kyoto University, the second ranked university in Japan.

Test sentence: Translate the following sentence into Japanese.

He must do something which he has chosen to do without being compelled by urgent interests or impelled by strong passion; he must feel entertained and free of any fear or hope of serious consequences.

A good translation clearly shows that the test taker knows English grammar and sentence constructions. Kyoto University, Japan's second ranked competitive national university, has given this type of test as long as I have known. Kyoto University has produced a large number of diplomats and politicians, not to mention noted scholars in many fields, who need English as a medium of communication.

### 2.1.2 Reforms of the Grammar Translation method: the Direct Method

In the late 1800s and early 1900s, linguists became interested in the problem of the best way to teach languages. These reformers, who included Henry Sweet of England, Wilhelm Viëtor of Germany, and Paul Passy of France, believed that language teaching should be based on scientific knowledge about language, that it should begin with speaking and expand to other skills, that words and sentences should be presented in context, that grammar should be taught inductively, and that translation should, for the most part, be avoided. These ideas spread, and were

consolidated in what became known as the Direct Method, the first of the “natural methods.” The Direct Method became popular in language schools, but it was not very practical with larger classes or in public schools. (TESL-L archives)

As Japan became more and more enthusiastic about learning English, people became frustrated about not being able to speak as much and fast as they wished. They decided to criticize the traditional Grammar Translation method, although it had had obviously positive effects. They immediately liked the new method, the Direct Method, called also the Gouin Method, the Phonetic Method, the Berlitz Method. (Larsen-Freeman, 1986, Tasaki,1990). But the Direct Method didn’t work. Some of the language experts soon realized that mother tongue acquisition and foreign language learning were two different things, but their objection didn’t have enough influence to turn back the trend. The Direct Method won great popularity and students’ skills suffered.

In the mid-1960s, Japan ranked 7<sup>th</sup> from the bottom in TOEFL in Asia, which wasn’t so bad, given the number of participating countries was smaller than it was in 2000. Japan was about in the middle of the ladder then, but its scores began to show a sharp drop in the 1980s, when the Communicative Approach (see 2.1.6.)was gaining ground and the The Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Program (see 2.2.3) began. Japan dropped to the second from the bottom in 2000. The following chart 1 shows the evidence (Otsu. 2005). From 1999 on, TOEFL adopted the computer based test (CBT) and the scoring system changed.

Chart 1. Japan’s TOEFL scores and rank in Asia.

year	score	rank from bottom in Asia
1964-66	482	5
1964-67	480	7
1966-71	470	6
1976-77	483	4
1978-80	483	3
1982-84	485	5
1984-86	496	7

year	score	rank from bottom in Asia
1987-89	485	3
1989-91	484	2
1991-93	490	3
1992-94	493	3
1993-95	494	4
1995-96	499	6
1996-97	496	3
1997-98	498	1
1998-99	501	4
1999-00	188	2
2000-01	183	2
2001-02	186	2

From my personal experience, the Direct Method is slow. Everything seems to be in murky water. When a new verb is to be introduced, teachers use pictures, gestures, anything but L1. This may sound easy, because if the verb is *to laugh*, the instructor can actually laugh or show a picture of someone laughing. The idea can be understood. But what about *like* and *want*? How can they teach the difference between these two verbs without using L1?

Here is how native speakers who cannot or do not speak Japanese are struggling with the way to get the meanings of *like* and *want* across to the students. My interview with one of them shows how they act in different situations. One native speaker asks as follows.

Other things take a little more practice and situational use to get across, such as *like* versus *want*, I'm sincerely curious; how do you get these concepts across? What's your method to teach *like* and *want* with elementary children? I do *like* by considering an array of food cards, then suddenly brightening up, selecting one card (say the fried chicken one) and exclaiming "I LIKE fried chicken!" That's all it takes, they start

exclaiming (and arguing) over their own choices, and it's simple to add *love*, *don't like*, and *hate* from there. How do you do *want*?

The other replies as follows.

First I make sure the kids are very comfortable with *like*. I also make sure they are comfortable using *Here you are*. *Thank You*. *You're welcome*.

To receive a card, you must say *I want...* and the conversation continues. This works with kindergarten kids too. You can make this into a game, or just use it as practice, taking turns. I also add on things like *I am thirsty*, or *I am hungry...* And if they can master this then of course the kids themselves ask *What do you want?* rather than me asking.

It will be very common for the kids to slip back into the *like* mode...I stop them and help them say it properly. I find the kids also have difficulty with the W sound, so it may help to get the practicing that. I also explain to them in Japanese the different between *like* and *want*. (Sorry to all you 'no Japanese' folks.)

I think the best thing is practice, practice and more practice.

So, after all, the second poster does use Japanese to explain and to make the meaning clear. She is not confident in relying only on the target language. This exchange shows that it takes forever to get the point across to the students without using their L1. Besides there is no way of testing whether or not the students are confused with *like*, *want*, and *need*. The situation where these verbs are used are so similar in nature that it's hard to show the difference in context and situations. It's simply effective and time consuming.

Here is another contribution from a different native speaker instructor.

You said you select a card from a group and say, "I LIKE fried chicken!" However, I can see that you *receive* the item. In my classes, I use a group of cards, too, but when I or the students ask "Do you like...?". The respondee only answers without getting a card. When using *Do you want...?* and the answer is affirmative, the respondee receives the card with a "Here you are". I am trying to show that *like* is for anytime (of course!) and *want* is for right now. Works for me and my students.

As one can see, the Direct Method is like walking in fog. We can't see things clearly. The problem is that even when students don't get the idea correctly, there is practically no way of knowing whether they got the idea right or not.

There is another problematic point in teaching the difference between *want* and *like*. A plural noun follows *like* as in *I like dogs*, unless the noun following *like* is something specific, such as *Mary's dog*, but a singular noun can follow *want* as in *I want a new bike*. It's rather difficult and time consuming to get this idea across without explaining the rule in L1. How would one teach the following sentences, some of which sound strange in a usual situation while the others are natural<sup>1</sup>.

I like dogs.

\*I like a dog.

\*I like some water.

I want a new bike.

I want some water.

I want some cats.

\*I want cats.

How confusing this aspect of English both to students and native speaker teachers is shown in chapter 7 of this dissertation. For the readers' convenience, I will repeat a part of that section. Trying to teach a foreign language without the knowledge of the students' first language creates all kinds of problem, including this *want* and *like* and the object problem.

### 2.1.3 Behaviorism and the Audio-Lingual Method

The relation of Behaviorism to language teaching is well described in this passage from TESL-L archives

(<http://www1.doshisha.ac.jp/kkitao/library/article/tesl-his.htm>).

Developments in other fields have, at times, had an effect on language teaching. In the field of psychology, behaviorism has had a great effect

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<sup>1</sup>In the Direct Method, a teacher is not supposed to use L1, so s/he can not say *hoshii* for *want* and *suki* for *like*.

on language teaching. Various scientists in the early to mid-1900s did experiments with animals, trying to understand how animals learned, and through animals, how humans learned.

One of the most famous of these scientists was Ivan Pavlov. Pavlov and others studying in fields of animal behavior (including John Watson and B.F. Skinner) came to believe that animal behavior was formed by a series of rewards or punishments. Skinner, in particular, promoted the idea that human behavior could be described using the same model.

In applying his principles to language, Skinner theorized that parents or other caretakers hear a child say something that sounds like a word in their language, they reward the child with praise and attention. The child repeats words and combinations of words that are praised and thus learns language.

Behaviorism, along with applied linguistics, which developed detailed descriptions of the differences between languages, had a great influence on language teaching. Theorists believed that languages were made up of a series of habits, and that if learners could develop all these habits, they would speak the language well. Also, they believed that a contrastive analysis of languages would be invaluable in teaching languages, because points in which the languages were similar would be easy for students, but points in which they were different would be difficult for students. From these theories arose the audio-lingual method.

The audio-lingual method is based on Behaviorism, i.e. using drills for the formation of good language habits. Students are given a stimulus, which they respond to. If their response is correct, it is rewarded, so the habit will be formed; if it is incorrect, it is corrected, so that it will be suppressed. The audio-lingual method is also called pattern practice. The well-described information below comes from English Raven Com

([http://www.englishraven.com/method\\_audioling.html](http://www.englishraven.com/method_audioling.html)).

Just as with the Direct Method, the audio-lingual method represents a major step in language teaching methodology that was still aimed squarely at communicative competence. A teacher that can use the method well

will generally be able to create what appear to be very “productive” students. The extensive and elaborate drills designed to facilitate learning and good “language habit forming” were an innovative addition to the techniques used to practice language, and many of them are featured as essential parts of “communicative” methods that followed the Audiolingual Method.

Although the audio-lingual method is said to have produced very “productive” students, not all the set patterns meet the needs and interests of learners, and therefore a large part of pattern practice seem hollow and even useless. They can easily slip away from memory and thus it is not as effective as it sounds. “The Army Method”, another name for the audio-lingual method described below more clearly shows what it is like.

The method’s original appearance under the name “The Army Method” is apt, and from it one ought not to be surprised that the method is all about highly controlled practice involving extensive repetition aimed at “habit forming”. If you can imagine a squad of new military recruits doing marching drills in the exercise yard, listening to the terse commands and repeating the movements in various combinations until they become second nature and do not need to be “thought about”, then you have yourself an effective picture of how the Audiolingual Method essentially works and creates the desired result. The experts representing descriptive linguistics at that time can be seen as disseminating the patterns required to perform the various marching drills piece by piece, and the behavioral psychologists dictated the various ways for the drills to be repeated in order to create an effective habit-forming process.

The “Army Method” has worked wonders for Mormon Church missionaries. They are highly praised for their achievement in whatever foreign language they need in order to spread their religious teaching. The “Army Method” is exactly what they have been doing at their mission training center, and their language success is remarkable. Mormon missionaries are sent all over the world with only a few months’ training in the language they need to speak in the foreign country where they will



be working for the next two years. Most of them have very little prior knowledge of that particular language, and yet, in a few months time, they learn by heart the necessary phrases to teach their religious principles. Language study at the MTC is intensive, stressing basic grammar and gospel instruction. Despite the intensity of the program, missionaries generally arrive in their new country with only a modest grasp of the language. But after immersion in the foreign country and a constant necessity to communicate in the local language, missionaries quickly become fluent in the target language.<sup>2</sup>

Although this “Army Method” received substantial acclaim, it inevitably kills the creativity and individual need to produce one’s own sentences. English Raven.Com further describes the outcome.

The (however slightly simplified) picture presented above ought to also indicate to the modern, enlightened and eclectic language teacher the obvious ways in which the Audiolingual Method falls far short of the overall goal of creating sustainable long-term communicative competence in language learners. The linguistic principles upon which the theory was based emphasized surface forms of language and not the “deep structure”. Cognitive principles aimed at explaining how learners learn and develop independent concepts were to change considerably in the period following the Audiolingual Method (sic).

Still, there are reasons why the method is still popular, and perhaps even appropriate in certain educational contexts. In countries where one of the prime objectives of learning English is to take and achieve successful results in a variety of tests, and where many learners are not intrinsically motivated to learn English but do so because they feel they have to, the method is not without merits. The term “practice makes perfect” was coined at a time when the concept of practice was synonymous with repetition, and if English is seen as just “another subject to be learned”, then the philosophy of repeating the required patterns until you get them right without needing to think about them does have a lot of supporters. This is exactly what English education in Japan has been largely about; another subject to learn in order to pass college entrance exams.

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<sup>2</sup>The author has had extensive interviews with Mormon missionaries during thirty-plus year teaching experience. One of the Mormon churches is near the author’s home.

However, one of the key responsibilities of the modern day language teacher is to actively create and build intrinsic motivation in their learners, to empower them with the ability and confidence to “learn how to learn”, to develop a sense of responsibility for their own development, and to regard peers as possible sources of learning as well. They should also be encouraged to experiment with the language rules they learn, and to find out through active independent application where and how the rules work. The idea that errors are a natural and even necessary part of the learning process needs to be encouraged and supported. The audio-lingual method does nothing to address those issues, and as a whole is little more than a very effective way of running highly teacher-orientated classrooms designed to produce language users whose proficiency comes from some kind of “robotic” mentality.

There are ways in which the practice involved in the audio-lingual method can be applied to approaches that have a bigger picture in mind. Audio-lingual-based drills can be adapted and used in combination with effective error correction techniques. It can be followed up with techniques designed to create more independent experimentation and application according to the learners’ needs and interests. I do not recommend it as a holistic approach to language teaching, but there are certainly aspects and techniques from the method that are effective if used in combination with an appropriate range of other activities, which includes grammar teaching and Grammar Translation.

One of the junior high and senior high school English textbooks *Progress In English* was based on this audio-lingual method, also called pattern practice. This textbook was a success. It was first published in 1965. A Catholic Father, Father Flynn compiled the book by himself. The author interviewed him twice in person asking how he came to be interested in writing that book. He greatly praised this pattern practice and had confidence in the method. A lot of drills were the key. Here are some examples of these drills. In Lesson 13 of *Book 1*, the three verb tenses are introduced: present and present progressive and future. There are 15 exercises.

A. Change the verb in the brackets to proper forms.

1. (skate) Jane (                    ) next Wednesday. She (                    ) now.
2. (be) I (                    ) hungry now. I (                    ) hungry tomorrow.

3. (swim) Tom (            ) every day. He (            ) now. He (            ) tomorrow, too.
4. (close) They (            ) the windows every day. He (            ) the windows now. He (            ) them tomorrow.
5. (swim) Jack (            ) every day. He (            ) with my little brother now. They (            ) tomorrow, too.
6. (walk) You (            ) every day. He (            ) with my little brother now. They (            ) tomorrow, too.
7. (wait) He (            ) for the bus every day. He (            ) for the bus now. He (            ) for the bus tomorrow.
8. (study) They (            ) English every Sunday. They (            ) English now. They (            ) English tomorrow.
9. (be) You (            ) hungry now. You (            ) hungry every day. You (            ) hungry tomorrow.
10. (cry) Your sister (            ) now. She (            ) every day. She (            ) tomorrow.
11. (buy) Mary (            ) pencils every Saturday. She (            ) pencils now. She (            ) pencils next Saturday.
12. (read) They (            ) their English books every morning. They (            ) them tomorrow.
13. (play) I (            ) basketball with my friends every day. I (            ) basketball now. I (            ) it tomorrow.
14. (be) He (            ) tired now. He (            ) tired every day. He (            ) tired tomorrow.
15. (want) He (            ) an apple every day He (            ) an apple now. He (            ) an apple tomorrow.

These drills do help students to internalize a grammatical idea, but the trouble with this method is that students' interests vary to a great extent, so that the materials used in the drills are interesting to some but plain boring to others. Some

unmotivated students can easily lose interest while the diligent ones are hooked on the drills and make remarkable progress. Unless you are sure of the effectiveness of pattern practice, the drills can seem frivolous and fruitless. But obedient and diligent students have followed the teachers' instructions and obtained positive results. Thus this textbook was a great success among elite students in many private schools across Japan. Since the schools where *Progress In English* is used are mostly high level private schools, the students there are naturally highly motivated and diligent. Thus with the help of this textbook along with other qualities of students, these schools produced a large number of successful applicants to prestigious universities. Following this example, other private schools began adopting this textbook in the 1970s along with the audio-lingual method.

However the same textbooks did not bring the same expected results to some schools. Gradually these school began to change their English textbooks to different ones, but pattern practice remained in the mainstream throughout the 1960s and 1970s.

#### 2.1.4 Other Mid- to Late-20th Century Trends

In the years following World War II, great changes took place, some of which would eventually influence language teaching and learning. The American education system was adopted and English became the mainstream foreign language.<sup>3</sup>

Expansion of schooling also meant that language learning was no longer the prerogative of the elite but something that was necessary for a widening range of people. More opportunities for international travel and business and international social and cultural exchanges increased the need for language learning. As a result, renewed attempts were made in the 1950s and 1960s to:

- 1) use new technology (e.g., tape recorders, radios, TV, and computers) effectively in language teaching,
- 2) explore new educational patterns (e.g., bilingual education, individualized instruction, and immersion programs), and
- 3) establish methodological innovations (e.g., the audio-lingual method).

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<sup>3</sup>Much of the material in this section is abridged from TESL-L archives.

However, the hoped-for increase in the effectiveness of language education did not materialize, and some of the theoretical bases of the developments were called into question.

At the beginning of the mid-1960s, there were a variety of theoretical challenges to the audio-lingual method. Linguist Noam Chomsky challenged the behaviorist model of language learning. He proposed a theory called Transformational Generative Grammar, according to which learners do not acquire an endless list of rules or patterns but a limited set of transformations which play a role in several constructions. With a fairly limited number of these transformations, according to Chomsky, language users can form an unlimited number of sentences. However, this transformational grammar of Chomsky was not really known to average high school teachers especially in Japan. To be honest, it was only a few years before I enrolled myself in the MA program in 2001 that I happened to learn of Chomsky. Transformational grammar had practically no place or influence in Japanese junior and senior high school education, and still does not.

Other theorists have also proposed ideas that have influenced language teaching. Stephen Krashen, for example, studied the way that children learn language and applied it to adult language learning. He proposed the Input Hypothesis, which states that language is acquired by using “comprehensible input” (the language that one hears in the environment) which is slightly beyond the learner’s present proficiency. Learners personally use the comprehensible input to deduce rules. Krashen’s views on language teaching have given rise to a number of changes in language teaching, including a de-emphasis on the teaching of grammatical rules and a greater emphasis on trying to teach language to adults in the way that children learn language. While Krashen’s theories are not universally accepted, they have had a considerable influence.

However his key term “slightly beyond the learner’s present proficiency” is hard to define, rather impossible to measure. Krashen has never said anything about the way to measure this “slightly beyond” range.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>From my long-time experience it’s definitely very difficult to read something beyond our present proficiency. Especially without grammar instruction or vocabulary input, learners find it hard to go on reading. Rather in chapter 6 here, I strongly suggest using reading materials slightly *lower* than the learner’s present proficiency. When students find reading materials readable and understandable they read on but otherwise the reading activity itself becomes a burden and a standing block.

Developments in various other directions have taken place since the early 1970s. There has been developments such as a great emphasis on individualized instruction, more humanistic approaches to language learning, a greater focus on the learner, and greater emphasis on development of communicative methods, as opposed to merely linguistic competence. Some “new methods,” including the Silent Way, Suggestopedia, and Community Language Learning, have gained popularity, and these reflect some of the above trends. In addition, there has been a disillusionment with the whole methods debate, partly due to inconclusiveness of research on methods, and calls for a deeper understanding of the process of language learning itself. Finally, there has been a greater stress on authenticity in language learning, meaning that the activities involved in language learning have not always reflected real-world uses of the language.

As I will comment on Communicative Approach and a few others later, I’m going to briefly discuss here only the Suggestopedia and the Direct Method. Here is what suggestopedia is about from the web source (<http://www.onestopenish.com/News/Magazine/Archive/suggesta.htm>).

Often considered to be the strangest of the so-called “humanistic approaches”, suggestopedia was originally developed in the 1970s by the Bulgarian educator Georgi Lozanov. Extravagant claims were initially made for the approach with Lozanov himself declaring that memorization in learning through suggestopedia would be accelerated by up to 25 times over that in conventional learning methods. The approach attracted both wild enthusiasm in some quarters and open scorn in others. On balance, it is probably fair to say that suggestopedia has had its day but also that certain elements of the approach survive in today’s good practice.

The approach was based on the power of suggestion in learning, the notion being that positive suggestion would make the learner more receptive and, in turn, stimulate learning. Lozanov holds that a relaxed but focused state is the optimum state for learning. In order to create this relaxed state in the learner and to promote positive suggestion, suggestopedia makes use of music, a comfortable and relaxing environment, and a relationship between the teacher and the student that is akin to the parent-child relationship. Music, in particular, is central to the approach.

Unlike other methods and approaches, there is no apparent theory of language in suggestopedia and no obvious order in which items of language are presented.

The original form of suggestopedia presented by Lozanov consisted of the use of extended dialogues, often several pages in length, accompanied by vocabulary lists and observations on grammatical points. Typically these dialogues would be read aloud to the students to the accompaniment of music. The most formal of these readings, known as the “concert reading”, would typically employ a memorable piece of classical music such as a Beethoven symphony. This would not be in the form of background music but would be the main focus of the reading, with the teacher’s voice acting as a counterpoint to the music. Thus the “concert reading” could be seen as a kind of pleasurable event, with the learners free to focus on the music, the text or a combination of the two. The rhythm and intonation of the reading would be exaggerated in order to fit in with the rhythm of the music.

Frankly, in all the experiences, enthusiasm and curiosity I am exposed to as an EFL instructor, I have never heard of Suggestopedia being popular. It’s listed as “one of the methods” in a language terminology book (Shirahata et al,1999), but I am quite certain it has never won much popularity in Japan.

The following information is from the archives of the TESL-L Electronic Discussion Forum for teachers of English as a second or foreign language.  
(<http://writing.berkeley.edu/TESL-EJ/archives.html>)

Two Frenchmen, C. Marcel and F. Gouin, and an Englishman, T. Pendergast, through their separate observations, concluded that the way that children learned language was relevant to how adults should learn language. Marcel emphasized the importance of understanding meaning in language learning. Pendergast proposed the first structural syllabus. He proposed arranging grammatical structures so that the easiest were taught first. Gouin believed that children learned language through using language for a sequence of related actions. He emphasized presenting each item in context and using gestures to supplement verbal meaning. This

is called TPR, Total Physical Response. TPR is based on the premise that the human brain has a biological program for acquiring any natural language on earth - including the sign language of the deaf. The process is visible when we observe how infants internalize their first language.

Though the ideas of these and other reformers had some influence for a time, they did not become widespread or last long in educational circles. They were outside of the established educational circles, and the networks of conferences and journals which exist today did not exist then to spread their ideas.

After all, one language methodology after another came into being, attracted attention, gained popularity to some extent, was experimented within classrooms, was criticized, and then lost the original attraction, but some elements of each still survive in many forms.

### **2.1.5 Communicative Approach**

There have been, if any, few methods as favored as the Communicative Approach. As the ambiguity of the name suggests, it can be anything from simple gestures with a few words of greetings to how to settle a complex real estate dispute. Not only because of this relatively extensive and flexible possibility to develop materials, but also of the de-emphasizes on grammar, this method gained an enormous popularity among native English instructors.

EnglishRaven.Com offers some information on the Communicative Approach.  
([http://www.englishraven.com/method\\_audioling.html](http://www.englishraven.com/method_audioling.html))

Methods and approaches such as Grammar Translation, Audiolingualism and Situational Language teaching are based on the presentation and practice of grammatical structures and, essentially, a grammar-based syllabus. In 1972, the British linguist D.A. Wilkins published a document that proposed a radical shift away from using the traditional concepts of grammar and vocabulary to describe language to an analysis of the communicative meanings that learners would need in order to express themselves and to understand effectively. This initial document was followed by his 1976 work *Notional Syllabuses*, which showed how language could be categorized on the basis of notions such as quantity, location and



time, and functions such as making requests, making offers and apologizing. Wilkins' work was used by the British Council of Japan in drawing up a communicative language syllabus, which specified the communicative functions a learner would need in order to communicate effectively at a given level of competence. At the end of the 1970s, the first course-books to be based on functional syllabuses began to appear. Typically, they would be organized on the basis of individual functions and the exponents needed to express these functions. For example, many course-books would begin with the function of 'introducing oneself', perhaps followed by the function of 'making requests', with typical exponents being *Can I ...?*, *Could you ...?*, *Is it alright if I ...?* and so on. These would often be practiced in the form of communicative exercises involving pair work, group work and role plays. It is interesting to compare this approach with a grammatical syllabus. In a typical grammatical syllabus, structures using the word *would* tend to appear in later stages of the syllabus, as they are held to be relatively complex (e.g. *If I knew the answer, I would tell you*), whereas in a functional syllabus *would* often appears at a very early stage due to its communicative significance in exponents such as *Would you like ...?*, which is extremely common and of great communicative value even to beginners. The need to apply a grammatical name or category to the structure is not considered important within the framework of a purely functional syllabus.

Criticisms of functional approaches include the difficulty in deciding the order in which different functions should be presented. Is it more important to be able to complain or to apologize, for example?

One of the problems of the communicative approach I have observed is that it always teaches the expressions of building positive friendship, accepting invitations, inviting friends, making friends, etc. There are very few negative materials, for example how to say *No* to becoming a friend. Very few students get to learn how to make plausible excuses or negative comments. Some examples can be seen in a MEXT approved junior high school English textbook *New Horizon English Course* (Kasashima et al, 2004). In lesson 1 of the second year students' textbook, the following short passage appears and the students are asked to make their own comments.

Here is a passage from *New Horizon English Course*.

Spring is the season for hiking. Come with us to Lake Heiwa. We can play volleyball there with Ms. Green. Meet at the school gate at 9.00 on Sunday, April 16. Bring your own lunch.

Sample comments from the students in the textbook:

1. I had a good time. It was a lot of fun.
2. Thank you for the cookies, Mr. Green.
3. Mark looked really happy at lunch.
4. I was a little tired, but I enjoyed the volleyball game.
5. Can we play volleyball with you again?
6. Let's go to Lake Hiro next time. We can see a pretty view there.

Sometimes in real life, you have to be more honest about how you feel about certain things. You can't always be polite or for that matter you sometimes shouldn't be. Sometimes you have to assert yourself rather strongly. Very few learners, even at an advanced level, know how to respond in the negative, let alone complain politely but effectively. These students would experience hardship when they are in a situation where a proper excuse or an effective complaint is necessary. The practice materials in the Communicative Approach are often too much controlled by the "optimistic", "friendly child" tone. All the sample comments students can refer to are positive ones. No negative comments are given, which suggests making negative comments is regarded unfavorably and further discouraging students from expressing their true feelings, which are sometimes negative.

Even at a college level textbook, this same phenomenon can be seen. The following sentences appear in *Modern Japanese into Modern English* (Hasegawa 2003, p.48). The sample answers given in the teacher's manual are all positive.

1. Would you please turn on the TV?  
OK. Which channel do you want?
2. Please get me a glass of orange juice?  
Certainly. But where is it?

3. Can you drive me to the station?  
All right. What time does your train leave?
4. What grade did you get in English?  
I got an A.
5. Would you mind my opening the window?  
No, not at all. I don't mind it.
6. Let's do our homework together this evening. What do you say?  
That sounds a great idea. I will be at your home at about 7:30.

The sample answers do encourage students to be obedient and answer in affirmative. They don't even offer negative forms.

Another problem lies in the wide range of grammatical structures needed to manipulate basic functions at different levels of formality (for example, *Can I...?* as opposed to *Would you mind if I ...?*). In addition, although it is possible to identify hundreds of functions and micro-functions, there are probably no more than ten fundamental communicative functions that are expressed by a range of widely used exponents. There is also the apparently random nature of the language used, which may frustrate learners used to the more analytical and "building-block" approach that a grammatical syllabus can offer. Another apparent weakness is the question of what to do at higher levels. Is it simply a case of learning more complex exponents for basic functions or is one required to seek out ever more obscure functions (complaining sarcastically, for example)?

On the positive side, however, there is little doubt that functional approaches have contributed a great deal to the overall store of language teaching methodology. Most new course-books contain some kind of functional syllabus alongside a focus on grammar and vocabulary, thus providing learners with communicatively useful expressions in tandem with a structured syllabus with a clear sense of progression. In addition, the focus on communication inherent in the practice of functional exponents has contributed greatly to communicative language teaching in general.

Finally, the idea that even beginners can be presented with exponents of high communicative value from the very start represents a radical shift from the kind of approach that began with the present simple of the verb ‘to be’ in all its forms and focused almost entirely on structure with little regard for actual communication in the target language. ([http://www.englishraven.com/method\\_audioling.html](http://www.englishraven.com/method_audioling.html))

Another interesting weakness is that this approach doesn’t talk much about grammar, not even about some basic rules. For example, the phrase *Would you like...?* is often used and very useful. *Would you like a cup of tea? Would you like to sit down?* Without teaching grammar, learners produce such sentence as

1. *Would you like to a cup of tea?*
2. *Would you like sit down?*

This can be confirmed in the error hunting test created for this dissertation. In the error hunting section of the test, many poor grammarians could not find an error in the following sentence, *I want to three pounds of ham for supper.*

Yet both (1) and (2) are still “communicative” and native speakers who hear non-natives say something like that typically do not correct the error. Nonetheless, the sentences are still ungrammatical and make a strange impression.

The Communicative Approach has played a central role in EFL in Japan, partly because it de-emphasizes grammar and makes it easier for native speaker instructors to conduct classes. But the lack of grammar leads to less improvement and progress for the students. The Communicative Approach did not succeed in yielding productive students as it claims it did. Since the Communicative Approach became the mainstream method, the ability of Japanese EFL learners has in fact showed a significant decline (Refer to the chart 1 in 2.1.2).

### **2.1.6 Semi-immersion, all English classes**

Here is a brief definition of an Immersion Program from the Oxford English Dictionary.

A general term for teaching approaches for limited English proficient students that do not involve using a students’ native language (OED, 2001).

An early Immersion Program was implemented in Canada in 1965 for students learning French. The way French was taught in school and the results and progress did not satisfy parents. Those parents along with some psychologists at McGill University started their first Immersion Program.

There are various kinds of immersion programs.

Early Immersion begins when the children are preschoolers, or first graders. Delayed Immersion starts when they are older than ten. Late Immersion begins at the junior high school level, when they are 13. Total Immersion means you are immersed in that language 100 %, while Partial Immersion covers approximately 50 % of the school day.

There are four properties of a successful immersion program (Bostwick, p.76. 1999).

1. Achieve functional proficiency in a foreign language.
2. Maintain and continue to develop skills in the native language.
3. Master subject content at the appropriate grade level.
4. Acquire an understanding and appreciation of another language and culture which will in no way detract from their appreciation of one's own culture.

Japan's first elementary school English immersion program began in 1992 at a private school, Katoh Gakuen in Shizuoka, as a result of a desire to improve students' proficiency in English. The school teaches all the required subjects, some of which are taught in English. Most students begin the program with little or no prior experience with English. The core concept of the Immersion Program is to learn the second language not as a foreign language subject for an entrance exam into college, but as a means of acquiring knowledge in various fields. In other words students are taught mathematics, science, physical education, music, art, social studies, etc. in English.

Besides this total immersion school, some schools have started semi-immersion, in which part of the curriculum is taught in the target language. One such school is Gunma Kokusai Academy, designed by the municipality of Ota using the system of government designated special zone for structural reform. It is a school to offer a 12-year education at combined primary, middle and high schools. The new school,

which formally opened in April 2005, uses English immersion teaching, in which all the classes except for Japanese, social studies and first-and second-grade ethics classes are to be taught in English. The school currently offers preparatory classes for those planning to enter the school to get used to an English-speaking environment.

There are currently numerous other English immersion or semi-immersion schools opening up in Japan (*The Daily Yomiuri* 7/5/2004).

### 2.1.7 Encouraging study abroad

After the Second World War, there appeared a number of exchange programs between the US and other nations of the world. Youth For Understanding Teenage Exchange Program (YFU) was one of those foreign exchange programs started in 1951, in order to ease the post-war tension. The primary aim was to promote international understanding and world peace through exchange programs for high school students. The exchange students to the US live with American host families for one year while going to the local public high school.

In 1951 YFU invited 75 students from West Germany and Austria to the United States. Japan joined YFU in 1958. In that year only two Japanese students went to the US as the first exchange students of Japan YFU. Japan began exchanging students with Australia in 1981. 16 Japanese students went to Australia. Five students came to Japan from Australia the following summer. In 1986 Japan began the program with Korea, but this was for a short stay. The program began with New Zealand in 1988 and other European countries joined YFU Japan the following year, 1989. What was started with only two students in 1958 has become one of the largest foreign exchange organizations with the number of Japanese participants over 20,000 in 2002. In the beginning Japan YFU exchanged students only with the US, but now the programs are conducted with 14 countries. In the 1960s, YFU and AFS (American Field Service) were the two major exchange programs besides smaller Christian church-affiliated programs, but now countless organizations exist. Most of the colleges have their sister colleges abroad where they exchange students on a regular basis.

In spite of an increasing number of exchange students studying abroad, the Japanese EFL learners' average TOEFL score hasn't improved (See the chart 1 in 2.1.1). There

may have been some reliable studies focused on the relations between English proficiency tests and the number of years test takers spent abroad, but the results have not been obtained.

One plausible factor is that in the 1960s, a large percentage of TOEFL test takers were a handful of elite who were well versed in English, but now a large number of college first year students were required to take it, only to lower the average score.

## 2.2 MEXT's response

In spite of all these efforts MEXT has made, English education in Japan still suffers. Ever since Japanese people began learning foreign languages, they have been faced with obstacles of different kinds in various aspects. Whether historical, cultural, linguistic or systematic, these problems have existed and been blamed upon different methods at different times. And none of the more recent reforms seems to have worked as MEXT hoped.

With the progress of globalization in the economy and in society, MEXT has concluded it is essential that Japanese students acquire communication skills in English, which has become a common international language, in order to take advantage of and to contribute to the world in the 21st century. This has become an important issue both in terms of the future of children and the further development of Japan as a nation. At present, though, the English-speaking abilities of a large percentage of the population are inadequate, MEXT says, and this imposes restrictions on exchanges with foreigners and creates occasions when the ideas and opinions of Japanese people are not appropriately evaluated (<http://www.mext.go.jp/>).

Accordingly, MEXT has formulated a strategy to cultivate “Japanese with English abilities” in concrete action plans with the aim of drastically improving the English education of Japanese people. One of the reasons MEXT thinks the English-speaking abilities of a large percentage of the population are inadequate is that the TOEFL and TOEIC scores are not as high as MEXT thinks they should be.

### 2.2.1 Fewer English classes and fewer compulsory words to learn in middle school compared to 1970s: Cutting down on grammar instructions

Japanese English teachers are being criticized for their inability in bringing up the standard of English education. The MEXT has approached this problem in a variety of ways. In their press release of 2002, MEXT announced their objectives as follows in the MEXT's website (<http://www.mext.go.jp/english/news/2002/07/020901.htm>).

With the progress of globalization in the economy and in society, it is essential that our children acquire communication skills in English, which has become a common international language, in order for living<sup>5</sup> in the 21st century. This has become an extremely important issue both in terms of the future of our children and the further development of Japan as a nation.

At present, though, the English-speaking abilities of a large percentage of the population are inadequate, and this imposes restrictions on exchanges with foreigners and creates occasions when the ideas and opinions of Japanese people are not appropriately evaluated. However, it is not possible to state that Japanese people have sufficient ability to express their opinions based on a firm grasp of their own language.

Accordingly, we have formulated a strategy to cultivate "Japanese with English abilities" in a concrete action plan with the aim of drastically improving the English education of Japanese people. In addition, we aim to make improvements to Japanese-language education.

Although MEXT announced in 2001 their objective to cultivate "Japanese with English abilities" their aim is unrealistic. They lack actual working strategies and suggestions. A large number of officials in MEXT are the graduates of top Japanese universities. They had little trouble as far as their academic performance goes. Many even earned their degrees in universities in the US and the UK. In other words, they don't know the real problem average Japanese students face every day. Their stated aims are mostly too ambitious.

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<sup>5</sup>*In order to live* is much more common than *in order for living*



Thus one factor that should be held responsible for the decline of English skills is a steady decrease in class hours devoted by MEXT to English. The following chart 2 shows how much reduction has been made in terms of vocabulary and grammar points taught in public middle schools in Japan from 1958 to 1999.

Chart 2

	1958	1969	1977	1989	1999
vocabulary in the book	1100~1300	950~1100	900~1050	1000	900
vocabulary that has to be learned	520	610	490	507	
grammar points	20	21	13	11	11

(Otsu, 2005. p.42)

The reduction has been pushed under the education ministry's policy to attach more importance to cultivating pupils' power to think independently and broadening the scope of their interest and knowledge, instead of confining them to the rote learning and cramming, which had been criticized as a major vice in Japanese educational practices.

In 1970 public schools offered five hours of English a week, but now they are reduced to three in 2000. Many teachers feel forced to rush to finish the textbook. As English teachers are required to teach what's in a textbook, they often end up unable to take their students' individual needs into consideration and thus both sides feel frustrated.

### 2.2.2 What MEXT had in mind didn't materialize

In spite of all the optimistic promises MEXT made in 2002, the outcome hasn't been satisfactory at all. Voices of concern have often been reported in the newspapers.

It is often pointed out that Japan ranks one of the lowest in English proficiency tests such as TOEFL and TOEIC. Unfortunately the observation is true. Japan has always been proud of herself for ranking high when it comes to the academic competence. In 2000, Japan ranked first in mathematical application of Program for International Student Assessment (PISA). In reading comprehension Japan ranked eighth<sup>6</sup>. The survey

<sup>6</sup>In 2003, Japan's mathematics level dropped from the 1<sup>st</sup> to the 6<sup>th</sup>, and reading from the 8<sup>th</sup>

just mentioned covered 276,000 male and female students in 41 countries and regions, most of which are OECD members. In Japan about 4,700 first-year high school students in 143 schools nationwide participated in the survey (*The Daily Yomiuri*, 2004.Dec.8).

However when it comes to English competence, Japan has constantly lagged behind. In the period 1998-9, the average TOEFL score attained by Japanese was 501, thereby putting Japan to 18th place in the ranking of scores among 21 Asian nations placing it above only Afghanistan, Cambodia and Laos. This even compared favorably to the previous year when Japan had come last with a score of 498, but still left it way behind its closest neighbors, China and South Korea, which scored 562 and 535, respectively (Otsu, 2005).

How dissatisfied the general public are with this education issue can be seen in a recent white paper poll conducted on January 15 and 16 in 2005. More than 70% Japanese are concerned about the declining academic abilities of Japanese students. Their English proficiency level is no exception.

### **2.2.3 Hiring too many cost ineffective, incompetent native English speakers: JET program**

In order to compensate for the unsuccessful English teaching and to calm the voices of dissent from the public, MEXT has introduced one new strategy after another. One of them was the communicative approach, where a strong emphasis was given on listening to and speaking the target language (See. 2.1.5.). Since Japanese English teachers have been notorious for not being good at speaking and listening to spoken English, MEXT decided to outsource their strategy by hiring native speakers of English to achieve their aim. This is where the JET program comes in.

JET stands for the Japan Exchange and Teaching Program. It was started in 1987. On the surface, the JET program looks like one of the exchange programs in which many foreigners come from overseas to Japan<sup>7</sup>. They work as assistant language teachers at public schools. They are called ALTs. Since most of these ALTs

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to the 14<sup>th</sup>.

<sup>7</sup>A majority of these foreigners are from English speaking countries such as the US, the UK, New Zealand, Australia, and so on, but there are a small number of participants from France, Germany, and other nations.

are seen in public junior high and senior high schools, one may have an impression that MEXT took the initiative in creating the program.

However the JET program was first started with a view to shrinking the trade surplus between Japan and the US. In reality it was an expensive gift to the US to solve trade frictions in the 1980. The Ministry of Education had no part in the beginning. The JET program was approached by three different Ministries with different purposes. The Ministry of Home Affairs and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs had a head start, with MEXT following behind them. The main goal of the Ministry of Home Affairs was to get local governments to open up their gates to foreigners. The main hope of The Ministry of Foreign Affairs for the JET Program was to increase understanding of Japanese society and education among youth in the participating countries. Learning English from the JETs was not at all the focus in the beginning. I will comment on this up later.

At first MEXT strongly opposed the idea of letting unqualified youths teach in the classroom, but they eventually gave in and accepted them as ALTs. The minimal requirement the JETs are required to have is a BA in any area. The JET administrators prefer those principally under the age of 35. Since the JET program had to start without enough preparations in educational circles there was considerable confusion both among the Japanese teachers and the in-coming JET participants. They had been given little information on what they were supposed to do.

Grammar instruction was reduced in the course hours, because a large majority of JETs and other native speaker teachers are not interested or even more accurately are ignorant of English grammar themselves (See. Chapter 5).

The most common reason for teaching grammar as a system for analyzing and labeling sentences has been to accomplish some practical aim or aims, typically the improvement of writing. For decades, however, research has demonstrated that the teaching of grammar rarely accomplishes such practical goals. Relatively few students learn grammar well, fewer retain it, and still fewer transfer the grammar they have learned to improving or editing their writing (Hillocks, 1986).

None of the studies reviewed for the present report provides any support for teaching grammar as a means of improving composition skills. If

schools insist upon teaching the identification of parts of speech, the parsing or diagramming of sentences, or other concepts of traditional grammar (as many still do), they cannot defend it as a means of improving the quality of writing (Hillocks, 1986).

How little they know grammar can be gathered from a fact that several native speaker teachers have asked such a question as “Is it *I used to skate in winter* or *I use to skate in winter?*” in an online discussion forum for English teachers in Japan (ETJ). One native English speaking teacher says in a personal communication that one of his biggest shortcomings as a teacher of English, was his unwillingness, because of his own lack of confidence, to teach grammar.

J. Knudsen, a long time teacher researcher in English education, seconds this view in one of his books, *The World Today* (Knudsen, 2004, p.8, Nan'undo).

Prince Charles of Great Britain's becoming increasingly dismayed that the British people write and speak their native tongue so “bloody badly.” This is true, he says not only of the less educated, but also of the supposed elite—graduates of Eton and Harrow, Oxford and Cambridge. This decline, Charles believes, stems from the “fundamental problem” of the way English is taught in Britain's schools. Several recent government surveys on language teaching in England tend to back the Prince up: spelling, grammar and verbal fluency are not what they once were. All this has come as something of a shock and embarrassment to British educators, who have always been fiercely proud of their education system.

How this lack of grammar teaching in the UK and the US negatively affects second language learners is demonstrated in Takahashi (2002 : ch.3). The issue of that study was to inquire whether or not a good grasp of grammar knowledge is essential for an EFL teacher. A set of syntactic quizzes was given to the EFL instructors, both native English speakers and Japanese teachers, to see how they explain the sentence structures. I had 20 native speaker teachers and 15 Japanese teachers answer the quiz. Of the 20 native speaker instructors, including JETs, only three of them could explain grammar points coherently. The question regarding JETs is thus whether the native speakers can articulate their knowledge of the basic English sentence structures to help Japanese students learn English.

My general answer to whether grammar is essential in foreign language teaching based on my research is thus a definite yes. In order to help students produce logical, unambiguous, succinct sentences and utterances, the knowledge of sentence structure appears to be essential. This view is also supported by Kunihiro (1984) and Torikai (1999).

#### 2.2.4 Starting early from elementary school

Their efforts and strategies in junior high and high schools having failed one after another, MEXT decided that starting early would do the trick. They brought up the plan of starting English lessons earlier, saying that in South Korea they start teaching English in primary schools, which has shown some positive outcome. So why not give it a try? But we will see that starting early without enough preparation is pointless.

While there has been much discussion about whether to go ahead with the primary English education or not, the reality on the ground is that English is spreading among younger learners. Of 22,000 public primary schools nationwide, 88.3 percent offered some form of English lessons during the 2003 school year, according to a survey conducted by the MEXT. Except for 66 ministry-designated pilot schools, most of these schools offer “English activities” as a means of promoting international awareness in the context of general studies classes.

*The Daily Yomiuri* (Feb.1, 2005) reports on one of the Primary Schools designated a pilot institution of early English education.

Amano Primary School in Kawachi Nagano, Osaka Prefecture, is a pioneer in terms of English teaching. In November, for example, a sixth-grade class was shown a film clip of two babies being wheeled past each other in buggies, and the students were then asked to come up with suitable dialog for the scene. The class, which was open to outside observers, emphasized reading and writing skills as the students checked their Japanese- English dictionaries and compiled vocabulary notes.

Amano Primary School was designated a pilot institution with regard to the introduction of Education Ministry in 1996, and English has been a regular subject there since 2000. First and second graders take English lessons once a week, while classes are held twice a week for older students. Classes are conducted by homeroom teachers on their own, or

with a team-teaching approach with Japanese teachers of English and a native speaking assistant language teacher working exclusively for Amano Primary School. The school has developed its own teaching materials and curriculum, reviewing them every year. The demonstration class was offered when the school opened itself to educators to show its achievements, which attracted about 500 schoolteachers and officials from all over the nation. Masaru Umemoto, an English teacher says they would like their students to improve their communication skills and realize how much fun it is to understand one another.<sup>8</sup>

In spite of a widespread belief that small children acquire better listening and pronunciation skills, the fact is that they very quickly forget what they don't need or use (Bostwick, 1990). Even returnees to Japan who have spent their early years in an English speaking country forget the language quickly once they stop using it.

Taiwan and South Korea have already made English compulsory at primary school. According to Tetsuya Kagata, associate professor at Osaka University of Commerce and an expert on English education in other parts of Asia, educators in Taiwan and South Korea emphasize acquiring English skills that will enable students to make their respective cultures and opinions known to the world. But in Japan, many worry that introducing middle school style English lessons in primary school will upset the current educational approach in primary school. Kagata (2001) insists that if Japan makes English a compulsory primary school subject, it should be to place emphasis on promoting international awareness, because we cannot expect great linguistic benefits from learning a foreign language just once a week. He adds that it would make more sense if they teach children how enjoyable it is to experience different cultures at this primary school stage. Tomoko Yamakawa, a plurilingualism researcher, seconds this opinion, saying it is of vital importance that small children should be exposed to a larger variety of foreign language so that their choice of learning will not be limited to English only (Otsu, 2005.p.162).

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<sup>8</sup>Here we see a wide-spread misconception about "understanding each other". There seems to be a notion that in order to understand each other, a common language, i.e. English is a necessary tool, but family disputes and political conflicts are no less rampant among English speaking people and nations. Researchers warn us of the language imperialism that has been going on silently during the last two or three decades. Linguistic imperialism, often seen as an aspect of cultural imperialism, has since the early 1990s attracted the attention of scholars in the field of English applied linguistics, particularly since the publication of Robert Phillipson's influential book *Linguistic Imperialism*.

I have seen over the last three decades how this early English education influenced some children. In one particular Catholic school, the first graders used to have three classes of English a week taught by native English speaker nuns. This continued until grade six. These head-starters went on to junior high schools, where everyone else started learning English for the first time. Most of these head-starters knew all the alphabets both in block styles and cursive styles. They had a larger vocabulary, were able to read simple sentences and were more comfortable repeating after the teacher than the rest of the students. The first two or three months were easy for them. However, after the first semester, that is, after the summer holidays, things begin to look different. Those non-head-starters begin to catch up. This observation of mine is confirmed by Shirahata (2004). He compared the English ability of first year students in middle school in winter between those who took one-hour English classes once a week after their fourth year in primary school and those who did not study the language in primary school. The result showed almost no difference in three categories: ability to distinguish between “r” and “l” pronunciation, the size of their vocabularies they could amass in a given time, and the speed with which they could read simple sentences. “Playing games and singing songs in English for one to two hours a week at primary school makes very little difference,” Shirahata concludes.

There are several linguistic reasons why younger EFL learners do not learn as much as expected. There seem to be a certain age when a certain notion of grammar is learned with relative ease. Up until that age, although it varies from individual to individual, it seems next to impossible to get it across to the learners, no matter how hard both sides try. They seem to get confused further as they try harder with very few positive results.

One noticeable aspect of this learning stage is that it looks very difficult for young learners to come to grips with the notion of third person singular-*s*, which is introduced in the first two months into the curriculum. Since we don’t have this grammar rule in Japanese, Japanese learners have a hard time internalizing it and actively and correctly reflecting it in their English production. It is a very common error to just drop this third person singular-*s* in speaking and writing. I have noticed that no matter how smart the students are they are unable to process the notion of this third person singular-*s* and actively utilize it in writing and speaking when they are in primary school. This observation of mine is confirmed by the similar observation

by Bostwick (2001), an immersion program director at Katoh Gakuen, one of the schools offering English immersion programs in Japan. He says that this notion of third person singular comes in later stages of learning than that of plurals and singular notion. Even young learners like three or four easily learn to see the difference between singular and plural but not the third person singular-*s*. Moreover, these head-starters get plural-*s* confused with the third person singular-*s*.

Verb inversion too seems to be difficult for children to grasp. In a personal communication, J.C. Jones, a long time children's English instructor at one of the giant language schools, said that until up to certain age, average children just could not understand and use inversion. Simple inversion such as *Is this your book?* and *Are you a teacher?* seem to pose little problem, while in more complex structures such as *Does she go to bed early every night?* or *Have you seen my pen?*, inversion seems to give more trouble or confuses them. Inversion in sentences with a *be*-verb is easy for both children and more mature learners. All they have to do is to replace a subject with a *be*-verb. But in sentences with other verbs, inversion rules become more complicated. Only after they have become well versed in the third person singular "S" notion, can they do the inversion involving this rule.

Another grammar problem I have observed in early English education is that a large percentage of students can not tell the difference between *your* and *you're*. Since the emphasis is not on writing and grammar, they are used to listening spoken phrases but when it comes to writing, they just do not do well. And if they make errors on the tests their evaluation suffers and so do their self-esteem and confidence.

An emotional side of the problem plays a negative role as well. The head-starters easily get bored in middle school English class and eventually lose interest. While they are idling away their time, the rest of the students keep working hard and catch up in no time. I have seen this happen many times. Parents of the head-starters also get frustrated and express their complaints to their children, which in turn produces unmotivated students.

In summary, starting early does not do the trick but rather ends up with less desired and often disappointing results.



### 2.2.5 A report from a primary English pilot program

When and how primary school children should be introduced to English and how it should be linked to middle school English, which is a compulsory subject, is an issue requiring careful consideration. MEXT has started English education at the primary school level much too early without positive and appropriate support. They decided to jump on the bandwagon to escape the dissatisfied public's complaints.

Although Matsukawa (1997) reports on some positive results of primary English education, there are aspects Matsukawa doesn't bring out. She shows some data how those first year students who had a "head start" (PEG, primary English group) excelled in overall attitudes toward foreign language learning and international awareness compared with their peers who did not receive any primary level English education (NPE, non primary English group). Her data includes questions such as:

1. If you have a chance to live in a foreign country, would you like to go?

- (a) I definitely would like to go.
- (b) I wouldn't feel like going.
- (c) I would refuse to go.

42% of PEG students chose *a*, while 30% of NPE students chose *a*.

50% of PEG students chose *b*, while 40% of NPE students chose *b*.

7% of PEG students chose *c*, while 30% of NPE students chose *c*.

2. Suppose you have a new student in your class and s/he can't speak Japanese. What would you do? Choose from the three answers.

- (a) I would talk to him/her the first chance I get.
- (b) I would talk to him/her when s/he has learned to speak Japanese.
- (c) I would not talk to him/her.

73% of PEG students chose *a*, while 59% of NPE students chose *a*. 20% of PEG students chose *b*, while 32% of NPE students chose *b*. 5% of PEG students chose *c*, while 7% of NPE students chose *c*.

3. Would you like ALTs to come to your English class more often? Yes or No.

68% of PEG students said yes and 72% of NPE students said yes. 32% of PEG students said no and 28% of NPE students said no.

4. Those who answered yes for #3, why?

- (a) We can be exposed to authentic English.
- (b) We can make use of English we learned.
- (c) We can learn some foreign culture first hand.
- (d) The ALT we had was a fun person to talk to.

60% of PEG students chose *a*, and 55% of NPE students chose *a*. 18% of PEG students chose *b*, but 9% of NPE students chose *b*. 10% of PEG students chose *c*, and 8% of NPE students chose *c*. 12% of PEG students chose *d*, and 28% of NPE students chose *d*.

5. Those who answered no for #3, why not?

- (a) I don't understand what s/he is talking about.
- (b) We can't talk to the ALT directly.
- (c) I have no confidence in my English.
- (d) The ALT we had was not a fun person to talk to.

28% of PEG students chose *a*, and 55% of NPE students chose *a*. 14% of PEG students chose *b*, and 15% of NPE students chose *b*. 22% of PEG students chose *c*, and 15% of NPE students chose *c*. 30% of PEG students chose *d*, and 15% of NPE students chose *d*. 5% of PEG students gave no reason.

6. Have you ever talked to an ALT outside your English class? Choose from the following four answers.

- (a) Only basic greeting phrases, such as *Hello. Nice to meet you. How are you?*
- (b) Self-introduction, about my family and friends.
- (c) Questions about the country from which the ALT comes.
- (d) I've never talked to ALTs.

(e) Some other topic.

67% of both PEG and NPE students chose *a*. 12% of PEG students chose *b* but 6% of NPE students chose *b*. 1% of PEG students chose *c* and 3% of NPE students chose *c*. 20% of both PEG and NPE students chose *d*. 4% of NPE students chose *e*.

Although Matsukawa concludes that these results show that the outcome of the primary English education is positive, closer examination sheds doubt on her conclusions.

First, while 42% of PEG chose *a* as an answer to the first question, 50% of them chose *b*. This indicates a larger percentage of PEG students are reluctant to go and live in a foreign land in spite of all the English lessons they had received in primary school.<sup>9</sup>

Second, for the second question, *would you talk to the new student who cannot speak Japanese?* 73 % of PEG said they would, while 59% of NPE said they would. I would say the difference between the two groups is rather small considering all the efforts, time and energy spent on primary English education cutting back on time otherwise spent on other subjects such as Japanese and math. It takes quite a bit of courage and friendliness to speak to someone who doesn't speak your language. I would say that the fact 59% of NPE said they would talk to them as soon as possible could be analyzed as positive attitude toward foreign culture. The interesting part of this data was that there were a small number of students who said they would never talk to the new student. The percentage of those among NPE was 7 % and that of PEG was 5 %. Primary school English doesn't seem to affect this negative attitude.

Third, more NPE students are looking forward to having ALTs in their English classrooms than PEG students. By the time they start middle school, PEG students can have lost the initial excitement of learning a foreign language by having been exposed to ALTs in primary school.

On the fourth question, almost twice as many PEG students as NPE students

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<sup>9</sup>The subjects of Matsukawa's data were all first year junior high school students. I can say from many years of my teaching experience that the gap between PEG and NPE is usually filled after about six months into middle school English. Some of the PEG students get Eiken pre-2<sup>nd</sup> grade earlier than NPE students but after that they mostly level out. This finding is supported by other educators such as Ichikawa(2001), Tsuda(1990) and Tanaka(1981).

want to use English they have learned in primary school. This is only natural because NPE students don't know English yet. But on the same question, twice as many NPE students as PEG students want more ALT classes because ALTs were fun people to be with. This shows NPE students can easily be motivated to learn the language and culture.

On the fifth question, almost twice as many NPE students as PEG students said they don't want more exposure to ALTs because they don't understand what the ALTs are saying. This is only natural since PEG students don't know enough English yet. But we should notice an interesting point in Matsukawa's data. A larger percentage of PEGs (30%) said they didn't want any more ALT classes because they had little confidence in their modest English skills. A smaller percentage (15%) of NPEs said they had little confidence, which can be regarded a natural reaction since they know practically no English, but what about those PEGs who have taken English lessons all through their primary school? They too have little confidence. This suggests that primary English education does the students less good than the MEXT and other advocates think it does.<sup>10</sup>

On the sixth question, exactly the same percentage of both groups (67%) said they only exchanged basic greeting phrase with ALTs outside their English classroom. This is something to be noted, because in spite of all those primary English lessons, PEGs did not voluntarily talk with ALTs in greater numbers. Of course more PEGs did more talking than just simple greetings, but this is again a natural outcome since they had been taught a little more complicated expressions, such as how to introduce yourself, family, friends, things they like to do in their free time, etc. Still another interesting fact here is that the same percentage of both groups (20%) said they had never voluntarily talked to ALTs outside their English class. This shows no matter how early English is introduced to children, there still remain a substantial number of children who are indifferent to foreign language. They can be classified as just shy when it comes to speaking English, but early introduction of English at primary school level doesn't seem to solve the problem.

Now we will go back to the reactions of Matsukawa (1997), the author of the book where all the data above appear. Although she concluded primary English

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<sup>10</sup>Another point here is that, although it's a small percentage, 5% of PEGs gave no reason for not wanting ALT classes. It may imply they are totally uninterested in the whole project.

education did have positive results, this very same person was disappointed by what she observed at two of the MEXT designated primary English education schools.

There is a general question; When children are exposed to English in their primary school days, how should middle schools deal with the students when they enter these schools? Kawachi Nagano's Nishi Middle School, which most Amano Primary School graduates attend, is struggling with the lack of a smooth linkage between the two. *The Daily Yomiuri* reports what Matsuoka saw in this regard:

Nishi Middle School, designated as a pilot school by the ministry in the 2003 school year, also opened itself to inspection by educators on the same day as Amano Primary School. About 30 adults observed a class for second-year students, who remained quiet and passive despite their teacher and ALT's efforts to whip up some enthusiasm. In addition to graduates from the pioneering Amano Primary School, the middle school also takes in those from nearby Tako Primary School, which offers English lessons about twice a month. According to a survey that the middle school conducted during the 2003 school year, there were no major differences in comparing listening and reading skills between the two groups. Umemoto from Amano pointed out that English teaching at middle schools tends to center on memorization and that approach makes it difficult to take advantage of what children learned in their primary school English lessons—having contact with foreign people and cultures.

So there is very little evidence, if any, in favor of starting early.

### **2.2.6 Practically no established curriculum and a very small number of professionals**

Another reason why primary English education is facing difficulty is the fact that there is practically no established curriculum for early English education. Of the 136 classes offered for education majors in one of the women's universities, Kobe Women's University, not even one class is dedicated to teaching English to young children under twelve years old. My observation is reinforced by the remark made by Saito (2004). He says the problem is the lack of any comprehensive surveys by schools studying the possibility of teaching the language as part of an official curriculum (2004, p.58).

### 2.3. ALL OF THE ABOVE IMPLY “DON’T COUNT ON SCHOOL” FOR ENGLISH EDUCATION

Since there is almost no curriculum available, there are very few trained professionals specializing in primary English teaching. As Bostwick (1995) confesses, the biggest challenge immersion programs face is to secure trained professionals who are willing to work for a certain period of time.<sup>11</sup> As a result, some hired professionals become disappointed or frustrated and quit. This is a bitter blow to the school. They can not switch teachers at the drop of a hat. This is one of the most critical aspects in language teaching to small children.

Because there are not even recommended textbooks to use, the primary schools where English lessons are given use the textbooks of their choice. Some schools use textbooks such as *Learning World for Tomorrow*, *Let’s Go series*, *Sesame Street series* and picture dictionaries of various kinds. In other schools, pupils learn phonics and play games and sing. Now some of the teaching universities are in a hurry to prepare courses for prospective teachers for younger children, but they are not yet ready for actual work. MEXT thought they had a plausible plan in mind, but what they claim are workable methods and what they have been doing are often contradictory. They say they wish to produce good English users, but they cut down on English class hours at school. They all of a sudden start a new strategy without enough preparation, such as the JET program and Primary School English classes. Nothing so far has been successful.

### **2.3 All of the above imply “Don’t count on school” for English education**

Now that the tacit conclusion of many points is: “Don’t count on school for English education”. So many people began looking for alternatives. There seems to be big, lucrative business opportunities where quite a few people are interested in starting English lessons even earlier than primary school. Here is an excerpt from *The Daily Yomiuri* (Feb. 1. 2005). “The rise in the number of children learning English at a younger age in recent years has led to growing competition among English-language schools with some even offering day-care service in English.”

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<sup>11</sup>Foreign nationals also have different view points in regard to work ethics and contract from those of Japanese workers, thus creating a gap between them, which is often difficult to bridge.

### 2.3.1 Commercial English schools

To benefit from the lucrative opportunities, commercial English schools began mushrooming all over Japan, trying to capture attention of apprehensive parents. The Japanese general public has been mistakenly made to believe that starting early is the only key to success in foreign language learning. We will see some of the pitfalls in this section.

#### **Nova's English Day Care**

Osaka-based Nova, the largest English language school chain in the country opened in January, 2004, the day-care center "Nova Kids Square" at Colorful Town Gifu, a commercial complex in Yanaiuzucho, near Gifu. Nova is promoting the school by advertising that the preschoolers will definitely become bilingual. The day-care center is the core facility of an area where children's products are sold. It takes care of children for up to eight hours a day, two hours of which are spent with foreign English language teachers. The center has an enrollment quota of 20 children aged between two and six. Fees start at 99,300 yen a month, or 216,000 dollars a year for the class—nearly four times more than the national average day care for children of 300,000 yen per year.

But despite the high prices, the center has received many inquiries, with one family driving two hours to visit it. Another family where the Japanese father speaks English and the mother Japanese to their children to help them become bilingual also sought information from the day-care center. A center employee said parents seemed very committed to helping their children speak English.

#### **Poppins Corporation's English Nursery School**

Tokyo-based Poppins Corporation, the largest provider of day-care services, has been a trailblazer in this field. In September, 2004, it opened the International Preschool in Shibuya Ward, Tokyo, taking care of Japanese and foreign children aged between one and three. At the school native English speakers trained in child-care teach everything in English, including asking children to work through problems themselves, such as sharing a popular toy to help them develop a habit of listening to others. The preschool offers both two-and five-day weekly services, with the latter costing 1.8 million yen a year—six times more than the national average.

Despite the high cost, more than 100 parents applied for the 30 admission places.

### 2.3. ALL OF THE ABOVE IMPLY “DON’T COUNT ON SCHOOL” FOR ENGLISH EDUCATION

As a result, the preschool had to interview parents to select the children. Most of the mothers whose children were accepted are not working mothers. A preschool employee said in addition to having their children cared for by the preschool, most mothers also wanted them to be educated.

This trend is proof how little Japanese general public know about foreign language education. In EFL situations in Japan, children do not learn as much as expected and forget more quickly than expected when they are not in need of the target language. Marhsall Childs, a practical linguist, backs up my observation as follows (*The Daily Yomiuri*, July 16, 2004).

Especially in the first half-dozen years of life forgetting plays a big part in language learning...in a mental shift from about age 5 to age 7, children develop a new grasp of reality that includes currently spoken languages, but greatly weakens the recall of unused language form.... What kills a language is lack of use of the language itself.... The rapid language learning for which children are famous is associated with a rapid forgetting of unused forms.... Both learning and forgetting happen quickly in the beginning and decrease (somewhat irregularly) with age. If you want a child to develop skill in a language, you must make sure he or she does not undergo long periods of not using it.

Although this English-for-babies trend is gaining some popularity, there is a hidden negative point. The room has to be quiet, which is quite unlikely with many young children. Rochelle Newman states his finding in *Washington Post*(April 27, 2005).

...noisy environments can interfere with language development in infants... said Newman, a cognitive psychologist ...Newman developed a series of individualized audio recordings and played them in her lab to each of 100 infants. In one recording , an unfamiliar female voice repeatedly called the child’s name, while in the background other voices created a potential distraction. The second version differed only in that the female voice called out someone else’s name. Both versions were played for each infant while researchers measured how long the babies paid attention. Newman also varied the loudness of the background noise in the recordings. She found that at about 5 months, a significantly greater number of



children listened longer to their own names than to other names—but only when the background noise was minimal. “The five-month olds could separate the streams of conversation and focus on the voice calling to them if the background was a level you might find in a romantic restaurant with soft and intimate conversations.” ... “But at that age the kids couldn’t isolate the foreground voice if the noise level nearly doubled—what you might hear in a crowded fast food restaurant.”...

### **Benesse Corporation**

In April, 2004, Benesse Corporation, a major correspondence education firm based in Okayama, started children’s English-conversation classes, run by women who have raised children and using their homes as classrooms. Such classes accept children up to middle school age, but most are low-grade primary school students and preschool age children. Benesse is competing in the Tokyo metropolitan area and elsewhere with Osaka-based ECC Junior, an English Language School, which runs similar classes.

#### **2.3.2 Semi-immersion schools**

Another article (*The Daily Yomiuri*, Sep. 24, 2004) depicts yet another story where parents are looking for ways to help their children acquire English skills. Parents who no longer find the conventional education system satisfactory are seeking new teaching settings for children. Their attempts apparently have been sparked by recent reports on declining academic abilities of Japanese children increasing international competition. Some parents in Japan, with no particular international experience, are seeking more international learning environments for their children; their goal is to provide their children with greater foreign language skills.

A company employee from Sagami-hara, Kanagawa Prefecture, in spring purchased a second-hand condominium in Ota, Gunma Prefecture. The Gunma Kokusai Academy, designed by the municipality of Ota using the system of government designated special zone for structural reform, is a school to offer a 12-year education at combined primary, middle and high schools. The new school, which formally opened in April 2005, uses English immersion teaching, in which all the classes except for Japanese, social studies and first- and second-grade ethics classes will be taught in English. The school currently offers preparatory classes for those planning to enter the school to get used to the English-speaking environment.

## 2.3. ALL OF THE ABOVE IMPLY “DON’T COUNT ON SCHOOL” FOR ENGLISH EDUCATION

These children’s English classes mentioned above have been around for some time, but the instructors are often unqualified women working part time. No credential is necessary to open a school branch. All you need is a room available two or three days a week and a few hours to spare. The screening for instructors is practically nil, because the main aim of the company is to gather students to be financially successful as business not to teach them English for the sake of education.

There have been very little, if any, research as to what has become of those who have been in either total immersion or semi-immersion environment. Matsumoto (1978) says they are at best mediocre interpreters. Interpreters are not supposed to express their own views. They are to act as spokespersons for the main speaker.

### 2.3.3 Going abroad with families

Some families even chose to spend their holidays abroad as a means of imparting English to their children—killing two birds with one stone. *The Daily Yomiuri* tells a story of one of such families (February 5, 2005.).

An increasing number of parents are traveling overseas to enable their children to study outside Japan with some parents attending language school themselves. Mrs. Matsumiya, a home-maker from Nerima Ward, Tokyo, left for Australia with her daughter Ria, 7, several days before the new school year starts there in February. Her daughter is scheduled to attend the local primary school for a month while Mrs. Matsumiya attends a language school. Ria took leave from her school in Japan to study overseas. This is not the first time Mrs. Matsumiya has taken her daughter overseas to study. In December 2003, after applying through a Tokyo-based organization, she rented a condominium and attended a language school in Southport on the Gold Coast in Queensland, Australia, while her daughter attended a local kindergarten. ALC Press Inc., which organized the short-term study program Matsumiya participates in, began running overseas study programs in 1998. Many participants who apply for the program are preparing for a longer-term study abroad, while some want to check the English ability of their children attending English classes in Japan. According to the *Ryugaku Journal*, a magazine on overseas education, there are two types of parents who take their children overseas

to study: those who wish to take their children with them while they learn a foreign language and those who simply want their children to experience life overseas.

Again there is very little, if any, evidence on how these families are doing in terms of linguistic competence after their time abroad.

#### **2.3.4 One university's strategy**

Some universities are offering unique courses to boost the students' English skills. Akita International University is one of them. Let us look at what they do (*The Daily Yomiuri*, February 7, 2005).

Every single class at Akita International University is taught in English. To offer students an international environment, the university has more than 20 non-Japanese teachers, who account for more than 60 percent of the school's faculty members. There are also about 30 foreign exchange students from the United States, Mongolia and China. All students are also required to study at AIU-affiliated universities, including Nankai University in China and Minnesota's Winona State University and St. Cloud State University, at least for one year. AIU students are asked to complete huge volumes of assignments every day. To help students concentrate on their studies in the early stages, all students are required to stay in a university dormitory in the first year. All students take the TOEFL and based on their scores, they are grouped into classes of about 15 students, categorized from EAP-1 to EAP-3. AIU President Mineo Nakajima, who formerly was president of Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, emphasized the importance of offering a curriculum that meets the need of individual students something he says most universities in this country fail to do.

It is too early to make comments on these all-English classes at universities. If the systems proves to be effective, others follow the footsteps. We will have to see.

#### **2.3.5 Making English official language in a firm**

Here is a brief summary of what some companies began doing in regard to improving their workers' English abilities.

### 2.3. ALL OF THE ABOVE IMPLY “DON’T COUNT ON SCHOOL” FOR ENGLISH EDUCATION

Sumida Corp., which grew out of a small factory in Tokyo, has made English the common language to be spoken by employees, whose name badges bear their real names and Western nicknames such as Lee and Peter. The company decided that employees have to call one another by their nicknames. The company made English the official language to be spoken by employees at companies affiliated with its corporate group in January 2002. Since then, employees have been obliged to speak English at every meeting attended by anyone who does not speak Japanese. All documents used within the company, from statements of account for business trips to sales reports, are written in English. The change was triggered by the rapid internationalization of the company’s business operations. Two years before making English its common language, the company began holding English conversation classes for employees. All employees with poor English skills were urged to participate. If employees whose TOEIC score is 500 points or higher attended a language school, until January 2002 the company provided up to 300,000 yen a year per employee in subsidies. To increase opportunities for staff to speak English as much as possible, the company hired non-Japanese staff in the canteen of its head office, prompting employees to have to order in English.

Other companies doing something similar are Nissan Motor Company and SMK Corporation, a Tokyo-based electric parts manufacturer. They have also made English their official language. Nissan adopted English after it formed a business alliance with Renault in 1999. SMK started in April 2001. At Nissan, the majority of internal documents are written in English, and English is used at meetings attended by non-Japanese staff. SMK writes documents in English for use at its branches overseas, and meetings are conducted in English if most of the attendants are non-Japanese. (*Yomiuri Shimbun*, 2005, Feb. 16)

#### 2.3.6 Summary of “English outside school” approach

We have briefly seen what the desperate general public has been doing to improve the situation and greedy private and public institutions to rake in money. Unfortunately there is no reliable data to show these alternatives favorably work for EFL learners. Now is the time MEXT made a move to win the approval of the Japanese people who are eager to learn. After all a foreign language learning is not that complex. In a way it looks absurd that the researchers have come up with so many methods including

obviously dubious ones without much careful research.

But here is no follow up data or studies to confirm how much they learn, and what levels of English they are actually using. One thing is sure: employing untrained native speakers does little good.

We have now visited the brief history on how English has been taught in Japan from the last several decades up to the present. In the next chapter, we will see the problems students and teachers face in EFL classes in terms of technical and cultural aspects. Some are preventable and can be fixed; others are not easy or even necessary to change. Some are simply myths.

## Chapter 3 Problems in EFL

### 3.1 Recognized problems: myths and realities

When English in education is the topic of discussion there are myths and realities mixed together. Innocent people are often victims of these myths. We will look at them one at a time:

#### 3.1.1 Students learn English for ten years

One of the misconceptions and misleading opinions about English education is refuted in Chapter 1 of this dissertation.

“Although we study English for all of ten years we still cannot speak it.” This is probably the phrase most often repeated by students and teachers and parents in Japan over the last two decades. However, this phrase is both misleading and true at the same time. It implies several aspects of foreign language learning and teaching in Japan. First of all who are *we*? And do *we* really study English for ten years? *We* implies average college graduates who spent most of their school years in Japan. The fact is that we don’t study English for ten years. We may be in English classes for a total of ten years, if you are English majors in college, but if not, very few of us can say we have studied English for ten years by the time we graduate from college. They may be required to sign up for English classes for the first two years of college but that is not equivalent to studying English for ten years.

Another problematic aspect of this famous phrase is that English is the only school subject that has been criticized this harshly. Japanese students start learning math as soon as they enter primary school up until they graduate from high school, that is, they learn math for 12 years. No one complains even if they don’t become a good mathematician or a skilled engineer.

Next, what is the definition of the phrase *speak English*? We often hear “I can’t speak English”, but it’s ironic that the speaker is talking in English. The phrase *speak*

*English* means something different to different people. It is so vague and ambiguous that we can't just say Japanese students can not speak English. They may not be able to say all they want in fluent English, but they certainly know a large number of phrases that they can use to express themselves to a certain extent.

The Eiken or Step test, the most popular English proficiency tests conducted in Japan, have interview parts, and all the junior high school students are encouraged to take them. In the speaking part of the test, the students are asked to answer questions such as "Why do many students go to cram school?" "How many bikes do you see in front of the building?" "Do you go to a cram school?" "Why?" The test takers are to answer these questions in English and as far as the third level is concerned, a majority of them pass. Doesn't that mean they can at least carry out a simple, short conversation in English? Therefore seen in this light, the old cliché "Although we study English for all of ten years we still cannot speak it" is a myth.

However, this phrase does have a side that is very much a reality. Many of the seniors in English majors in college can not express their simple feelings and opinions in English comfortably. They repeatedly make the same errors and mumble rather than clearly say some stilted phrases right out of the textbooks. They often have a hard time listening to and understanding spoken phrases. This fact is often referred to as *not being able to speak English after learning it for ten years in school*. In a sense it is true.

### **3.1.2 Low TOEFL scores imply general incompetence; comparison with other nations' scores is not always fair**

For more than 40 years the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) has been the leading academic English proficiency test in the world. Each year nearly 800,000 individuals worldwide register for the exam (TOEFL manual, 2004.) Unfortunately, Japan has always lagged behind in TOEFL scores. In the period 1998-99, the average TOEFL score attained by Japanese was 501, thereby raising Japan to 18th place in the ranking of scores among 21 Asian nations, placing it above Afghanistan, Cambodia and Laos. This compared favorably to the previous year, 1997 when Japan had come last with a score of 498, and was still left way behind its closest neighbors, China and South Korea, which scored 562 and 535, respectively.

Just looking at these scores and ranking, we can not be optimistic nor pessimistic,

because it is not at all fair to simply compare scores between Asian nations. Take China for instance; the Chinese agriculture minister reported that in 1993 the average rural income was 921 yuan (\$77) versus 2337 yuan (\$195) in urban areas while an average household income in 2000 was about 500,000 yen (\$5000). The cost of TOEFL test is roughly 100 dollars worldwide. It is a lot of money for an average Chinese family.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, it is easy to speculate that not everyone in China can afford to take TOEFL, while it is easily affordable for even a college student in Japan to take the test several times in a row. In fact in many colleges the students are required to take TOEFL for the purpose of having their levels checked. When all the first year students are required to take it whether they are ready or not, some poor scorers inevitably lower the average score of the Japanese test takers. But in China, only a handful of elite, who are ready and eager, can afford to take it. Chinese test takers are often the ones from rich families who could afford private English teachers to give their only child lessons at home.

A similar observation is made by M.R. Child.

...Do such reports give a valid comparison of the Japanese English level with the levels of test-takers of other countries? No, because we must consider who takes the test. In most Asian countries, not many people take the TOEFL because it is expensive, and they take it for the rather limited goal of demonstrating the English skill required to enter an English speaking university. In Japan, many people take the TOEFL, typically two or three times in their lives, just to see how they will do. Relatively few take it as part of the requirement for entering an English-speaking university. Japanese people take more TOEFL tests than all other Asians put together. Does the resulting low "average" score mean Japanese people have poor English? No. It means simply that in Japan hordes of low-scoring people take the test.... (*The Daily Yomiuri*. Sep, 9, 2005).

Although TOEFL score says a lot about English ability, a simple comparison would be dangerous.

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<sup>1</sup>A close friend of mine, a woman from Shanghai, confided to me that her monthly income in Shanghai was 10,000 yen and she was able to live quite comfortably.



### 3.1.3 Speaking is not everything; reading and writing play vital roles

Since Japan is a highly populated island country with scarce natural resources, trading with other countries has been important for its survival. It is not too much to say that Japan has heavily relied on its international trade for many centuries. When Japan traded with China, Korea, Holland and other countries, reading and translating written business documents was of prime importance. Writing also mattered. When actual business meetings were conducted, only then, speaking was a useful communication tool. But until 1924, when the telephone was introduced, there must have been very few opportunities to actually speak a foreign language. Also, when contact is made, what matters most is a written document not a verbal promise. When a new technology is introduced, it is a written manual that has to be read. I'm not trying to make light of speaking ability, but I should emphasize reading and writing are even more important.

Grammar translation has been the target of blame for the unsuccessful outcome of the EFL in Japan. They say translation does more harm than good. It slows the speed with which students produce either written or spoken English. But thanks to the high level of grammar translation done by our predecessors in a variety of languages, Japanese people can now enjoy a large collection of Chinese, French, German, Russian classic literature, let alone English literature, magazines, newspapers, novels, etc. Since Japanese and English are quite different in structures, grammar translation is an important asset in EFL.

## 3.2 Teaching problems

Problems in EFL can be found in all areas of learning and teaching. We'll look at some of the problems on teaching side.

### 3.2.1 Overcorrection and disapproval by teachers

Even in the first few months into English learning, the students are encouraged to learn every detail of the lesson including spelling, punctuation and the way to write the alphabet. This is the way it should be. The basic material is always important. But the problem is that every little mistake the students make on a test is taken as a minus point. They are mostly interested in their first encounter with a foreign language but nervous as well. They become very passive in writing, afraid they make

errors resulting in lower scores on a test. Overcorrections of their errors intimidate the students.<sup>2</sup>

### 3.2.2 Textbooks and reference books need improvement. More current use should be adopted

Although all the MEXT approved textbooks are proofread by native speakers, some sample sentences are unnatural, archaic and stilted. Some of the reference books and exercise books have unrealistic and unnatural sample sentences that can cause the students to lose interest. Moreover the way the grammar is presented leaves much to be desired. A large number of students who say they don't like to study English dislike the way grammar is taught. As is shown in chapter 5 it is an obvious fact that grammar is essential in learning a foreign language, but some old, useless grammar lessons taught at school kill the potential interest of the students. For example, one beginning level composition asks the students to write *Is that a white ship? No, it's not. What is it then? It's a black ship* (Flynn, 2000). In what situation can anyone possibly mistake a black ship for a white ship? It is too unrealistic.

### 3.2.3 Lack of confidence in teachers exerts negative influences

English teachers are encouraged to pass the Eiken pre1st grade or get higher score than TOEIC 700. This announcement made by MEXT indicates that a large number of current English teachers' English competence is low. The teachers themselves are well aware of it and that lack of confidence exerts negative influences on the students. Also, there are more and more returnees in English classes today, whose pronunciation and listening ability are better than those of the teacher. Especially when an assistant English teacher (ALT) is present in class, the teachers who think themselves to be incompetent speakers get nervous and the students can easily perceive the teachers' mood.

However, I need to emphasize that there is more than speaking ability and good pronunciation in teaching. There are many more important components in teaching a foreign language. Just like a world-class pianist is not always a best piano teacher, those with good speaking abilities are not always competent teachers. If those with

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<sup>2</sup>Personally I correct spelling errors but do not take a point out of the scores, unless it is a crucial error such as *right* and *write*, *your* and *you're*. I correct *consert* to *concert*, but the student does not suffer a minus point. All they need to do is to write the correct spelling several times until they get it right. A minus point will not do them any good. It would only discourage them.

good speaking ability were always superior teachers, then all the native English speakers would make ideal teachers, but the reality is not so. This native speaker fallacy is discussed more in detail in Chapter 7. A similar observation is made by M.R. Child.

Earlier in 2005, the ministry did a survey of English teachers and found them lacking in language ability,” in that 80 percent of high school teachers and 90 percent of middle school teachers had not passed the pre-first grade of the Eiken test administered by the Society of Testing English Proficiency. The apparent remedy is to encourage English teachers to improve their English and to require them to attend summer institutes to learn modern methods of communicative language teaching. Focusing only on teacher’s fluency in English is far too narrow a view of the problem. It is not a teacher’s fluency that is required; it is the students’ fluency. Like a good athletic coach, a teacher can nurture this fluency in a student without having it himself or herself. Of course, personal skill in a teacher is helpful, but lack of it should not be a source of blame by students, parents or ministries- or a cause of lower self-esteem of teachers (*The Daily Yomiuri*, Sep. 9, 2005).

This lack of confidence is reflected in the recent phenomena where school teachers began enrolling in juku’s intensive courses to brush up and improve their teaching techniques. It has been a tacit assumption that accredited junior and senior high schools should shun juku or yobiko, because the very fact students go to juku implies school alone is not enough for students to reach their goal or to achieve what the students and their families wish, namely to enter prestigious high schools or colleges or to improve English as an academic subject. Schools used to make every effort to avert their students from going to juku. The larger the number of their juku-going students, the greater the embarrassment and shame the schools face, and the greater the danger of ill-fame. But now things began to change and teachers began going to juku. Some private schools hire juku instructors to teach their classes not only English but also mathematics and science.

Even major publishers were and still are on the schools’ side. They almost never openly release teachers’ manuals to juku, no matter how large or competent the juku may be. They have always ranked below accredited schools in Japanese society.

Nothing was able to avert this strong trend. Things began to change, however. Alarmed school teachers began going to yobiko themselves to learn the secrets of teaching. Yobiko began offering intensive courses for enthusiastic but sometimes incompetent teachers to improve their teaching skills. Sometimes teachers travel to other prefectures to attend these seminars at their own expense. These seminars are usually held on weekends when regular school teachers have their days off. After Friday classes some teachers fly to other areas of Japan where these seminars are held and come back late Sunday night. It is a hectic schedule, but more and more teachers are enrolling anyway. They are this desperate.

### 3.3 Students problems

It is always easy to find faults with students, the less authoritative figures. The people in the higher places in a hierarchy find it an easy way out to blame learners. In fact, on students' side, there have always been unwillingness to speak and other negative attitudes toward learning. M.R. Childs comments on this as follows.

The notorious Japanese reluctance to speak is due to a national inferiority complex caused at least in part by the self-fulfilling prophecy that Japanese people cannot speak English—a false belief that is treated as a fact and has consequences as though it were a fact (*The Daily Yomiuri*, Sep. 9, 2005).

The Japanese are not alone in this. Reluctance to speak a foreign language is universal. Not everyone is confident in a foreign language. But nonetheless the reluctance to speak and other problems on the students' side exist. We will see where they come from.

#### 3.3.1 Grammar translation's negative effects

As we have seen in the earlier part of this chapter (section 2.1.1.), grammar translation once dominated EFL teaching in Japan. This conventional method has always been blamed for the negative side of EFL. This is both true and false. It is true that too much word for word translation delays the reading process. It also deprives the students of opportunities to read enough easy English materials fast. They sometimes spend too much time on selecting just the right word for a natural translation, which

goal is often very difficult to reach. Some teachers themselves feel comfortable with translation because that's one of the English skills where they are certainly superior to the students. They can be confident in what they teach. They don't have to be intimidated in front of the returnee students, some of whom can possibly be very good English speakers. Some teachers prefer the grammar translation method to any other because that's the way they learned English themselves.

### **3.3.2 Organizing thoughts and presenting them is a weakness**

It is often said that the average Japanese have more difficulty in organizing thoughts and presenting them to other people. It is good manners to quietly sit and listen when your superior is speaking. The same manner is respected in school classrooms. Very few students put up their hands and ask questions during class. Teachers too prefer a quiet audience and encourage students to be quiet and take notes while they are lecturing. This makes the students to be even more passive and reserved than they are by society's norms.

### **3.3.3 Shyness is one of the obstacles; group oriented mind**

Japanese students in general don't want to stand out in class or anywhere for that matter, as a result of cultural norms. We have a saying in Japanese "A stake that sticks out gets hammered", which means those who distinguish themselves are not received well. We are a group minded people and seem to feel more comfortable when we look and act the same as others. The evidence can be gathered from the fact that many schools have uniforms for the students to wear, and they are required to carry the same bags, wear the same shoes, caps, gym clothes, and socks and even slippers inside the school building. This group oriented tendency often works negatively when it comes to students expressing themselves verbally in a foreign language. They would rather remain quiet than say something different from others.

*To make a difference* is a phrase often used with positive connotation in English. In Japanese *be different* almost always conveys something negative. Speaking a foreign language is something very different. Although Japanese say they would like to speak English, I am convinced that deep within their mind they are always ready to get rid of that something that is very different.

A similar observation is made by Alayne Madore (*Surprises and Discoveries about Japan*, p.69. Nannundo, 3000). Madore was born and educated in Australia and New

Zealand and came to Japan in 1967 and married a Japanese and lived and taught in Japan for many years. She owns a study abroad business, Madore International.<sup>3</sup> Her observation is as follows.

...Everything was identical. Kindergarten seems to be the start of group life here in Japan.... I was surprised to see how everyone was organized into groups. Individuality was discouraged from this early age.... I came to understand why Japanese students can't seem to make decisions and move independently. ...When students go on excursions or school trips, they are again divided into groups with a leader. It seems that a child is never given a chance to be on his or her own or to think for himself or herself.... I would often teach and then ask the class a question. Of course I was expecting that many students would raise their hands, but not a single hand went up....

...Based on my personal observations, and comments from friends who are also teachers, high school and college in Japan are no different from earlier education. College students will sit passively in the class, and never raise their hands to try to answer the questions...but on their own they could do nothing....

For EFL learners, children and adults included, who feel constrained by their shyness, I know that there are many ways to break free. Parents and teachers, first, must respond to the students' shyness with empathy, taking care not to equate being anxious with being incompetent and making mistakes. Instructors should send soothing signals that say, "This is hard. I'm going to help you deal with it. You're not alone. I've been there before".

#### **3.3.4 Perfectionists. All or nothing attitude**

Japanese are said to be perfectionists. Some evidence can be seen in the way the EFL students learn how to write the alphabet. They are encouraged to learn how precisely every letter should be written, that is, how far the lower part of Y should extend and at what angle the upper part should open, etc. They obey the "rules"

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<sup>3</sup>Madore International is one of the most reputable study abroad organizations in the Kansai area in Japan.

so diligently and every little difference is corrected by the teacher. As a result most of the Japanese students write both block letters and cursive letters very well, a lot better than native English speaking children and adults.

In regard to the written tests, almost all the tests are marked in points with 100 being the highest. In middle schools and senior high schools, no tests are marked as A, B, C. Tests graded as A,B,C, do not show exactly how many points the students get on the test, but those marked in points more precisely show where they lost a point. In this way, the students become too point conscious, worrying about a small mistake that is not at all critical when it comes to getting their thoughts across to the other person.

Moreover, a large majority of middle school students are in the early stage of puberty when they become extremely self-conscious. Speaking in a foreign language where they are prone to say something “wrong” and risk being in danger of being ridiculed is the last thing they would do. This is particularly more noticeable among boys than girls. McDougall (1963) extended Baldwin’s (1960) analysis to explain the development of individual differences in the trait shyness, and he suggested a third stage of development in which the intensification of self-consciousness at the onset of puberty interacts with the development of the self-regarding sentiment to shape shyness and modesty as qualities of adult character and conduct.

### **3.3.5 Attitude toward foreign language learning: The students’ major goal is to pass college entrance exams**

One major purpose of learning English in Japan is to pass college entrance exams. A large percentage of students study English for this purpose. Test contents are available everywhere from school libraries to bookstores nationwide. Countless distance learning courses deal with university entrance exams. Cram schools teach the students how to pass college entrance exams. In most entrance exams, they do not ask for the examinees’ competence in speaking. Some teaching colleges ask for listening abilities, but not speaking abilities at the time of the entrance exams. Therefore test takers put more emphasis on the written test materials that most often appear in the tests. They are vocabulary, idioms, grammar, reading and writing. Some say college entrance exams are shifting toward a non-grammar, non-translation trend. They ask for more fast reading (Guest. 1999). Guest also says in a newspaper column as

follows:

We've all heard this one before: The unproductive emphasis on teaching "yakudoku" (reading and translating texts from English into Japanese), and the related emphasis on teaching sentence grammar can't be helped because these things need to be learned in order to pass university entrance examinations. This is the so-called washback effect according to which university entrance exams dictate how high school courses are taught. There is only one problem with this theory, though: Time and time again it has been shown that university entrance exams do not demand nor focus extensively on English-to-Japanese sentence translation or grammar skills.

(*The Daily Yomiuri*, Oct. 14, 2004).

This observation is also partly true but mostly false, because the exams certainly do ask grammar questions. Moreover, translation and writing are the major part of the objective measurement used in most of the top state universities.

The English exam of Kyoto University in 2005 has three questions. Each allotment of marks is 50 points. Of the total 150 points, 100 points are for translation from English to Japanese. The remaining 50 points are for composition from Japanese to English. Kyoto University, the second ranking university in Japan, where many aspiring, intelligent students wish to go, has given the same type of exams for as long as I can remember, at least forty years. Kyoto University graduate school's entrance examination is all translation from English to Japanese. Nothing else is asked for.

Kobe University has a slightly different type of exam to select their students. They too ask students to translate English into Japanese and vice versa. But their allotment for translation only takes 35% of the total points. One could say 35% is still a lot, and I agree.

So I must conclude that college entrance exams require students' grammar knowledge, especially sentence analysis and composition skills. Without these skills, it is absolutely impossible to score high enough to be admitted to top ranking universities. No amount of vocabulary and idioms would compensate for the lack of grammar.



### 3.4 Cultural differences and problems

Cultural differences play a part in every learning situation including foreign language learning. Many tend to regard them as negative and obstacles and try to change them. But often it is not at all a good idea nor does it work. Culture differences are rooted deep into the society and they have been created or formed themselves over a long period of time. It is often pointed out that the western ways of informing the office of your delay or absence is different from those of Japanese, that is, in English you first tell them you'll be late or be absent and then go on to tell them the reason. The conclusion is first and the reason later. On the other hand Japanese would start telling them the reasons and expect the office manager to guess the conclusion; in this case the caller will either be late or absent (Matsumoto,1970). One sample conversation would be:

Japanese worker: Hello. This is Tanaka speaking. It has been a little chilly since last night and I seem to have caught a cold. I don't feel very well, and so....

At this point the person at the other end of the line is supposed to guess whether the caller is not coming to work or is going to be late. The receiver is supposed to be able to guess which by the tone of the caller's voice. Asking whether or not he is coming would be considered insensitive. The conclusion is expected to be understood. But in order to make sure the listener would say something like "So, you are not coming in today, I suppose." Then the caller would say " No, I'm sorry". The conclusion comes last.

Changing the way of talking means changing your mind set, which is hard to do.

Another example we often come across is the way we talk about our family members. English speaking people tend to say positive things about their sons, daughters, and spouses almost to the point of bragging from a Japanese point of view. Japanese would deliberately downplay the good points, mentioning some of the shortcomings in their family members, to try to appear reserved. This often shocks the first time visitors to Japan. In EFL classes, Japanese learners are often encouraged to say something positive about themselves but this makes them very uncomfortable. We just don't praise ourselves in the presence of others. *Being proud* often sounds positive in English but in Japanese it has a negative connotation.

Talking back or arguing with someone older than you is not in our culture either. This behavior is not regarded positive. We have our own ways of saying negative

things, denying and refusing. Simple reproduction in English would make us feel awkward.

Debate, therefore, is hard to teach and learn because of a cultural barrier.

### 3.4.1 The Native speaker fallacy exists; Hire traveling foreigners?

The “Native speaker fallacy” is a notion that “the ideal teacher of English is a native speaker” (Phillipson, 1992: 192-199).

Being a native speaker does not automatically give us a conscious, clear and comprehensive picture of a language in all its contexts of use. What is more, intuitions can vary from one user to another. Richard Bradford’s opinion (2001) that “question tags ... mostly belong to 1960s BBC broadcasts” is a case in point. The native speakers I asked think question tags are alive and well. Whether they are used with the same frequency, or in the same contexts, or by the same social/age groups, are questions that no native speaker can answer accurately just on the basis of his/her intuitions. Such sweeping statements, based on purely subjective views, suffer from the same problems that he has identified in ELT materials (Gabrielatos, 2003: 2).

In one of the many online discussions over the years, one of the participants asked the following question. *Is ‘amn’t’ used?* Some native speakers said it was acceptable, because it was a common expression where he came from. Others said it wasn’t acceptable and thus should not be taught in EFL. Still others said their grandparents often used the expression. So what are the EFL students supposed to learn from an inconclusive discussion of this sort?

In the same discussion forum, an issue of idiom was brought up. One poster says as follows.

This morning I was talking to my mother (British - north of England) on the phone and she said: “I’ve just been watching the new Doctor Zhivago - not a patch on the old one” (meaning “not nearly as good as”). “Good expression,” I thought, “must teach that one”. Then I began to wonder whether the expression also exists in North American English. A quick consultation with two dictionaries (Oxford Advanced Learners’ &

Longman Advanced American) made it seem that the expression is pure British. Could somebody please confirm/ disconfirm this for me?

To this another poster answers:

The direct teaching of such expressions is, simply put, a waste of time. There are thousands of English words and who knows how many expressions. It is impossible to address them all (or even the majority of them) in class. One must prioritize. Clearly the most frequently used words and expressions should take precedence. These are so important that they should be taught directly.

At some point, though, you need to draw the line. Many experts feel that only the most common 2 or 3 thousand words are worth directly teaching in English class. Once learners know these words, they should be reasonably well equipped to learn the others they need from context. Expressions such as *not a patch on* don't even fall into the most common 10,000.

Now two different approaches appeared. Then another poster says as follows:

Actually, I think we have a responsibility to teach the natural spoken English of our family and friends back home. This doesn't mean that I advocate that we should teach slang... and actually, I almost never do. (If I do, I make a point of telling them that it is slang and advise caution in who they say it to and when they use it. As for swear words.... never.)

But I certainly do teach idioms such as these occasionally and even handout homework sheets to my students from time to time... and they love doing them!

The reason why I think it is important to teach these kinds of idioms is that people back home really do talk like this! They don't confine themselves to text book English. In the real world, we color our lives with all sorts of rich language and wonderful metaphors.

Many of my students have complained that they can't understand the American videos they love to watch – and have to resort to reading all of the Japanese. I believe part of the problem for them is the speed at which

the language is spoken by native speakers. But probably a good 50% of the problem is that native speakers use idioms all the time and I don't even think we realise how often we do so!

Whenever I go back to Australia for a vacation, I realise I suddenly and quite subconsciously slide back into a stronger accent and speak uninhibited slang with a major dose of idioms to add nuance and emotional content. It is then that I realise how guarded and correct my English becomes in the classroom. Is this really fair to the students? What happens when they visit my country.... have I really done them a favor by speaking so slowly, clearly and concisely that I have taken all of the culture out of the living language? I encourage teachers to teach English spoken in the real world and not to worry about whether it fits into any kind of minimum list category. Teach your mum's English!

Now things begin to get complex and opinions get more and more idiosyncratic. Yet another poster says:

We should disregard frequency and teach the expression (and presumably others like it) because "people back home really do talk like this." If we subscribe to this idea, how then are we to go about selecting from the hundreds of thousands of words and expressions available to us those to address in our classes?

If one wants to equip students to compare movies (or books, or whatever), how does one decide whether to teach them: not (nearly) as good as, couldn't hold a candle to, pales in comparison to, not a patch on, a piece of crap compared to, doesn't stand up against, not worth the celluloid it's printed on, etc. Or do we simply teach all of them; dig out every trivial expression we can think of and foist them on students? Of course, this would take more class time than anybody has but....

Obviously a choice is forced upon us, so how are we to proceed?

I can conclude from this email exchange that native speaker teaching can be really confusing to students. The last poster says the choice is upon the teachers. Does that mean there are as many idioms to learn as there are teachers? The students would need some kind of guidelines.

The native speaker fallacy often confuses not only EFL students but Japanese teachers of English. They would think all native speakers have the absolute authority on English, which is not true. They tend to forget some of the bright sides of being a non-native teacher (Medgyes,1999, p.89).

1. provide a good learner model for imitation;
2. teach language learning strategies effectively from their own experiences;
3. supply learners with supplementary information about the English language;
4. anticipate and prevent language difficulties better;
5. be more empathetic to the needs and problems of learners;
6. make use of the learners' mother tongue.

However of course there are dark sides of being non-native teachers. A linguistic deficit and scanty cultural information can be counted as the main factors. Being a cultural stimulant can be hard if you don't look "foreign" enough.

### **3.4.2 Speaking is not valued high: Silence is still golden in Japan**

In a country where silence is still considered better than talkativeness, encouraging students to talk does not produce expected results. They prefer remaining quiet, especially in EFL classes. There is a proverb in English "The wheel that squeaks loudest gets the oil", but there is no equivalent in Japanese. This is strange, because Japanese and English often have the equivalent proverbs. It may suggest that the wheel that squeaks doesn't get the oil in Japan.

Let us look at some examples from a cultural perspective.

Sumo is Japan's national sport even though in recent years more sumo wrestlers from abroad have joined Japan Sumo Association. At the end of each tournament, a final bout is fought for championship. Winning a championship is a great feat and the winner must be very proud, happy, excited, and impressed with his own victory. It has been a long, arduous way and yet the champion never expresses any emotion. None. He doesn't even smile. Making a V sign would be ridiculed and risk discharge from the Sumo Society. On the other hand, when you see a soccer game or a baseball game played in Japan, the entire atmosphere is very different.

When the team wins the championship, they jump around, pat everyone on the back, hug, scream, and express their joy and happiness to their heart's content. Staying calm and not expressing your feelings on this occasion is regarded strange. Having emotions in check is a sign of a cultivated mind in Japan. It is highly praised.

Another example is given by Torikai (1996) when Shogi, a Japanese board game much like chess, is played between two top players for a national championship. When the game is finished after many hours, the moment of victory comes. One of the two is the winner, but he just bows to his opponent and to the audience. No emotion is expressed. Nor is a word. The first runner up just bows to the champion and to the crowd. This is his way of "saying" *I lost*. No emotion is expressed. No one expects to hear a word spoken. Here silence is not only golden but beautiful.

Things are of course changing, but some cultural aspects are hard to change, at least not as easy as some might think. This cultural aspect, silence is golden, is no less significant in foreign language learning in Japan. Japanese students can not be instantly turned into fake westerners, eagerly voicing their opinions in class, expressing emotions openly, debating issues they are not comfortable with. Teachers encourage students to speak up in English classes, but not in other classes. In other classes students are expected to remain quiet. They play a role of good listeners. Sleeping in class is overlooked but talking students are reprimanded. How can they switch from quiet, good listening students to lively, opinionated students at the drop of a hat? It's quite unlikely. This is a request hard to comply with. "Don't be afraid of making mistakes when you speak English" is the phrase least effective and yet most often heard and repeated over the decades. This not only sounds empty and unrealistic but also even ignorant of the language learning situation in Japan.

### **3.5 Systems problems**

When you have problems in the system, it's hard to change. Sometimes you just have to go with the flow or work with them. In this section, the Japanese language system, social issues surrounding EFL, and the most important of all, the university entrance examinations are discussed.

### 3.5.1 Japanese and English are different in structures

Japanese language is a flexible language when it comes to word order. You can use all of the following sentences to mean *I ate three pieces of cake*. Some are formal and others slightly informal but they are all acceptable and correct.

1. keki wo mikire tabeta.
2. mikere keki wo tabeta.
3. tabetayo, keki wo mikire.
4. watashi wa keki wo tabeta, mikirene .
5. mikire no keki wo watashi wa tabeta.
6. tabetayo, watashi wa keki wo mikire.
7. watashi wa mikire no keki wo tabeta.
8. watashi wa tabetayo, mikire no keki wo.

The direct translations of the Japanese sentences above into English are as follows.

1. Cake three pieces ate.
2. Three pieces cake ate.
3. Ate cake three pieces.
4. I cake ate three pieces.
5. Three pieces of cake I ate.
6. Ate I cake three pieces.
7. I three pieces of cake ate
8. I ate three pieces of cake.

As you can see, English word order rules are not as flexible as those in Japanese. Unless Japanese EFL learners have a good grasp of sentence production rules, for their utterances a word for word translation would make no sense at all. Learning English can be more challenging to Japanese than to, say, French learners or Dutch learners, because of the linguistic differences in both vocabulary and grammar.

Another one of the differences is the adjective usage. In Japanese all adjectives, adjectival phrases and clauses come before the noun they modify. Adjectives never come after the modified nouns. But in English a single adjective comes before a noun but adjectival phrases and clauses come after the noun.

Examples:

1. Akai kuruma.
2. Aniga katta akai kuruma.
3. Jikode kowareta akai kuruma.
4. Kouen no sobano akai kuruma.
5. Sengetsu chichiga katta akai kuruma ga nusumareta.
6. Ieno maeni tomatteiru akai kuruma wa watashinodewa nai.

English translation of the above sentences:

1. A red car.
2. The red car my brother bought.
3. A red car crushed in the accident.
4. A red car by the park.
5. The red car my father bought last month was stolen.
6. The red car parked in front of the house is not mine.

Word for word translations of the Japanese sentences.

1. Red car.



2. Brother bought red car.
3. Accident in crushed red car.
4. Park by red car.
5. Last month bought red car was stolen.
6. House front parking red car mine not.

Since the sentence construction rules are very different, it is absolutely impossible for Japanese EFL learners to even say or write a simple sentence without knowing grammar. Especially the adjective clause usage is a crucial one. Betty Azar, author of *Understanding and Using English Grammar* lists a very common error made by non-native speakers in one of her books (*English grammar*, 1999.p.268).

Incorrect: The book is mine that is on the table.

Although the sentence could be understood, it's still incorrect.

Among many other grammar differences, the pronoun usage is another point to note.

In Japanese pronouns are much less frequently used than in English. I'm giving English sentence examples first and the direct Japanese translations later to show how these pronouns are dropped in Japanese. A set of sentences, direct translations from Japanese, are perfectly correct in standard Japanese.

English examples.

1. Do you like oranges? Yes, I like them very much.
2. Did you see the movie I was talking about? No, I was a bit busy.
3. Did the police catch the man they were looking for? Yes, they caught him last night.
4. What are you waiting for?

Japanese translation.

1. Orenji ga sukidesuka? Hai, totemo sukidesu.

2. Itteta eiga mimashitaka? Iie, chotto isogashikatta.
3. Keisatsu wa tehaishiteita hannin wo taihoshimashiataka? Hai, sakuya tsukamaemashita.
4. Naniwo matteiruno?

Japanese translated again in English word for word.

1. Like oranges? Yes, very like.
2. Talking movie saw? No, a bit busy.
3. Police looking for man caught? Yes, last night caught.
4. What waiting for?

No pronouns are used in the above examples. Subjects and objects, when they are pronouns, are often omitted. Objects are almost always dropped.

A similar observation is made in regard to the gender differences in pronouns in Japanese and English. Yamauchi (*The Daily Yomiuri*, 2005, Oct. 4) writes as follows.

...In English, you have both “he” and “she” just for third person singular, while you do not distinguish gender for third person plural (“they”).... ...English still requires differentiating male and female when discussing people. You need to choose “he/his/him” or “she/her” when referring to individuals. Coupled with the singular-plural issue, this gender-orientation results in considerable complexity from the point of view of languages that do not distinguish gender and number. For instance, when attempting to write contemporary gender-neutral English, one sees things like: “When (a) Member(s) of the Association decide(s) to oppose a resolution by the committee, he, she or they who has/have so decided, need(s) to submit his/her/their decision to the chairperson of the committee in writing.”

...In Japanese, we avoid all this complexity: there is no linguistic distinction between male or female, just like there is no distinction between singular or plural. ...First, there is no gender for any Japanese nouns.

Since there are no such things as “pronouns” in Japanese, “he” or “she” do not arise as a concern when referring to men or women. Those of you who have studied Japanese might say, about now, “What about *kare* and *kanojo*?”, words usually taught to mean “he” and “she” respectively. In my opinion these words have been pressed into use, unnaturally, to create a correspondence with English, because of the absence of corresponding Japanese words.

If we look closely at the meanings, *kare* is used when the speaker refers to a man whom both the speaker and his/her counterpart know, so the real meaning is more like, “that guy we know,” “the boyfriend,” etc. *Kanojo* is the female version of this word, with the same implications. In most cases in Japanese, when we know whom we are talking about, we just don’t specifically mention them directly as subject or object. ...the whole idea of “subject” or “object” in the English sense of the word does not exist in Japanese.

With a linguistic background like this, Japanese people have no mental mind-set to distinguish between whether the person in question is male or female. It is for this reason that they are prone to misuse of “he” or “she,” “him” or “her,” etc., when speaking English. That they make this mistake is part proof of the gender neutrality from which they naturally look at the world—the Japanese mind is unused to making gender distinctions when referring to another person.

Unless EFL learners are well aware of these linguistic differences and know how to deal with them with grammar knowledge, satisfactory competence is out of their reach.

### 3.5.2 No urgent motive for everyone to communicate in English

Japanese have no urgent need to communicate in English in their daily life.<sup>4</sup> One common national language suffices. Although they know English skills are a useful tool to do business, to enjoy original English works of literature, to make friends with

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<sup>4</sup>A student very good in English left school after her MA and went to accountant school. After one year, she sent an e-mail to her former academic advisor and said it was her first English in a year.

English speaking people, to travel and much more, they are still not in any urgent need to speak it within Japan. A foreign language is best learned when the learners have a strong motive. Naito (1995) says the adult Turks learned German faster than children because they needed to adjust to the life in Germany. The motivation is the most vital element in language acquisition. Average Japanese lack this motive. Their strongest motive is to pass college entrance exams.

### 3.5.3 University entrance exams play a vital role

As I discussed earlier in this chapter, university entrance exams play a vital role in EFL in Japan. More and more native speaker instructors have been trying to convince the general public that translation and grammar are not as important as they used to be. Mike Guest, an associate professor teaching English in Japan for 16 years, writes as follows (*The Daily Yomiuri*, March 4, 2004.) Although part of his article was discussed earlier in this chapter, let's look at it more closely.

Entrance exams — not what you think

...I thought it would be a good time to look at one of the great myths of English education in Japan. We've all heard this one before: The unproductive emphasis on teaching "yakudoku" (reading and translating texts from English into Japanese), and the related emphasis on teaching sentence grammar can't be helped because these things need to be learned in order to pass university entrance examinations.

This is the so-called washback effect according to which university entrance exams dictate how high school courses are taught. ...time and time again it has been shown that university entrance exams do not demand nor focus extensively on English-to-Japanese sentence translation or grammar skills.

To support this argument, I would like to briefly analyze the 2004 National Center for University Entrance Examinations (Center Exam), the primary exam given for university entrance nationwide.

...let's look at the exam itself. There are six sections, usually divided into two or three parts each. The test begins with two sets of questions

on stress, constituting only 8 percent of the test's total value.... The second section is divided into three parts and involves selecting the correct word or phrase from a set to complete a sentence or short two-person exchange. This demands lexico-grammatical, rather than purely grammatical, knowledge. Interestingly, the choices are often practical signal words, phrasal verbs and indicators of register, not random, obscure vocabulary. The last part of section two asks examinees to put jumbled vocabulary in the correct order as a sentence fragment, a productive — as opposed to receptive — skill.

The third section begins by asking examinees to place the correct rhetorical signals (i.e., “in spite of this”) within a paragraph. To do this correctly, an examinee will need to be able to understand the rhetorical flow and discursive structure of the entire paragraph. This is a vital reading skill and, again, falls outside the sentential and atomistic (word-by-word, item-by-item) approach that yakudoku instruction usually entails.

The second and third parts of this section ask examinees to put in order a series of three sentences that have been removed from the middle of a paragraph. The third part in fact is a short essay (short essays make up almost 75 percent of the test) which means that examinees will again have to display understanding of the holistic rhetorical flow of the essay. This demands not only some comprehensive reading skills but also the ability to reproduce a text in a coherent, organized manner. This is a valuable skill and that is far removed from the standard grammar-translation process.

The fourth section involves a short but simple scientific English essay.... Examinees are here asked to abstract information in the essay to match to an adjacent chart as well as answer questions focusing on recognizing themes and summarization. The fifth section is based on a casual dialogue between two campers. This dialogue is A highly transactional (a lot of information is shared) and is also quite natural stylistically. This section asks examinees to abstract detail from the text in order to match adjacent drawings. It also requires examinees to sequence ideas and events that are paraphrased from the text.

The weighty final section involves a lengthy narrative. Again, the

questions demand a variety of skills: holistic reading, sequencing, reading between the lines, paraphrasing, interpreting and making inferences.

In conclusion, what I find most noteworthy about the center test is the following:

1. Examinees are never required to write in Japanese on the test.
2. Examinees are never asked to translate (as an answer).
3. There are no Japanese texts except in the instructions.
4. The skills required correspond to what most highly regarded reading textbooks and teachers demand, especially in terms of meaning-based reading and holistic comprehension.
5. The texts in the test are of a great variety (narratives, dialogues, scientific essays).
6. None of the questions demand what I would call arcane rules or obscure vocabulary.

All this clearly indicates that the notion that the Center Exam demanding detailed grammatical knowledge, *yakudoku* and syntax manipulation is far from reality. Moreover, it is well-known that *nijishiken* university entrance exams—those made and administered by individual universities—are even more comprehensive and holistic in their questions, and now often include listening sections and short English essays, making them even close to a four-skill evaluation.

The irony is that, despite some high-school teachers' belief that teaching students *yakudoku* will enable them to pass the entrance exams, such an approach may actually hinder the students' chances. In fact, more pedagogically sound approaches to comprehensive, meaning-based reading, extending into interactive or productive skills, would seem to be the best formula for university entrance exam success.

It's time the myth was exploded once and for all—not just for the sake of sound pedagogy but for the success of our students on those all-important entrance exams.

Guest is wrong in that he says “Moreover, it is well-known that nijishiken university entrance exams—those made and administered by individual universities—are even more comprehensive and holistic in their questions, and now often include listening sections and short English essays, making them even close to a four-skill evaluation.” He is utterly vague in his use of “comprehensive and holistic”. He doesn’t give any examples. He says that none of the questions demand what he would call arcane rules or obscure vocabulary, but neither do Japanese English teachers use arcane rules or obscure vocabulary.

The core of Nijishiken, the second round exam, is translation. A lot of translation appears in the exams. Here is an example of the questions Kyoto University gave to applicants for entrance exams in 2005.

Read the following and answer the questions.

The famous British physicist Lord Kelvin (1824-1907), after whom the degrees in the absolute temperature scale are named, once said in a lecture: “When you cannot express it in numbers, your knowledge is of a meager and unsatisfactory kind.” He was referring, of course, to the knowledge required for the advancement of science. But numbers and mathematics have the curious tendency of contributing even to the understanding of things that are, or, at least appear to be, extremely remote from science. In a famous story by Edgar Allan Poe, Detective Dupin says: “We make chance a matter of absolute calculation. We subject the unlooked for and unimagined to the mathematical formulae of the schools.” At an even simpler level, consider the following problem you may have encountered when preparing for a party: You have a chocolate bar composed of twelve pieces; how many snaps will be required to separate all the pieces? The answer is actually much simpler than you might have thought. Every time you make a snap, you have one more piece than you had before. Therefore, if you need to end up with twelve pieces, you will have to snap eleven times. More generally, irrespective of the number of pieces the chocolate bar is composed of, the number of snaps is always one less than the number of pieces you need. Even if you are not a chocolate lover yourself, you realize that this example demonstrates a simple mathematical rule that can be applied to many other circumstances. But in addition to mathematical

properties, formulae, and rules (many of which we forget anyhow), there also exist a few special numbers that are so ubiquitous that they never cease to amaze us. The most famous of these is the number pi ( $\pi$ ), which is the ratio of the circumference of any circle to its diameter. The value of pi, 3.14159..., has fascinated many generations of mathematicians. Even though it was defined originally in geometry, pi appears very frequently and unexpectedly in the calculation of probabilities. A famous example is known as Buffon's Needle, after the French mathematician Comte de Buffon (1707-1788), who posed and solved this probability problem in 1777. He asked: Suppose you have a large sheet of paper on the floor, ruled with parallel straight lines spaced by a fixed distance. A needle of length equal precisely to the spacing between the lines is thrown completely at random onto the paper. What is the probability that the needle will land in such a way that it will intersect one of the lines, as in Figure 1? Surprisingly, the answer turns out to be the number  $2/\pi$ . Therefore, in principle, you could even evaluate  $\pi$  by repeating this experiment many times and observing in what fraction of the total number of throws you obtain an intersection. Pi has by now become such a household word that film director Darren Aronofsky was even inspired to make a 1988 intellectual thriller with that title.

- Q.1 Find the quote by Kelvin, the physicist and translate the sentence into Japanese.
- Q.2 There are two sentences quoted by Dupin, the detective. Translate them into Japanese.
- Q.3 Find the answer to the following question in the passage and translate it into Japanese. "You have a chocolate bar composed of twelve pieces; how many snaps will be required to separate all the pieces?"
- Q.4 Find three questions asked in regard to Buffon's Needle and translate them into Japanese.
- Q.5 There is an answer to Buffon's Needle question. Find it and translate it into Japanese.



As you can see, the applicants need a good grasp of sentence structure in order to be able to do all these translations. The knowledge of grammar to grasp the sentence construction is an absolute must skill to tackle this kind of exam (Ito, 1989,1990), counter to Guest's claim. Students must translate repeatedly.

Students can not do without grammar especially when it comes to translation, which we see still plays a crucial part in top class state universities in Japan.

Another point where Guest is inaccurate is that he says "...and now often include listening sections..." The reality is that except for a small number of foreign language teaching colleges, a listening test is not given. Therefore the students don't put an emphasis on listening, let alone speaking. High school English classes and cram schools also don't teach speaking very enthusiastically. Some of them openly say it's a waste of time, at least in classrooms where the time allotted for English is very limited. They have so much to teach in limited hours to help students pass college entrance exams.

Guest is once again mistaken in believing that holistic reading skill doesn't require grammar. Reading does require grammar. The thesis shows this in details in Chapters 5 and 6. It is a widely accepted misconception that sentence reordering is not a grammar test. It is true that sometimes knowing certain idioms would do the job but it is nonetheless a grammar test. The evidence for this is in Chapter 5. Guest's misleading statements but they are vague when he favors something, and simply wrong when he is against something. This whole thesis shows his points are false.

Without grammar, success in college entrance examinations is out of the question. This is a cliché among top yobiko and juku, which have produced many more successful examinees than public high schools (Sawai, 2003).

## Chapter 4 A general measure of proficiency, the Eiken 2

In this chapter we will see what the Eiken or STEP test is all about. It is a popular assessment tool to measure English proficiency of Japanese students. More than 3,500,000 tests are taken annually (Eiken Manual 2002). Test takers can take two tests of different levels at a time. The Eiken are being administered three times a year. Not only at regular test sites, students can, if they wish, take the test at their school.

Regarding other proficiency tests, in 2002 about 2.8 million individuals registered to take the TOEIC in more than 60 countries worldwide. This is more than twice the number that took TOEFL in the same time period (Chapman, 2003). Considering these figures of TOEIC and TOEFL, the number of Eiken test-takers is outstandingly high. Eiken is administered only in Japan after all, while TOEFL and TOEIC are more universally administered.

### 4.1 What MEXT has in mind: Produce Japanese with English abilities

The strategic plan attainment targets published by MEXT encourages all Japanese students to take the Eiken or STEP test. Here is an excerpt from their bulletin board.

On graduation from junior high school: Ability to hold simple conversations (and a similar level of reading and writing) comprising greetings and responses (English-language ability of graduates should be the third level of the STEP (Eiken) test, on average).

On graduation from senior high school: Ability to hold normal conversations (and a similar level of reading and writing) on everyday topics (English-language ability of graduates should be the second level or semi-second level of the STEP test, on average).

The Eiken 2<sup>nd</sup> level requires the test takers to be able to understand and use English well enough for every day needs and situations. Also the test takers should be able to communicate if visiting or living overseas. (Eiken Manual 2003)

**The successful examinee of Eiken 2<sup>nd</sup> level is: 1)**

- 1) Able to converse about basic matters of daily life (make simple explanations, conduct simple business by telephone, etc.).
- 2) Able to read materials related to basic daily life (general newspaper and magazine articles, pamphlets, instructions, etc.).
- 3) Able to write about basic matters of daily life.

Among several English proficiency tests, Eiken is the most favored by MEXT, probably because it measures test takers' four English skills, reading, listening, vocabulary and writing. There are other proficiency tests such as TOEIC and TOEFL, but they give the test takers neither writing test nor speaking test.

## **4.2 What is the Eiken, the STEP test? – History and background**

The test of the Society for Testing English Proficiency, commonly called Eiken in Japanese, is one of the tests designed to measure the proficiency of EFL students in Japan. It is widely used as a tool to see what level the students have. It is the most widely administered English test in Japan, with 2.5 million examinees annually and over 14,000 test sites. The Eiken directly assesses all four skill areas of reading, writing, listening, and speaking—with particular emphasis on the interactive speaking skills required for living and studying overseas.

The Society for Testing English Proficiency, (STEP) was established as part of the Ministry of Education's policy of expanding social education in Japan. The goals of the Society were, and still are, to popularize and improve practical English in Japan.

The first STEP Tests were administered in 1963 with the support of the Ministry of Education and were based on the Standard Criteria for

Testing Practical English Proficiency. Tests were administered for the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Grades to a total of about 37,000 people. From its inception, STEP was widely acclaimed by Japanese society overall, and the reaction from junior and senior high schools was especially impressive. The 4th Grade was inaugurated in the spring of 1966, and STEP's success and social importance were acknowledged in February 1968 when the Ministry of Education officially approved and began promoting the STEP Test as an important element in social education.

As the social prestige and value of STEP grew, the Society realized that the number of testing grades should be increased. The Pre-1st Grade and the 5th Grade were thus established in 1987. In addition, the Pre-2nd Grade was inaugurated in 1994. This gives STEP a total of seven grades: 1st, Pre-1st, 2nd, Pre-2nd, 3rd, 4th, and 5th. More than 60 million people have taken the STEP Test since its inception, and STEP continues to strive to achieve an even higher degree of excellence and reliability for its tests.

English language education in Japan has experienced a shift toward an emphasis on communicative English. In line with this trend, STEP has incorporated the latest testing research into the content of its examinations to reflect the evolution toward testing communicative ability. This culminated in 1997 with STEP's renewal program under the slogan "More Communicative."

In the year 2000, the Japanese Ministry of Education established new regulations governing educational proficiency examinations. The Test of Practical English (the STEP Test) received official Ministry of Education authorization under these regulations. This increased the number of test takers all over Japan and Eiken intensive schools began popping up elsewhere. Schools offered their classrooms for test sites so that the students have an easy access to Eiken.

To provide examinees with further opportunities to take the STEP Test, the Society for Testing English Proficiency has increased the number of grades being administered in the winter session (January-February). A third session for the Pre-2nd and 3rd Grades was introduced in 1999 and

for the 2nd Grade in 2000. As of 2001, the Pre-1st and 1st Grades have been added to the winter session, so that all levels of the STEP Test are now being administered three times each year (<http://www.eiken.or.jp/>).

Unlike TOEFL, Test of English as a Foreign Language, the Eiken was valid only in Japan until 2003. In this respect it was unique. In spite of its exclusiveness, it is highly valued and recommended by schools and language institutions, the most authoritative department being MEXT.

All junior and senior high school students are encouraged to take the Eiken by MEXT, not to mention college students. An increasing number of elementary school students also take the Eiken.

### **4.3 English teachers are strongly encouraged to get 550 in TOEFL or Eiken pre 1<sup>st</sup> grade**

The Eiken used to offer only three levels when it was first created; levels 3<sup>rd</sup> 2<sup>nd</sup>, and 1<sup>st</sup>, the level 1<sup>st</sup>, being the highest. Passing the 3<sup>rd</sup> level means the test takers have cleared the requirements taught in middle school, which is the 9<sup>th</sup> graders' level. Passing the 2<sup>nd</sup> level means they have a good grasp of what is taught in high school, which is equal to the 12<sup>th</sup> graders' level. The level 1<sup>st</sup> is extremely difficult to pass. Only about 10 percent of test takers pass.

Only about 10 percent of public middle school teachers and 20 percent of public high school teachers have passed the Practical English Proficiency Test at Pre-first level<sup>1</sup> or higher, according to survey in 2004 by the Education, Science and Technology Ministry.

The survey also showed that the percentage of teachers who have obtained scores of 550 and over on the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) and more than 730 on the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) was even

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<sup>1</sup>Able to conduct daily life English-speaking areas, with the exception of specialized fields. Although problems may remain in understanding natural English or expressing oneself perfectly, is able to grasp major points in order to communicate.

The successful examinee is:

- 1) Able to converse about ordinary matters of daily life and relatively specialized matters of a personal nature, and able to grasp the gist of general speeches, lectures, broadcasts, etc.
- 2) Able to read high-level materials (newspaper articles, general magazine articles, etc.) and understand the essential information.
- 3) Able to write about personal ideas and opinions.

lower. The survey results were released at a ministry-sponsored forum titled “English Forum 2004: Regarding the Establishment of an Action Plan to Cultivate ‘Japanese with English Abilities,’” held in Tokyo on March 4, 2004.

The ministry’s survey, the first of its kind, was carried out as part of the action plan the ministry laid out last year in a bid to reform the teaching of English and improve the English-language ability of students. According to the plan, almost all English teachers are supposed to have passed the pre-first level in the English proficiency test, known as the STEP test. Boards of education in 38 prefectures and seven government ordinance-designated major cities surveyed 22000 English teachers at public middle schools and 21000 at public high schools. Of those polled, the number of middle school teachers with STEP test pre-first grade or higher levels stood at 2386, while only 1021 and 1581 respondents had passed predetermined scores on the TOEFL and TOEIC, respectively.

As for English teachers at high schools, 4194 hold STEP certificates, while 2186 have passed targeted scores for TOEFL and 2965 were above the standard set for TOEIC, double the figures for middle school teachers.

The ministry has set the test’s pre-first level as the standard for teachers’ English proficiency. I would say although the stake of pre-1st grade seems high for schoolteachers, they have to jump this hurdle over to be able to teach with confidence.

#### **4.4 How is Eiken different from TOEFL and TOEIC?**

There are other English proficiency tests besides the Eiken. TOEFL and TOEIC are also used as assessment tools. Since not many Japanese English teachers have high scores in English proficiency tests, they are strongly encouraged almost to the point of being required to get 550 in TOEFL or the Eiken pre 1<sup>st</sup> grade.

Both TOEFL and TOEIC tests are designed to precisely measure non-native speakers’ skills in understanding spoken and written English. The TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) evaluates one’s ability to communicate in an American academic environment, whereas the TOEIC (Test of English for International Communication) evaluates one’s chances to interact effectively in a business setting. The TOEFL is required of all non-native English speakers applying to undergraduate and graduate programs primarily in North America; the TOEIC is used by companies

in the recruitment process. Although similar in many ways, the two tests differ in several important respects. A TOEFL score is only valid for two years while TOEIC test results can be used for an indefinite period of time, but are generally considered accurate for about five years because language skills can change greatly with time and usage. The formats of the tests vary, too. The TOEFL is administered both on the computer and on paper, while the TOEIC is offered only as a paper-based exam.

Eiken differs from other existing English competence tests such as TOEIC and TOELF in that Eiken has an interview which tests speaking ability of the test takers. Those who successfully pass the written and listening parts of the test are entitled to go for an interview where the examiners ask them questions about a certain situation described on a card with pictures. This is a required part of the test and test-takers are not given a certificate without passing this interview part. They have no interviews for the levels four and five, but from the level three up, they give the examinees interviews in English. The following shows the lack of the speaking part in TOEFL.

The new Test of English as a Foreign Language debuted late in September, 2004, and its creators hope it will better evaluate how well applicants can communicate in English. In 2003, 750,000 students took the old, mostly multiple-choice TOEFL. But in recent years, many of the 5,200 English-speaking colleges and universities throughout the world that use the exam have grown concerned the test fails to identify students who master only “textbook” English. There have also been complaints in the U.S. from students who can’t understand the foreign graduate students teaching their classes. After a decade of research, the Educational Testing Services (ETS) debuted the new TOEFL “iBT” (Internet-based test) on Sept. 24, 2004, in U.S. test centers. The test will be phased in worldwide during the next year. Perhaps the biggest change is a new speaking component. Previously, ETS offered a separate speaking test, but few students took it (*The Daily Yomiuri*, Oct. 4, 2005).

The Eiken has been giving the interview tests all along but TOEFL has begun to administer the speaking test just now.

Another point is that Eiken measures the writing ability of test takers, while TOEFL and TOEIC do not. TOEFL and TOEIC allot more time for listening than

Eiken.

Only Eiken publishes past test materials. Neither TOEIC nor TOEFL does. Only in 2004, did TOEFL make their past test materials accessible to the potential test-takers, but they are not sold at city book stores. Applicants have to buy them directly from the Education Testing Service (ETS), a private educational institute, where TOEFL materials are made. This system makes it difficult for applicants to prepare for TOEFL. The Eiken is more accessible. The Eiken test materials are readily available at any bookstore in town, as well as in online shopping and school libraries.

## 4.5 Benefits of the Eiken

The Eiken grade holders have some academic advantages. Some colleges add a few points to Eiken 2 holders' test results. Some colleges admit the Eiken pre-1 holders without English exams. Some colleges spare students with TOEFL 600 or the Eiken 1 holders from taking English classes at all.

The Eiken 1<sup>st</sup> grade holders have even more advantages. They are often spared an English entrance exam to private graduate schools. Doshisha, one of the top private colleges in Kyoto, for example, states in their brochure, that those with Eiken 1<sup>st</sup> grade or TOEFL 600 or over do not need to take the English exam for MA programs. There are others that give similar benefits. Okayama University gives 8 credits to the Eiken 1<sup>st</sup> grade holders, 4 points to pre-1<sup>st</sup> grade holders. Tokai University gives 1<sup>st</sup> level holders 6 credits, and pre-1<sup>st</sup> level holders 4 credits. Tokyo Seitoku Junior college give 1<sup>st</sup> level holders 4 credits and pre-1<sup>st</sup> level holders 2 credits. Hotani High School gives 1<sup>st</sup> level holders 5 credits, pre-1<sup>st</sup> 4 credits, 2<sup>nd</sup> level holders 3 credits, and pre-2<sup>nd</sup> level holders 2 credits.

The growing number of schools granting students credits in accordance with the Eiken certificate (As of March 2004).

(<http://www.eiken.or.jp/advice/treatment/unit.html>).



	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
University	89	129	153	183	205
Junior college	55	62	66	63	68
Vocational school	35	38	38	40	44
High school	434	501	561	645	752

There are more than thirty-five US colleges where the students with Eiken 2 can be accepted. However, those who wish to be accepted by those US colleges must have passed the Eiken 2 with flying colors, that is with more than 80%, not with the bottom line points.

## 4.6 Actual contents of the Eiken 2

The Eiken is said to measure students' communicative competence. Since MEXT recommends it to all the students and they are treated favorably when they go to college, it has to be a decent tool to measure their general English skills, not only grammar. So it's *not* a grammar test, The Eiken manual says. The Eiken does not test only grammar. It tests overall English skills, but let's examine more closely if it's a grammar test or not.

### 4.6.1 Vocabulary

The Vocabulary part tests vocabulary, whether the test-takers know what a certain word means. It is difficult just to guess the correct answer, because any one of the four choices can go into the parentheses and the sentence is still grammatically correct. Take for example #1, a test administered in 2002, where you see *was* before the parentheses. Grammatically any one of the four choices, *throwing*, *staring*, *aiming*, *guessing* can go, but only *staring* makes sense in this sentence.

(1) A: My subway ride this morning was awful. A strange guy was (            )  
at me the whole way.

B: How terrible! That's really rude.

1 throwing

2 staring

3 aiming

4 guessing

Let us see some other examples. #3,4,6,7,11, are questions of collocation. Test-takers need good vocabulary to see which word makes sense in (3). *A critical businessman* can make sense, but not in this context. *A neutral businessman* would sound odd, but the trick here is that test-takers often confuse *neutral* with *natural*. *A natural businessman* still wouldn't make sense, but when they see a familiar word, they tend to choose that familiar word rather than an unknown word. Choosing an unknown word makes test-takers nervous.

- (3) Andrew was a hardworking student in college, so none of his friends were surprised when he later became a (                    ) businessman.

1 successful                    2 frequent                    3 critical                    4 neutral

#4 is tricky for Japanese test-takers, because a word-for-word translation for *precisely* fits just fine in Japanese.

- (4) A: Excuse me, sir. The use of camera is (                    ) forbidden in this museum.  
B: Oh, I'm sorry.

1 exactly                    2 immediately                    3 strictly                    4 precisely

#6 is hard because in Japanese *fares* and *cash* have the same translation and used interchangeably. Test-takers should know the different usage of *fare*, *fee*, *cost*, *price* and *value*. In Japanese they are somehow interchangeable. *Checks* and *receipts* are different, but they are here to test their vocabulary.

- (7) Many people complained when they heard that railroad companies were going to raise their (                    ) by an average of 10 percent.

1 fares                    2 cash                    3 checks                    4 receipts

To choose a correct verb for #11, test-takers have to know the phrase *make every effort*.

The other choices, *worked/filled/left every effort*, although technically correct, do not make sense, thus incorrect.

(11) Joshua ( ) every effort to persuade Anne to go with him, but she refused to do so.

- 1 filled      2 worked      3 left      4 made

#7 is a vocabulary test.

(7) Experts ( ) the value of the newly discovered painting to be over \$50,000.

- 1 price      2 charge      3 measure      4 estimate

So far, not much grammar was tested. The next group of questions tests idioms.

(12) A: Are there any tickets left for the school festival on Saturday?

B: I don't know. You should ask Ms. Thomas. She's in ( ) of selling the tickets.

- 1 order      2 front      3 place      4 charge

(13) Ellie suddenly started crying at the party. We later found out that she had just ( ) with her boyfriend.

- 1 given in      2 broken up      3 left out      4 gone about

(14) A: Aren't you tired of this cold winter weather, Stephanie?

B: Yeah, but spring is just ( ). It should be getting warmer soon.

- 1 on the edge      2 in the middle      3 around the corner      4 over the top

(16) A: I think I need a few more minutes to get ready. Do you mind waiting, Joe?

B: No, ( ) your time. We're not in a hurry.

- 1 bring      2 take      3 save      4 hold

(17) Whenever I'm with Jane, I always ( ) up arguing with her. We have such different opinions about everything.

- 1 put      2 make      3 end      4 fit

In order to make a correct choice for #12, 13, 14, 16, and 17, test-takers should know the different meanings of such idioms as *in charge of* and *in place of* in #12, and *break up*, *given in and leave out*, *go about* in #13.

*Around the corner*, *on the edge*, *in the middle*, *over the top*, all make sense in isolated items, but in the context the choice is only one.

Similarly, for #16 both *save time* and *take time* are good collocations, but only *take your time* makes sense in the context. To understand the context, test-takers should also know the phrase *Do you mind -ing?*

To see the context correctly, test-takers should know *whenever*, *argue with*, *opinions*. Then they will know the correct idiom is *end up* for #17.

Although they say that all test-takers need is good vocabulary and idioms, grammar skills are being tested. If you look carefully at the question #13, the idiom is *give in to* not the past participle form *given*. *Leave out* wouldn't be suitable because the verb is transitive .

- (13) Ellie suddenly started crying at the party. We later found out that she had just (                    ) with her boyfriend.

1 given in                    2 broken up                    3 left out                    4 gone about

What about the next three examples, #18,19,20?

- (18) A: Are you coming to Jill's party, Dave?

B: No, I don't think so. I seem to (                    ) a cold, so I want to go to bed early tonight.

1 have caught                    2 be caught                    3 catch                    4 catching

These three are entirely related to grammar. In #18, test-takers should know that a present participle form of the verb cannot follow an infinitive to. But still they have three choices, (1) *seem to have caught*, (2) *seem to be caught*, (3) *seem to catch*. Here they need more grammar to see the difference. (2) is out, because a passive voice is not appropriate here. (3) is out, because *Dave* is talking about what happened in the near past *seem to catch* indicates usual, routine, habitual behaviors, thus inappropriate in this context.

- (19) A: I'll give you my phone number in case you (                    ) to contact me.  
 B: Thank you.

1 need                    2 needed                    3 have needed                    4 had needed

#19 is also about the tense. The speaker A is talking about the future, so the grammatical tense after *in case* cannot be past or past perfect.

- (20) Daniel had his eyes (                    ) during the meeting, so I thought he must have fallen asleep.

1 closing                    2 close                    3 to close                    4 closed

It may be easy to know what #20 means, but hard to make a correct choice. The *causative* is a common structure in English. It is used when one thing or person *causes* another thing or person to do something. It is often a hard notion for Japanese EFL students to grasp. They have to see the pattern “have + thing + participle”. Then they have two choices, *closing* or *closed*. The eyes are *closed*, not *closing*, so the correct choice is (4) *closed*. The latter half of the sentence, *so I thought he must have fallen asleep* suggests that Daniel's eyes had already been closed when the speaker looked at him.

As we can see it is absolutely necessary for the Eiken test takers to know grammar to be able to choose a correct form of the verb.

As we have seen, in the first part of the Eiken 2<sup>nd</sup> grade test, although they say it is a vocabulary test, grammar points are increasingly integrated in the test. Without a clear tense notion in English test-takers will be unlikely to make correct choices.

Next comes a word ordering test section. This section is said to play a role of a writing test. We will see if test takers can put the word in order without knowing grammar.

#### 4.6.2 Word ordering test

In this section of the test, Test takers are asked to put five phrases given below the sentence in the correct order so that they form a sentence to make sense in the parenthesis. In order to put the words in a correct order, knowledge of grammar and idiomatic expressions is indispensable.

Take # 21 for example. It is necessary to know that a Subject-Verb clause follows *because*. Of the five words and phrases, *have nothing to do with* is an idiom. Knowing these two points help the test taker to put the words in a correct order.

(21) The teacher gave Debbie's paper a bad grade because (            ) supposed to write about.

1 she was            2 with the topic            3 nothing            4 it had            5 to do

Let's look at #22. It is also obvious that a Subject-Verb clause has to follow the *so that* construction. Since there is already a subject *she*, a verb phrase *had already left* has to come next. (4) *by the time* also needs a Subject-Verb clause, *he arrived* is the one to follow. Since the time sequence is clear in that Melanie's departure from the restaurant took place before Mike's arrival, the sentence in this order makes a good sense.

(22) Mike was so late for his dinner date with Melanie that she (            ) the restaurant.

1 left            2 he arrived            3 at            4 by the time            5 had already

As to #24, there are two verbs *study* and *say*. From the information we get from the first part of the sentence *Kenji enjoys his schoolwork so much that*, we can see that Kenji likes to study, in other words he lives to study. The subject of the that-clause has to be *all his friends* because there is no other candidate. *study* could be a subject but along with *to*, but the structure wouldn't be correct with *all* preceding the clause. The verb to follow the subject *all his friends* is the one that's left *say*. Technically *all his friends study to say he lives* is correct but what it means doesn't make sense or collocate with the first part of the sentence, *Kenji enjoys his schoolwork so much*. There is one more possible order. *...all say he lives to study his friends....* This, although grammatically acceptable, does not make sense.

(24) Kenji enjoys his schoolwork so much that all (            ).

1 say            2 study            3 his friends            4 to            5 he lives

To get the correct word order for #25, students need to see the subject of the second independent clause after *but*. The subject is *her father*. Since *her father* is a third person singular, the verb following takes an *S*. The only verb that has an *S* is *wishes*. Either a to-infinitive or an SV-clause follow *wish*. There is no to-infinitive in the choice. Test takers have no other choice but to choose an SV-clause. An auxiliary verb comes before a main verb and so the correct sentence order is *her father wishes she would stay closer to home*.

(25) Cindy has decided to go and work in Japan after she graduates, but her father (                    ).

1 stay            2 closer to home            3 would            4 wishes            5 she

The word reordering process clearly asks for extensive grammar knowledge although MEXT and other Eiken supporters don't openly say you need grammar for it. This section of the test is not "writing" such as effective sentences, good organization, choice of words, register of sentences. It is only grammar, exactly in the sense that grammar tells us how to fit together parts of sentences whose meanings are related. In order to fit together, *night mudslide, heavy rains, hillside house, our family, evacuate soon, hurry, leave things behind*, what students need is grammar. It's grammar and nothing else that puts a coherent discourse together. *In these heavy rains, mudslide might hit our family's hillside house, so hurry and evacuate soon leaving things behind*.

Although Eiken claims that it measures test takers' writing ability, this word ordering part is the only place where part of the writing ability could be seen. This is because it is next to impossible to have all the thousands of test takers write essays and correct their errors in a relatively short time. Since Eiken does not use computers at the time of testing, the essays no matter how short would be hand written. It would not be able to provide a fair assessment when such a large number of test takers turn in hand written essays.

It is a wide spread misconception that The Eiken does not require grammar. But we have seen that test takers do indeed need good grammar to re-order these phrases in this section of the test. Again "a feel for correctness" doesn't work for EFL learners in general. Only good grammar is a tool. Some may yield to our point over in the

word ordering section but not in other parts of the test such as reading comprehension. We will see if this claim is valid.

### 4.6.3 Reading and filling in the blanks

The following reading materials come from the Eiken test administered in 2002.

3. Fill in the blanks with suitable words listed below.

#### Coffee Time

England has long been famous for its tea-drinking culture. However, England was also the location of some of the first places in Europe to serve coffee. In fact, London coffeehouses were the center of English social and business life in the late 17<sup>th</sup> and early 18<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Coffee first appeared in England in 1610, when the East India Company began to import it. It took many years for the dark, bitter drink to become ( 26 ), but by 1670 coffeehouses could be found throughout London. These coffeehouses became convenient places for people to meet and exchange information. Many coffeehouses attracted people who were interested in discussing topics such as politics, medicine, and science. Business was also a ( 27 ) topic of conversation. Since businesspeople often did not have their own offices, coffeehouses were used as places to conduct business.

Some of the early London coffeehouses later went on to become famous in other fields. For example, England's most famous insurance company, Lloyds of London, can trace its history all the way back to the Lloyd's coffee house, which opened in 1687. Since many of the customers of this coffeehouse were ships' captains, Lloyd's became a center for the shipping business, and later began to provide insurance for ships going on long voyages. Another famous institution that is ( 28 ) with coffee is the London Stock Exchange, which was originally a coffeehouse called Jonathan's where stock traders used to meet.



The English coffee boom did not last for very long, however. It ended when the East India Company decided to concentrate on importing tea from China instead of coffee. As a result, tea became considerably cheaper than coffee, and this was one of the factors that ( 29 ) English people to develop their famous habit of drinking tea.

- (26) 1 limited 2 popular 3 friendly 4 expensive  
 (27) 1 strange 2 recent 3 common 4 sensitive  
 (28) 1 connected 2 compared 3 returned 4 offered  
 (29) 1 defended 2 informed 3 ordered 4 encouraged

This fill-in-the-blanks part above is pure reading. Vocabulary helps more than Grammar, because any one of the four words given below the essay could be grammatically correct. Test takers should have good vocabulary and reading abilities to choose a correct word to make the passage meaningful. To make a correct choice for (29) for example, it will be helpful if test-takers know that an infinitive does not follow *inform*. The pattern is *inform + person + of + noun phrase*. But without this point of grammar, test-takers could very well see which word goes in (29) judging from the context. Therefore, this part of the test does not seem to need so much grammar to make correct choices.

But what about the other reading materials in the test. We will see whether only vocabulary and idioms will suffice.

#### 4.6.4 Reading comprehension

There are three reading materials for test takers to read and show their comprehension. The first reading is a business related email. The second one is about social problems the US face and the third is about biology. Test takers are supposed to be ready to read anything from a casual email to a formal science report. In this part of the test as well as the fill-in-the blanks part, what the Eiken wants to see is test-takers' reading ability, not grammar. First we will look at one of the three reading materials.

From: Bob Evans <evans@lightweight.com>  
To: John Cousins <jfc6488@officepro.com>  
Date: April 18, 2003  
Subject: Copy machine

Dear Mr. Cousins,

I am writing to you concerning the possibility of changing the copy machine we are leasing from your company. I would like to say immediately that there is nothing wrong with the machine itself. In fact, in terms of our daily business needs, we do not really require a machine that can make color copies.

Most of the documents created in our department are black and white, and even in the case of color documents, monochrome copies are sufficient for most purposes. We have therefore decided that there is no need for us to continue to pay the extra cost of leasing a color copier and maintaining supplies of color ink.

We have also found that, with a color copier on hand, employees tend to use it for personal reasons. Many have started to bring in photographs and other materials to copy, and this has been increasing our costs.

For these reasons I would like to discuss with you the possibility of exchanging our current copy machine for a black-and-white model as soon as possible.

I would appreciate it if you could call me at your earliest convenience.

Bob Evans

Lightweight Materials

On the surface it's not a grammar test. It's pure reading. No grammar questions are asked. The Eiken is only trying to see whether test-takers understand what's in the email. In order to see their understanding, three questions follow.

(35) Bob Evans

1. seldom creates documents in black and white.
2. wants a machine that can copy color photographs.

3. is satisfied with the quality of the color copy machine.
4. thinks the black-and-white machine uses too much ink.

(36) What is Bob Evan's main complaint with the copy machine?

1. It is difficult to teach employees to use it.
2. It is costing his company too much money.
3. It is not popular with the workers.
4. It is not being used very often.

(37) What dose Bob Evans ask John Cousins to do?

1. Bring a black-and-white copy machine right away.
2. Cancel their agreement regarding copy machines.
3. Call him to discuss leasing a new copy machine.
4. Recommend a copy machine that is more accurate.

The questions have nothing to do with an explicit grammar. It's only information that test-takers need to withdraw from the email. Therefore it's safe to say they don't ask for grammar. The Eiken is rightly regarded as a general competence test. But there is no doubt that test-takers are using grammar silently when they succeed even here, which my research below will demonstrate.

We will look at one more reading material. This is also plain reading followed by some questions to make sure test-takers have understood the contents.

#### Biting Back

Anyone who has ever been bitten by a mosquito knows that these insects can make life very unpleasant. But mosquitoes, which are found all over the world, are more than just annoying. Many types of mosquitoes carry serious diseases such as malaria and yellow fever. Every year, over 3 million people worldwide die from diseases caused by mosquito bites, and the problem is getting worse in many countries.

Currently, the most popular method of reducing mosquito populations is to use chemicals that kill mosquito larvae in the pools of water while

they live. This approach, however, has met with some difficulties. Some people are worried that the chemicals may cause damage to environment. Another problem is that there are over 3,000 types of mosquitoes, and some of these are no longer affected by the most widely used chemicals.

Recently, though, researchers at the University of Florida have developed a new way to deal with the mosquito problem. The researchers found a hormone that prevents mosquitoes from digesting their food. Although the mosquitoes can eat, they cannot gain energy from their food. The researchers realized that if mosquitoes absorbed this hormone in large amounts, it would cause them to die of hunger. They decided that the best way to deliver the hormone would be to use yeast, one of the favorite foods of mosquito larvae. They succeeded in creating a type of yeast that produces the hormone naturally. When this yeast is put into ponds and other places where mosquitoes lay eggs, the mosquito larvae eat the yeast and die before they can become adults. And with fewer adult mosquitoes, fewer people get bitten.

In laboratory test, the yeast was 100 percent effective in getting rid of mosquito larvae. Moreover, unlike the chemicals currently being used, the new yeast is effective against all types of mosquitoes. And the yeast is so environmentally safe that it can be put into drinking water with no harmful effects. The researchers who have developed the yeast expect that it will soon become commercially available. When it does, the fight against mosquitoes may become easier for all of us.

(38) Mosquitoes

1. are not as harmful as most people believe.
2. are responsible for millions of deaths each year.
3. are in danger of dying out from diseases such as malaria.
4. are an unpleasant but necessary part of our lives.

(39) The chemicals most commonly used to reduce mosquito populations

1. are causing people to become sensitive to mosquito bites.
2. are ineffective because they only target the larvae.
3. have eliminated over 3,000 types of mosquitoes.

4. have become unable to kill some kinds of mosquitoes.
- (40) What did the University of Florida researchers discover?
1. A way to stop mosquitoes from digesting food.
  2. A type of yeast that mosquitoes produce naturally.
  3. A new kind of mosquito that cannot lay eggs.
  4. A method of reducing hunger in mosquitoes.
- (41) What do you researchers say about their invention?
1. It will probably be available on the market soon.
  2. It does no lasting harm to mosquitoes.
  3. It can make water 100 percent safe to drink.
  4. It is not as effective as the chemical method.
- (42) Which of the following statements is true?
1. A newly discovered hormone is being used to cure diseases carried by mosquitoes.
  2. A chemical is now available that destroys the favorite food of mosquito larvae.
  3. Researchers have made a new type of yeast that can be used to control mosquito populations.
  4. Damage to the environment has been causing millions of mosquitoes to die of hunger.

This reading material about mosquitoes is also for reading only. No grammar questions are asked. It looks like test-takers don't need much grammar to understand what they read if they have good vocabulary. However, as I am going to show in chapter 5, test-takers with good grammar score higher in Eiken than those with poor grammar. Why so? We will discuss this and find the secrets in chapter 4. Before we move into chapter 4, let's look at the interview part of the Eiken.

## 4.7 Interviews to test speaking ability

One of the features that make the Eiken different from the other two English proficiency tests, TOEIC and TOEFL, is the Interview. TOEIC doesn't have a speaking part. TOEFL began a speaking test in 2005. Here is an Eiken Interview Test in 2002

Those who passed the first written part of the test are entitled to take the second part of the test, which is a live interview. The interview is usually given about one month after the announcement of the successful applicants is made. Here is how an interview is conducted.

Test takers of Eiken 2nd level are ushered into the room where two examiners are seated. One is to time the interview and the other to ask questions. After a brief greeting, there are a few warm-up questions, such as “How long did it take you to get here?” or “Is it raining now?” or other simple questions to help the examinee relax.

The test takers are then given a card showing a picture with a short passage usually consisting of around sixty words. They are given twenty seconds to read the passage to themselves. After twenty seconds, they are asked to read it aloud. Then, the examiner asks five questions. The test takers are supposed to answer at least three of them sufficiently in order to pass. Here is one of the interviews conducted in 2002.

### **Eiken 2<sup>nd</sup> level interview sample:**

The card given to the test takers has a title “New Skills”. It reads as follows.

These days, companies want their employees to learn new skills. As a result, more people are attending seminars or studying at home. They hope to gain qualifications in fields such as translating or word processing. The skills they learn can give them a better chance of succeeding in their careers. Many people also find such skills useful in their private lives.

The card has two pictures below the passage, the first of which shows an office with many people working at computers. One of the workers looks clearly in his fifties and is struggling with his computer, referring to the manual with a perplexing expression. The second picture shows the same man going into the building with a sign that reads ‘Computer School’. Obviously he has decided to enroll in one of the programs there to improve his computer skills.

The test takers are allowed to look at the passage and the pictures while answering the questions.

The highest score in each question is five. The passing score is three. Eiken has set their own criteria for the answers that can give passing scores. Here are the sentences

and the scores they get.

The first question: According to the passage, what are more people doing these days?

(They are) attending seminars or studying at home. . . . . 5 points

Learning new skills. . . . . 5 points

More people are attending seminars or studying at home. . . . 4 points.

(If they read right out of the text including the phrase As a result, the points would be 2.

Attending seminars./ Studying at home. . . . . 3 points.

The second question: According to the passage, what can new skills give people?

(They can give people [them]) a better chance of succeeding in their careers. . . . . 5 points.

The skills they learn can give them a better chance of succeeding in their careers. . . . . 4 points.

Qualifications. . . . . 3 points.

The third question: Now, describe the situation in the picture.

A man is having a lot of trouble using his computer. His co-workers are worried about him. One week later, the man starts taking a computer class. By learning computer skills, he hopes to be able to do his job more efficiently. . . . . 5 points.

A man is having difficulty using his computer. One week later, the man begins taking a computer class. . . . . 3 points.

For this question, test takers are supposed to be able to tell two important points in order to pass. They are that the man is having difficulty using his computer and that a week later he began taking a computer class. Test takers can say additional sentences to describe the pictures. But if the description does not cover the two main points, they do not pass. For example, such incomplete descriptions as ‘There is a man in the office’ or ‘He is standing in front of the computer school’ are concerned to be insufficient.

The fourth question: Mr./Ms.–, thanks to computers, more people may be able to work at home instead of at the office. What do you think of that?

Now for this question, test takers can express their opinions freely. But at least they have to come up with one or two sentences using subordinators. Silence is a sign of communicative incompetence. All the answers relevant to the contents of the passage are given passing scores. Dropping of articles and determiners, errors in verb agreement and other grammatical errors are not penalized. They don't ask for grammatical precision in the interview part of the test. Some possible answers are:

I think it's good. If we work at home, we can spend more time with our families.

I wouldn't want to work at home, because I like being able to work with other people in an office.

I think it's important to keep work and home separate. We should work at the office and relax when we're at home.

The fifth question : What skills do you think you will need in the future?

Whatever test takers say in regard to this question, the examiner will ask them to explain why they think so. For example, if the test taker says the skill s/he needs is language skill, then s/he will have to explain why. The possible explanations are: I think I will need to learn another language besides English. It will be useful for getting a job.

If s/he says cooking is a skill s/he needs to learn, then she will have to add something like 'I'd like to know how to cook Chinese food, because I want to open a Chinese restaurant after I graduate.'

After the interview, the examiner will tell the test taker to leave the room and s/he follows the direction and the test is over. They receive the results within about two weeks.

Now you have been familiarized with what The Eiken Interview is like. In the interview, your attitude toward communication is taken into account also. The points range from 3 to 1, 3 being the highest. Those with more enthusiasm seem to get higher



scores. Those with few words and more tendency of shyness seem to score low. As far as pronunciation is considered, a Japanese accent is no problem, but a wrong stress on words may cause a point minus, especially when that occurs many times during the interview.

AS you have seen, The Eiken does not expect test-takers to speak in full, perfect sentences. The minimum information, as long as it is correct, suffices. The more perfect the sentence is, the better, but that's not what The Eiken expects. They want test-takers to show their understanding of the information on the card and show their ability to tell what they saw on the card. As far as tense is concerned, no present perfect, past perfect, subjunctive moods are needed. If they could use them, so much the better, but they can pass without using complicated tenses. All they need is present progressive and past tense. It is clear that the Eiken tests outside grammar competence. In summary, although the Eiken does have some grammar related questions, a major part of their test is non-grammar. The Eiken is for everything, only a few questions focus on grammar points without admitting it. But again, why do more students with good grammar have the Eiken 2nd grade? My comments and analysis is in Chapter 5.

#### 4.8 Possible counter arguments

Some say that in order to score high, all you need is good vocabulary and a lot of reading, along with some idiomatic expressions including prepositional phrases, such as *catch up with*, *do away with*, *get rid of*, *look after* and many others. Of course good vocabulary and idioms are an absolute essential.

Interesting stories are the best tool for improving foreign language skills. The reading materials should correspond to the reader's intelligence. Building up your vocabulary is also important. (Powle, 1998)

Here is a small experiment I did in one of the classes. I gave all the students a short reading material. We read, translated, checked the new words and phrases and made sure everyone understood the story. Later I gave them a list of words to reproduce the story. Here is the original story and the list of words.

Mr. Brownberg liked going to the theater very much. He waited for more than a year to get a ticket to a big hit on Broadway. When he found

his seat in the theater he was surprised to find an empty seat between him and a little old man. He said to the man. "It sure is a shame that nobody could get this seat. Tickets are so hard to get."

"Yes, they are," replied the man. "My wife and I had to wait a long time. This seat was for her."

"Oh, ! really!" said Mr. Brownberg. "It's too bad she couldn't come tonight. Is she ill or something? "

"I'm afraid she died," said the man sadly. "Oh! I'm sorry to hear that. But why didn't you give the ticket to a friend or a relative? Questioned Mr. Brownberg.

"None of them could come either," answered the old man. "You see, they're at the funeral. (Miller, 1984. pp.22-23)

The following list of words come from the same textbook. They are given to the reader to help them reproduce the story.

1. Mr.—theater—much
2. Waited—than—ticket—hit
3. When—seat—surprised—empty—man
4. Said—sure—nobody—seat—hard
5. Yes—wife—wait—for her
6. Really—Brownberg—too bad—ill
7. Afraid—died—sadly
8. Oh—sorry—why—give—friend
9. None—either
10. You see—funeral.

A student wrote following sentences.

Mr. Brownberg see the theater in much people.

He waited longer than before ticket hit him.

The man said “I and my wife wait tickets a long time”

I don't sure nobody get the seat hard.

I'm afraid to died my wife and sadly...

But you really that Brownberg was too bad to ill.

As we can see knowing a list of words and phrases doesn't automatically make a student a good writer. Grammar is the key. Students need to know how to put the given words together to make sentences that make sense.

Some argue that knowing the past Eiken tests and doing them repeatedly helps. Yes it might, as long as idioms are concerned, but it does not help students understand the reading materials, which occupy a substantial part of the test.

Still others say it's all the matter of memorization. Yes, those with good memory may remember more words, but not all the test questions can be answered by mere memorization.

Listening plays a part, which doesn't require grammar, some say. But it does. The data is in Chapter seven. Those who had good grammar knowledge did better in listening comprehension than those with poorer grammar. Those who don't or rather can't pay attention to the grammatical aspect of sentences they hear tend to write improbable, often erroneous sentences when they are asked to dictate the chunk of sentences. The examples can be as follows. The sentences in parentheses are the correct ones.

1. I'm so many to choose from. (I've so many to choose from)
2. I think of give them a call. (I think I'll give them a call)
3. How got a happen? (How'd that happen?)
4. I hear is really hard. (I hear he's really hard)

There have always been criticisms that the Eiken doesn't really measure overall language competence. But recall that more than 3,500,000 people take Eiken every year. (Eiken Manual 2003). This figure alone shows Eiken is valued highly. Although the Eiken is performed only in Japan for Japanese EFL students, while other English proficiency tests such as IELTS, TOEFL, TOEIC are more universal, the fact is, it is the best measure over all of what counts as successful English learning in Japan.

Anti-Eiken people say that study abroaders are high scorers, but this can be their subjective impression and there exists no reliable data to prove their feelings. It still shows that good Eiken scorers are good in English.

After all, there is no other alternative for objective measure for EFL competence. Tests are necessary to see the levels of students from an objective point of view.

The amount of grammar does not correspond exactly to practical use. Without grammar, there is no understanding of the reading materials to the fullest measure or composing meaningful sentences, speaking in an informative way.

Now consider the influential cries of Krashen.

...even advanced students with a great deal of interest and experience with grammar are able to access only a small amount of their grammatical knowledge when actually using language. Even when students are deliberately focused on form and taught rules carefully, the impact of grammar study is weak....(Krashen, 1998).

In the next chapter I will challenge Krashen's statement above. We will see why more students with good grammar have the Eiken 2<sup>nd</sup> grade than those with poorer grammar.



# Chapter 5 Correlation between grammar and the Eiken

Chapter 5 discussed what the Eiken Test is all about, showed its actual test materials, and provided some reasons why it's been the most widely used assessment tool for Japanese EFL students. It is said the Eiken is not a grammar test, but a tool to measure an overall English proficiency, although some grammatical elements are included in the tests.

In this chapter, I will show how students with good grammar fared in experimental tests created to see the correlation between their grammar skills and their Eiken level.

## 5.1 The Eiken 2 holders' good grammar knowledge corresponds to high scores in the Eiken Test

Although the Eiken Test makers don't openly say the Eiken Test is a grammar test, those having obtained the Eiken Test 2<sup>nd</sup> level are better in grammar than those without. The detailed research and analysis showing this appears here. Of my 150 subjects, 50 Eiken 2<sup>nd</sup> level holders showed a better grasp of grammar when tested.

The test subjects had been controlled before they were given the tests. They were given questionnaires to confirm:

1. that they hadn't spent more than 3 months in an English speaking country.
2. that they didn't have an English speaking member in their family.
3. that they weren't exposed to early English education.
4. that they weren't involved in English immersion programs.
5. that they were between the ages of 17 and 21.
6. that they had studied English for an average of 6 to 8 years.
7. that they had not lived with an English speaking roommate.

8. whether they had passed the Eiken 2nd level or not.

Consequently all the subjects were on a basically equal basis.

The subjects were given three types of grammar tests. One is an error finding test (Test 1) and another is composition (Test 2), and in the third, the test takers are asked to describe in semantic terms the difference between similar looking sentences (Test 3). The three types of tests described below are focused on grammar points to see the students' understanding of word order rules, tense awareness, passive vs. active voices, how to pick correct conjunctions, and other aspects of English grammar. They are specifically not meant to measure general aspects of competence such as speaking and listening. At the same time, as will be seen, these points of grammar are not meaningless rules, abstract ideas, or obsolete prescriptive grammar. Rather, they are crucial points for Japanese EFL learners in reading, writing and speaking English. Not just any kind of English, but academically and globally acceptable English, the kind of English that MEXT wants them to learn.<sup>1</sup>

The grammar points in these tests are focused on some of the very common errors made by Japanese EFL students. These common errors come from students' own writings, books published over the last two decades and my thirty years' experience as an EFL instructor.

Here is a list of books on the common errors that I referred to.

*Tsuujiru eigo 55 no hints* (2004). Mitsuko Takahashi, Mike Guest.

*Nihonjin ga machigaiyasui eigo hyougen* (1990). Francis Power.

*Natural English* (1989). Richard Maynard.

*Common Errors in English Usage* (1997). Paul Brians.

*Nihonjin ga kurikaesu 200 no machigai* (2003). Kenji Shimizu

*Nihonjin eigo no yokuaru machigai 101* (1996). Nova Enterprise.

*Nihonjin no hushigina eigo, igaina machigai, komatta gokai*. Tommy Uematsu (1971).

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<sup>1</sup>On graduation from junior high school: Ability to hold simple conversations (and a similar level of reading and writing) comprising greetings and responses (English-language ability of graduates should be the third level of the STEP (Eiken) test, on average).

On graduation from senior high school: Ability to hold normal conversations (and a similar level of reading and writing) on everyday topics (English-language ability of graduates should be the second level or semi-second level of the STEP test, on average).

English-language abilities demanded of those active in the international community attainment targets to be established by individual universities with a view to cultivating human resources capable of using English in the work place.

This chapter argues that the Eiken Test 2nd level holders have better grammar and those who don't do badly on grammar tests. The concrete data are given latter in this chapter. In general written assignments done by poor grammar students have more mistakes than those done by good grammar students.

## 5.2 The Grammar Tests in this research

Test 1 is an error finding test<sup>2</sup>. They were asked to give their meanings in Japanese to show their understanding in regard to who or what is the doer or the agent and who or what is the object and what syntactic and semantic roles each word plays in the respective sentences. Here are a few samples from Test 1.

### Samples from Error Hunting Test 1

1. Many students in our class prefer playing to study math.

Being able to differentiate between an infinitive and a preposition easily translates into clarity vs. confusion. An infinitive can mean the purpose of the verb as in *We went out to see the view*. *To see the view* is indeed the purpose of our going out. If hearers take the *to* in (1) as an infinitive not a preposition, they would interpret it as *In order to study math, many students prefer playing*, which really doesn't make sense.

2. She wants to something cold to drink for her breakfast.

This clumsy, ungrammatical sentence can be understood, but the students should know that *want to* precedes a verb, not a noun. In any case, it's disturbing to the readers and hearers to start to process one kind of construction and then get another.

3. I was in Hawaii during I was on vacation last summer.

This sentence too can be understood, but is not correct since *during* is a preposition and can not take a clause. *During* has to be replaced by *while*, which can take a clause. This is a purely grammatical point and ignorance of it leads to a

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<sup>2</sup>Since these tests are not multiple choice tests, it was improbable that the students could have only guessed the solutions and happened to give correct answers.



very awkward expression. Without knowing it, as with sentence 3, the reader or hearer can be disoriented.

4. This job can certainly do by the end of this week.

Whether a verb is transitive or not is a central fact of grammar. Being able to distinguish active voice and passive voice is crucial not only in conversation but also in written material. A business correspondent has to be clear about who sent what to whom. *The company has been sent an email* can be a confusing sentence if you can not tell the difference between active voice and passive voice. It is a common error among Japanese EFL students to interpret this sentence as *The company sent an email*, which means that the sender is the company when, in fact, the company is a receiver of the email.

5. He has often visited this museum when he was a child.

Many EFL students find it hard to know when to use simple past and when to use present perfect. This lack of knowledge sometimes leads to a misunderstanding between two parties. *We didn't send the merchandise* and *We haven't sent the merchandise* have different connotations. The former can mean we had no intention of sending it, so we did not send it, while the later can suggest that we are eager to send it but so far, for some reason, we haven't been able to send it, but will be sending it as soon as we can.

6. Have you been seen the new dress Mary bought on Elm Street yet?

A lot of students with poor grammar fail to see the difference between *Have you seen*, and *Have you been seen*. This very often leads both parties to confusion, the speaker and the listener. When reading materials are involved, the confusion is even more serious. *Has he seen the police?* and *Has he been seen by the police?* are a pair of sentences where many students fail to tell the difference.

7. Jane is one of most diligent student in our school.

The singular vs plural notion is also hard to grasp, since the Japanese language does not express it as systematically as in English. Not being able to distinguish in speaking between plural and singular can certainly create confusion. For example, at an academic conference or a presentation, a Japanese speaker often

says “author” instead of “authors” ignoring the other people who co-authored a document.

8. Do I usually look like happy when I’m with you ?

The test takers with good grammar knowledge know that an adjective does not follow the phrase *look like*. Those poor grammar students often put adjectives after the phrase *look like* and a noun after *look* when an adjective should follow as in *He looks happy*.

9. Tell me what are you thinking right now.

The rule for indirect questions is that subject verb order follows such phrases as *Tell me, I know, Do you know*. Without the knowledge of this rule, the students just add the question sentence after the main clause.

10. She was heard to singing that old Irish folksong.

The correct sentence is *She was heard to sing* or *She was heard singing* without an infinitive *to*. Because the active voice of this sentence is *We heard her sing/singing that old Irish folksong*, the test takers with poor grammar are confused with the usage of infinitive. Certain verbs of perception are followed by an object and then just the simple form of the verb. In this sentence #10, *heard* is the verb of perception, *her* is the object of the verb, and *sing* completes the verb complementation in an active voice.

### Samples from Composition Test 2

These sentences were given to the students in Japanese, and they were supposed to translate them into English. The first sentence in each pair is the Japanese sentence given to the students and the second sentence is my choice of an English equivalent. Memorization could not have possibly helped to compose correct English sentences. They need to know basic word order rules. I will comment on each pair of sentences to show why these specific sentences were chosen to evaluate the students’ competence in English grammar.

1. Sannen maeni Nagoyani itta kotoga aru.

I went to Nagoya three years ago.

This sentence is given to students for translation. Its aim is to see if the test takers have a clear notion of present perfect usage. As a general rule, a present perfect tense does not appear when a specific past phrase is used in the same sentence such as *three years ago*, *yesterday*, *in 1990*, or with *when* + sentence. In the simple past the action was finished in the past but in the present perfect tense, the effect of the action in the past still remains.

*Itta kotoga aru* in Japanese means both *have been in/gone to* and *went* in English. When a phrase such as *three years ago* appears at the end of the sentence, the present perfect can not be used, but since there is some ambiguity in the Japanese language in regard to the tense interpretation, Japanese EFL learners constantly make errors in tenses. This simple past and present perfect confusion is one of the central errors.

2. Gozenchuu ni churippu wo juppon hodo ueta.

I planted about ten tulips in the morning.

This second sentence is to see if test takers control the order of words in translating the Japanese sentence into English. In the Japanese sentence *gozenchuni* ‘*in the morning*’ comes at the beginning of the sentence. This phrase can be at the beginning of the sentence or after *churippu wo* ‘*tulips*’ or after *juppon hodo* ‘*about ten*’ but never at the end of the sentence. In English this phrase *in the morning* can be either at the beginning of the sentence or at the end of the sentence. Also in the Japanese sentence there is no overt subject. It is rare to see *He* and *She* printed in major newspapers. Therefore test takers have to come up with an appropriate subject, in this case, almost any pronoun will do, such as *we*, *I*, *he*, *she*, *they*.

Another point in this sentence is that the verb *ueta* ‘*planted*’ comes at the end of the sentence, which is almost never the case in head-initial languages such as English. Because of this linguistic difference, Japanese EFL students often put words in a wrong order as in *I planted tulips about ten in the morning*, which can mean I planted some tulips at about ten o’clock in the morning. This type of sentence order error can easily lead to a serious misunderstanding in business or personal appointments.

3. Ima shiroi kuruma ga sandai to, akai kuruma ga nidai miete iru.

I see three white cars and two red ones.

In this sentence *miete iru*, the verb, means *to see*. The English verb *to see* does not take a present progressive form, but since *mieteiru* (present progressive) and *mieru* (potential present) can be used interchangeably here in Japanese, Japanese EFL students often use *to see* in a present progressive form as in *I am seeing three white cars and two red cars*.

4. Ane wa yonenkan eigo wo benkyo shite iru.

My sister has been studying English for four years.

This sentence too tests a critical grammar point in the Japanese verb form. In Japanese there is no distinct difference between simple past, present progressive, present perfect and present perfect progressive. *Benkyo shiteiru* can mean either *to study, to be studying, to have been studying, to have studied* according to the context. Therefore without careful attention to the time duration, which in this case is for four years, those students with poor grammar would use a present progressive form in this sentence as in *My sister is studying English for four years*. This sentence can mean that her sister is going to study English for four years, which has quite a different meaning from the test sentences. Verb tenses are critical part of communication in English. It's vitally important to know whether the person is going to do something in the future, or s/he has been doing something in the past and the action still continues into the present. Verb tense unawareness can thus cause serious misunderstanding.

5. Kono sanbiki no inu wa totemo onakaga suite iru.

These three dogs are very hungry.

Another common mistake Japanese EFL learners make is in singular vs. plural nouns. The Japanese language does not indicate singular vs. plural notion nearly as often as English. *This* can proceed *three dogs*, thus *this three dog* is possible in Japanese. When singular and plural forms are not used properly, the listeners will not know whether the speaker is talking about more than one or just one. This can be a confusing factor when it comes to clear communication in any field.

6. Chichi wa sengetsu kuruma wo nusumareta.

My father had his car stolen last month.

This is a sentence a lot of Japanese students have trouble translating. In the Japanese sentence the subject is *chichi* ‘father’ and the verb is *nusumareta*. *Nusumareta* is a passive form of *to steal*. So a lot of the students write *My father was stolen his car* when they have to say *My father had his car stolen*. They realize that it is *his car* that was stolen only after the sentence is corrected word by word.

### Samples from Sentence Analysis Test 3

Here are sample problems from Test 3. The students were supposed to specify the semantic differences among the following small groups of sentences.

1. The dog was frightening.
2. The dog was frightened.

Being able to tell the difference between the sentences 1 and 2 is crucial in English competence. It makes a significant difference whether the dog was scared by something or the dog himself was a fierce creature. The same situation can occur with *a boring teacher* and *a bored teacher*. Japanese EFL learners often say *I’m boring* when in fact they wanted to say *I’m bored*. *The interested party* and *the interesting party* are two quite different things and the difference can very easily cause a problem in communication.

3. Jack found Mary kind.

This sentence, of course, means Jack thought that Mary was kind. Jack, through talk, observations, and other means of knowing her, came to the conclusion that Mary was a kind person. But students with poor grammar can not identify the parts of speech correctly and interpret the sentence as *Jack found kind Mary*, which is not identical to the original meaning. For example, in the latter sentence, *kind* is necessarily the speaker’s opinion, but it is not in the first sentence.

4. Jack found kind Mary.

These sentences #3 and #4 are confusing to some students. They interpret #4 as *Jack thought that Mary was kind*.

5. Jack found it easy to find Mary.

This expletive *it* gives test takers a problem in analyzing the sentence. Many with poor grammar think *it* the object of the sentence and don't realize that *it* means *to find Mary*. They think that *Jack* found something in order to find *Mary*. But those with good grammar instantly know that Jack knew that finding Mary was easy. Some EFL learners confuse the impersonal *it* as an object with a simple object *it*.

6. Mary and Jack found it easy.

7. Mary and Jack found it easily.

These sentences are confusing to students because they are not able to distinguish easy and easily. They take the meaning of (6) to be the same as the sentence #7, Mary and Jack found it easily.

As we have seen, all these errors shown above are central in students' sentence production and reading. They have caused problems on numbers of occasions and hindered the students' understanding. These areas of errors have been pointed out in many grammars and references, and these sources support the view these grammar points are central and not pointless details.

### 5.3 Test results

The Eiken 2<sup>nd</sup> grade holders' scores and those of non-Eiken holders are compared in the charts below. Chart 1 is for the Eiken 2<sup>nd</sup> grade holders. Chart 2 is for the non-Eiken counterparts.

The Eiken 2<sup>nd</sup> grade holders' average scores for Test 1 was 27 while the non-Eiken Counterparts scored 14.93, the highest possible score being 35. The percentage comes to 77.1 vs. 42.7.

The Eiken 2<sup>nd</sup> grade holders' average scores for Test 2 was 11.4 while the non-Eiken Counterparts scored 5.9, the highest possible score being 15. The percentage comes to 74.3 vs. 39.3.

The Eiken 2<sup>nd</sup> grade holders' average scores for Test 3 was 19.8 while the non-Eiken counterparts scored 15.32, the highest possible score being 25. The percentage comes to 79.2 vs. 61.3.

**Chart 1 The Eiken certificate holders**

	Test 1 error hunting out of 35	Test2 composition out of 15	Test 3 Similar sentences out of 25
1.	30	12	20
2.	29	13	19
3.	24	9	22
4.	31	14	21
5.	22	10	20
6.	28	11	25
7.	22	13	19
8.	19	11	25
9.	34	10	17
10.	34	14	22
11.	33	14	22
12.	32	12	21
13.	31	13	24
14.	33	12	20
15.	31	10	21
16.	31	11	21
17.	25	12	19
18.	26	11	18
19.	29	10	20
20.	30	12	22
21.	19	12	19
22.	19	10	18
23.	33	13	22
24.	32	11	19
25.	30	11	21

	Test 1 error hunting out of 35	Test2 composition out of 15	Test 3 Similar sentences out of 25
26.	32	13	21
27.	22	10	18
28.	33	11	13
29.	22	9	11
30.	15	9	20
31.	18	10	20
32.	31	11	21
33.	32	9	19
34.	33	11	22
35.	22	9	21
36.	29	12	22
37.	27	8	19
38.	33	14	22
39.	25	11	20
40.	30	10	19
41.	27	11	21
42.	28	10	19
43.	19	11	10
44.	22	10	19
45.	32	13	21
46.	31	11	19
47.	32	12	21
48.	18	10	19
49.	17	11	18
50.	29	10	21
average(E)	27	11.4	19.8
%(E)	77.1	74.3	79.2

Chart 2 Non- Eiken certificate holders



	Test 1 error hunting out of 35	Test2 composition out of 15	Test 3 Similar sentences out of 25
51	10	3	9
52	13	5	11
53	9	4	13
54	20	6	15
55	28	11	21
56	14	8	13
57	11	4	10
58	12	3	15
59	9	4	19
60	30	11	21
61	10	3	7
62	13	6	11
63	16	5	14
64	11	8	20
65	20	6	17
66	21	5	12
67	11	4	13
68	21	7	11
69	9	2	10
70	30	12	21
71	29	11	19
72	8	3	10
73	13	5	17
74	13	4	18
75	11	3	19
76	15	6	14
77	13	4	15
78	14	5	14
79	13	4	19
80	13	8	14

	Test 1 error hunting out of 35	Test2 composition out of 15	Test 3 Similar sentences out of 25
81	15	7	15
82	15	6	17
83	11	4	15
84	13	5	16
85	12	5	11
86	11	6	21
87	13	7	15
88	11	6	14
89	12	5	16
90	14	4	18
91	10	5	19
92	10	5	18
93	13	6	18
94	12	7	17
95	14	5	16
96	11	3	15
97	19	6	15
98	29	11	20
99	28	11	19
100	9	3	11
101	9	3	9
102	8	3	10
103	11	4	15
104	11	4	11
105	12	5	14
106	13	6	15
107	14	3	19
108	20	10	19
109	9	3	11
110	10	4	11

	Test 1 error hunting out of 35	Test2 composition out of 15	Test 3 Similar sentences out of 25
111	10	5	12
112	10	5	11
113	13	4	21
114	11	7	15
115	11	7	11
116	12	8	13
117	13	7	12
118	14	3	11
119	15	5	14
120	13	5	15
121	14	5	15
122	14	7	16
123	15	6	13
124	17	5	14
125	17	6	21
126	15	6	21
127	30	11	22
128	29	12	20
129	28	11	20
130	29	11	20
131	27	10	19
132	11	4	15
133	11	5	19
134	13	6	21
135	13	7	13
136	11	8	11
137	15	4	14
138	16	3	11
139	16	5	14
140	17	6	11

	Test 1 error hunting out of 35	Test2 composition out of 15	Test 3 Similar sentences out of 25
141	17	6	14
142	18	6	16
143	17	5	16
144	15	6	19
145	15	7	21
146	16	8	16
147	15	9	19
148	16	5	14
149	14	6	16
150	12	6	15
Average(NE)	14.93	5.9	15.32
%(NE)	42.7	39.3	61.3

As the two charts above show, the Eiken Test 2<sup>nd</sup> level holders scores are significantly higher than those of the non-Eiken counterparts. The Eiken Test is not a grammar test, but the test of vocabulary, idioms, reading, and phrase re-ordering. Among them the focus is on general ability of reading. This can be judged by the amount of reading in the test. The reading occupies more than 70 % of the whole test. Although it looks like grammar doesn't play an important part in the Eiken Test, in reality, those who passed the Eiken 2nd level have good grammar. Those who didn't pass did badly on the three tests shown in the charts above. In the next chapter I will set out to show the Eiken 2<sup>nd</sup> level holders' general English abilities are good on reading, writing and listening.

#### 5.4 More detailed analysis of the tests

As became clear in chapter 3, the Eiken Test measures many aspects of English outside strict grammar. It never asks grammar questions, but as the charts 1 and 2 above show that the Eiken 2nd grade holders did significantly better in grammar tests. Here is some more detailed data how they did.

In this section, the test results of two particular subjects are compared, to see in detail why Subject 38 is one of the high scorers among the Eiken 2<sup>nd</sup> level holders.

Subject 72 does not hold the Eiken 2<sup>nd</sup> level, but her other controlled factors are the same as those of Subject 38. It is important to realize that both have studied English for comparable periods, in comparable situations. The course of study published online by MEXT standardizes the Japanese education system and shows that Japanese schools give nearly the same opportunities to the students, in terms of textbook levels, the class time, curricula, facilities, holidays and extra curricular activities. The MEXT closely supervises curriculum and textbooks, and classes with much the same content are taught throughout the country. As a result, equal opportunities of education for all the students become possible.<sup>3</sup>

My research is strictly designed so that it is clear which grammar points the test takers had not been aware of before taking the test.

Subject 38 is one of the highest scores of the Eiken 2<sup>nd</sup> level holders. Look at how she corrects the errors in the following sentences. She has made only one error in sentence #7, where she didn't notice the absence of *the* before *most*. Other corrections she makes are perfect and they are all grammatical. Her result shows that she has very little trouble in grammatically correct sentence production.

Subject 38 on Test 1
----------------------

1. Many students in our class prefer playing to study math.  
study → studying
2. She wants to something cold to drink for her breakfast.  
omit *to* before *something*
3. I was in Hawaii during I was on vacation last summer.  
during → while
4. This job can certainly do by the end of this week.  
do → be done
5. He has often visited this museum when he was a child.  
omit *has*

---

<sup>3</sup>However this is only true up to the junior high school level. The academic levels of high school students vary to a great extent.

6. Have you been seen the new dress Mary bought on the Elm Street yet?  
omit *been*
7. Jane is one of most diligent student in our school.  
student → students
8. Do I usually look like happy when I'm with you ?  
omit *like*
9. Tell me what are you thinking right now.  
are you → you are
10. She was heard to singing that old Irish folksong.  
singing → sing

Here, I will put together some unordered general comments for this Subject's performance, highlighting where her grammar knowledge is much in evidence.

1. Subject 38 knows that *to* can be either an infinitive or a preposition and that the *to* in #1 is not an infinitive but a preposition; thus the verb following *to* should take a gerund form not a base form of the verb.
2. Many EFL learners add *to* after *want* even when a noun follows *want* as in #2. They often confuse a phrase *I want to see you tomorrow* with a phrase *I want a new bike*. But Subject 38 knows exactly what was wrong with #2.
3. Subject 38 knows the difference between *while* and *during*. That is, a clause construction follows *while* but only a noun or a noun phrase follows *during*.
4. She is also aware of the passive and active voice usage in #4 and #6.
5. Subject 38 omitted *has* in #5 because she knows one should use the simple past when the exact time of a past action is stated in the same clause, in the case of #5, *when he was a child*.
6. She is also aware that a plural form of the noun follows the phrase *one of the* as in #7. Many Japanese EFL learners are not aware of this rule because we do not use plural forms to the same extent as in English. In Japanese a sentence

such as *This three dog is cute* is perfectly acceptable. Thus it takes time and efforts for Japanese EFL students to come to grips with the singular vs. plural usage.

7. We can see that Subject 38 knows that a noun follows *look like* and an adjective follows *look* in sentence #8.
8. In #9, subject-verb inversion does not occur, because the interrogative sentence is embedded in an imperative sentence. Subject 38 is aware of this rule.
9. When a sensory verb *hear* is used in a passive voice, either one of the following form is used.

be+heard+to+root verb

be+heard+verb-ing.

It is sometimes confusing to Japanese EFL learners, but Subject 38 is aware of this rule.

In contrast, here are the results of the test done by Subject 72, who is not an Eiken 2nd grade holder. The first sentence is the original wrong sentence and the second sentence is her version of this ungrammatical sentence.

Subject 72 on Test 1
----------------------

1. Many students in our class prefer playing to study math.  
Many students prefer playing to study math in our class.

She doesn't spot the difference between an infinitive and a preposition. Moving the phrase *in our class* to the end of the sentence is irrelevant, worse, it changes the meaning. The sentence Subject 72 wrote can mean that in order to study math in the class, many students prefer playing, which really doesn't make sense. Subject 72 is not aware of the nonsense her sentence suggests.

2. She wants to something cold to drink for her breakfast.  
She wants something cold drink for her breakfast.

She crossed out *to* after *wants* and *cold*. This shows that she doesn't know the

functions of *to* in each case. The first *to* is not necessary because a verb does not follow, but the second *to* is obligatory because the adjective *cold* has to modify the preceding noun *something*. *Cold drink* is acceptable, but not *something cold drink*.

3. I was in Hawaii during I was on vacation last summer.  
I was in Hawaii during vacation last summer.

Subject 72 has perhaps given a correct answer here by accident, because she replaced *when* with *during* in #8, which shows she is not fully aware of the correct usage of *during*, that is, that a clause construction can not follow *during*.

4. This job can certainly do by the end of this week.  
No answer is given.

5. He has often visited this museum when he was a child. He has visited this museum when he was a child.

The central point in this sentence is the notion of present perfect. Though #5 is perfectly understandable, it is nonetheless ungrammatical with *when* and *has visited* used in the same clause. Subject 72 isn't aware of a grammatical rule that a specific time phrase and a present perfect cannot be used in the same clause and has simply crossed out *often*.

6. Have you been seen the new dress Mary bought on Elm Street yet?  
Have you been seen the new dress Mary has bought on Elm Street yet?

She doesn't see where passive vs. active voices should be paid attention to. Instead she must think something was wrong with the past tense and added *has* to make the tense in the relative clause present perfect, leaving the erroneous sentence ungrammatical. Subject 72 did not see that leaving *been* as it is in the



sentence suggests that someone is asking if *you* were seen by someone, in other words, *have someone seen you*, and the rest of the sentence just doesn't fit in, confusing the listener and the reader.

7. Jane is one of most diligent student in our school.

Jane is one of diligent student in our school.

Subject 72 crossed out *most* and didn't know that the noun following the phrase *one of the* should be plural. She confuses the readers and listeners as to the number of students she is talking about; whether she is talking about one particular diligent student or one out of several other diligent students.

8. Do I usually look like happy when I'm with you?

Do I usually look like happy during I'm with you?

Subject 72 replaced *when* with *during*. Her correction shows she has no awareness as to the usage of the conjunction *when* and the preposition *during*. A noun or a phrase follows *during* but a clause follows *when*.

9. Tell me what are you thinking right now.

Subject 72 gave no answer to this sentence, indicating she doesn't recognize a correct embedded word order, that is, when an interrogative sentence is preceded by *Tell me*. In the phrase following *Tell me*, the simple question form changes to the simple statement.

10. She was heard to singing that old Irish folksong

She was heard sing that old Irish folksong.

Subject 72 crossed out *to* and changed *singing* to *sing*, the root form. When converting *we heard her sing* to a passive voice the sentence is *she was heard to sing*. *To*, which isn't used in the original sentence, appears. Subject 72 doesn't know this rule.

These comparisons between the two subjects show that high scorers in the Eiken have good grammar.

## 5.5 Composition Test

Recall that the sentences were given to the students in Japanese and they were supposed to translate them into English. The test takers need to know basic word order rules, number agreement, tense sequence, and other grammar points. The first sentence of each pair is one of the Japanese sentences given to test takers. The second sentence is my translation.

Here, let us again look at the English sentences Subject 72 wrote. Subject 72 made some of the typical errors the non-Eiken 2<sup>nd</sup> level holders made. This is why I chose her paper to represent the whole group.

Subject 72 on Test 2
----------------------

1. Sannenmae ni Nagoya ni ittakotoga aru.

I have been Nagoya 3 years ago.

*I went to Nagoya three years ago*, is the correct translation. Subject 72 used a present perfect in #1 when a phrase indicating a specific time of event was in the same clause, in this case *3 years ago*. In Japanese *ittakotogaaru* is equivalent to *have been to*. Its past form *itta* and the present perfect *ittakotogaaru* can be used interchangeably in Japanese. Many EFL learners make this error and Subject 72 made this common error. She left out *to* after *been*.

2. Gozenchuu ni churippu wo juppon hodo ueta.

I \* \* \* flowers about ten at this noon.

*I planted about ten tulips in the morning*, is the correct translation. She has trouble with the word order in #2. A lot of Japanese EFL learners have trouble deciding where to put *tulips*, either before *about* or after *ten*. The confusion is due to the Japanese word order. Directly translated, the Japanese word order in this sentence is *the morning in tulips ten about planted*. Unless test takers are aware of the grammar of word order they can easily get confused. She

wrote *flowers* instead of *tulips*, but this is not a vocabulary test. *At this noon* is understandable but not a translation of the given Japanese phrase, *gozenchu ni*, which should be translated as *in the morning*. A university professor, says that 30 %of college entrance exam takers made errors in the word order in this sentence (Tomi 2003).

3. Ima shiroi kuruma ga 3 dai to, akaikuruma ga 2 dai mieteiru.  
I'm seeing three white cars and two red cars.

*I see three white cars and two red ones(cars)* is the correct translation. *See, watch* and *look at* can be all translated as *miru* in Japanese. Of the three English words, *see* does not take a present progressive form. But Japanese *miru* can take a present progressive form *mieru, miteiru* or *mieteiru*. Another confusing factor is that in Japanese *mieru* 'to see' can either be *to look at* or *be looking at*. Thus *I am seeing* is a common error in English but a correct expression in Japanese. Subject 72 was not well versed in this area of word usage, where grammar is required.

4. Ane wa yonenkan eigo wo benkyo shiteiru.  
My sister is studying English four years.

*My sister has been studying English for four years* is the correct translation. To differentiate between present perfect, simple present, simple past, present progressive and present perfect progressive is a difficult task for Japanese EFL learners. *Benkyo suru* can be translated either as *study, be studying, have been studying, or have studied*. Subject 72 wrote *My sister is studying English for four years*, which means that her sister will continue to study in a period that totals four years. However, the Japanese sentence given tells it's the present perfect progressive that the test taker has to use. If the Japanese sentence in question were to include the future, it would be *korekara yonen kan benkyo suru tsumorida*, or *benkyo suru darou*, or *benkyo suru yoteida*, not *benkyo shiteiru*. Another alternative is to use *korekara no yonen kan*, instead of just plain *4nen kan*. If test takers only look at the verb form, *benkyo shite iru*, they can easily

be prompted to use present progressive as Subject 72 did, but in terms of the whole sentence, that present progressive form does not work in sentence #4.

5. Kono sanbikino inu wa totemo onakaga suiteiru.

This three dog is so hungry.

*These three dogs are very hungry*, is the correct translation. The Japanese language does not differentiate between singular and plural as often as does English language. *This three dog is hungry* is thus a word for word gloss of a correct, acceptable utterance in Japanese. Japanese EFL learners have huge trouble in this area. *Kono inu* can mean either *this dog* or *these dogs*.

In addition, *desu* can be translated as *am, is, are*, where no distinction is necessary. Even quite advanced learners make this error.

6. Chich wa sengetsu kuruma wo nusumareta.

My father was stolen his car last month.

*My father had his car stolen last month* is the correct translation. A word for word translation would no doubt produce a sentence such as *My father was stolen his car last month* just like the one Subject 72 wrote. This is a case of a passive causative verb *have*. The past participle is used after *have* to give a passive meaning. In this case, someone stole my father's car. In other words, my father's car was stolen, but the sentence written by Subject 72 means someone stole (kidnapped?) my father.

Next let us take a look at how Subject 38 fared in Composition Test. Subject 38 is one of the highest scorers in the Eiken 2nd level holders group and shows a significant excellence in grammar tests.

Subject 38 on Test 2
----------------------

1. I have been to Nagoya three years ago.

Subject 38 also used present perfect in #1 when a phrase indicating a specific

time of event was in the same clause, in this case *3 years ago*.

2. I planted about ten tulips in this morning.

She has no trouble with #2.

3. Now I see three white cars and two red cars.

No errors. She apparently knows the verb *see* does not usually take a progressive form.

4. My sister has been studying English for four years.

Subject 38 seems aware that a word for word translation of the Japanese sentence may be misleading and uses a correct tense for #4, namely, present perfect progressive. She has no confusion between present progressive and present perfect progressive. She is aware that *for four years* indicates the duration of time beginning in the past continuing to the present.

5. These three dogs are very hungry.

No errors. Subject 38 is well aware of number agreement.

6. My father had his car stolen last month.

Clearly, Subject 38 has a good grasp of this passive causative sentence construction.

## 5.6 Sentence analysis test and results

Let's recall again the sample problems from sentence analysis test. The students were asked to tell the semantic differences in Japanese between the following small groups.

1. The dog was frightening.

2. The dog was frightened.
3. Jack found Mary kind.
4. Jack found kind Mary.
5. Jack found Mary easily.
6. Jack found it easy to find Mary.
7. Mary and Jack found it easy.
8. Mary and Jack found it easily.

We are going to see how Subjects 38 and 72 translated each sentence and where they made errors and how these errors can lead them to ambiguity in communication.

Subjects 38 and 72 on Test 3
------------------------------

1. The dog was frightening.

The first sentence is the translation by Subject 38 and the second one by Subject 72.

Sore wa kowai inudatta. (Subject 38)

Inu wa kowagatteita. (Subject 72)

The incorrect translation given by Subject 72 means it was the dog that was scared. But the translation given by Subject 38 means correctly that the dog was fierce, and so the people were afraid of it.

2. The dog was frightened.

Inu wa kowagatteita. (Subject 38)

Inu wa kowagaraseta. (Subject 72)

The translation given by Subject 72 means people feared the dog. Subject 38 gave a correct translation, which means the dog had fear.

3. Jack found Mary kind.

Jack wa Mary ga shinsetsudato wakatta. (Subject 38)

Jack wa shinsetsuna Mary wo mitsuketa. (Subject 72)

The translation by Subject 72 means that Jack found the girl, Mary, who was kind. The translation by Subject 38 means that having known Mary, Jack came to realize she was kind. The result shows that Subject 72 does not know the sentence construction where *Mary* is the object and *kind* is a complement, meaning *Mary is kind*. Subject 38's translation clearly shows she knows this sentence construction.

4. Jack found kind Mary.

Jack wa shinsetsuna Mary wo mitsuketa. (Subject 72)

Jack wa shinsetsuna Mary wo mitsuketa. (Subject 38)

They both gave identical answers, which are correct. The sentences mean Jack found Mary, who was kind.

5. Jack found Mary easily.

Jack wa kantanni Mary wo mitsuketa.

This is the translation given by both Subjects 72 and 38. It's the correct translation.

6. Jack found it easy to find Mary.

Jack wa sore wo kantanni Mary ni mitsuketa. (Subject 72)

Jack wa Mary wo mitsukerunoga kantandato wakatta. (Subject 38)

Subject 72 doesn't know the impersonal *it* as an object. She translates *it* as *sore* (something). Her Japanese translation means that Jack easily found it for Mary. On the other hand, Subject 38 knows the impersonal *it* and translates the sentence correctly. Her translation says that Jack came to know that finding

Mary was not difficult.

7. Mary and Jack found it easy.

Mary to Jack wa sore wo kantanni mtsuketa. (Subject 72)

Mary to Jack wa sore ga kantandato wakatta. (Subject 38)

The translation by Subject 72 means that Mary and Jack found *it* easily. She thus did not analyze the sentence correctly. This sentence has the same construction as does sentence #3, where *it* is the object of the sentence and *easy* is the complement. She also confused *easy* with *easily* and has the meaning wrong. The translation by Subject 38 is correct. She says that the sentence means Mary and Jack found that *it* was *easy*. Her translation shows she clearly understands the sentence construction.

8. Mary and Jack found it easily.

Mary to Jack wa sore wo kantanni mitsuketa.

The two Subjects gave the same correct answer. They both identified *it* as the object of the sentence and had no trouble with the sentence analysis.

As the sentences show, a mere awareness of word meanings often doesn't contribute much to the understanding of semantic aspects of a sentence. It is clear in these examples that these are due to grammar differences. It is obvious by looking at the groups that it's not a question of "vocabulary" or "context" that makes the difference between success and failure.

## 5.7 Grammar in the Eiken Reading

In chapter 3, it was confirmed, by looking closely at the Eiken test materials, that most of the test is not grammar. They don't ask grammar questions at all. It was all the matter of vocabulary, idioms and reading except for the sentence reordering section. Yet in this chapter we learned that those with good grammar scored higher than those with poorer grammar. This seems contradictory. We will see what is in the reading materials that reflect this outcome.



Let's look at one of the reading materials again sentence by sentence. The sentences to be discussed are underlined and numbered.

From: Bob Evans <evans@lightweight.com>  
 To: John Cousins <jfc6488@officepro.com>  
 Date: April 18, 2003  
 Subject: Copy machine

Dear Mr. Cousins,

(1) I am writing to you concerning the possibility of changing the copy machine we are leasing from your company. I would like to say immediately that there is nothing wrong with the machine itself. In fact, in terms of our daily business needs, we do not really require a machine that can make color copies.

(2) Most of the documents created in our department are black and white, and even in the case of color documents, monochrome copies are sufficient for most purposes. We have therefore decided that there is no need for us to continue to pay the extra cost of leasing a color copier and maintaining supplies of color ink.

We have also found that, with a color copier on hand, employees tend to use it for personal reasons. Many have started to bring in photographs and other materials to copy, and this has been increasing our costs.

For these reasons I would like to discuss with you the possibility of exchanging our current copy machine for a black-and-white model as soon as possible.

I would appreciate it if you could call me at your earliest convenience.

Bob Evans

Lightweight Materials

(35) Bob Evans

1. seldom creates documents in black and white.
2. wants a machine that can copy color photographs.

3. is satisfied with the quality of the color copy machine.
4. thinks the black-and-white machine uses too much ink.

(36) What is Bob Evan's main complaint with the copy machine?

1. It is difficult to teach employees to use it.
2. It is costing his company too much money.
3. It is not popular with the workers.
4. It is not being used very often.

(37) What does Bob Evans ask John Cousins to do?

1. Bring a black-and-white copy machine right away.
2. Cancel their agreement regarding copy machines.
3. Call him to discuss leasing a new copy machine.
4. Recommend a copy machine that is more accurate.

First, let's look at the underlined sentence (1) in the email.

*I am writing to you concerning the possibility of changing the copy machine we are leasing from your company.* In order to understand what this sentence means, test-takers have to know that the phrase *we are leasing from your company* is an adjective clause modifying *the copy machine*. Also there are three verbs ending with *ing*. *Writing, concerning, changing, leasing* all look alike in terms of function but they sometimes behave differently. There are rules for participles and a lack of this grammar may very well confuse test-takers.

In the sentence analysis test mentioned earlier in this chapter, there was a set of sentences that includes this point of grammar. They were:

The dog was frightening.

The dog was frightened.

She is a boring teacher.

She is a bored teacher.

The non-Eiken certificate holders scored 61.3% while certificate holders scored 79.2%.

Also in the error finding test section, there are two sentences that have participles. Many failed to find the errors in these sentences because there are a number of participles.

A wounding man was lying on the cold ground in the woods. I was watching a little boy drew a picture of a galloping horse.

Readers may argue that test-takers don't need such grammar to get high score in the Eiken. But let's take a look at the underlined sentence (2) of the email, *Most of the documents created in our department are black and white,...*

When there are two verbs in one sentence, the second one is usually a main verb, in this sentence *are*, and the one that looks like a past form of a verb, in this case *created*, is often a participial adjective modifying the noun or a noun phrase just before the adjective, in this case *Most of the documents*. Sometimes test-takers think *created* is a main verb. That's why question (34) asks if Bob creates documents. The Eiken assumes that test-takers shaky grammar might lead them to confusion. This shows knowing the meaning of individual word does not guarantee a good reading skill.

Let's look at some more sentences in the next reading materials.

Biting Back

(1) Anyone who has ever been bitten by a mosquito knows that these insects can make life very unpleasant. But mosquitoes, which (2) are found all over the world, are more than just annoying. Many types of mosquitoes carry serious diseases such as malaria and yellow fever. Every year, over 3 million people worldwide die from (3) diseases caused by mosquito bites, and the problem is getting worse in many countries.

Currently, the most popular method of reducing mosquito populations is to use chemicals that kill mosquito larvae in the pools of water while they live. This approach, however, has met with some difficulties. Some people are worried that the chemicals (4) may cause damage to environment.

Another problem is that there are over 3,000 types of mosquitoes, and some of these <sup>(5)</sup> are no longer affected by the most widely used chemicals.

Recently, though, researchers at the University of Florida have developed a new way to deal with the mosquito problem. The researchers found a hormone that prevents mosquitoes from digesting their food. Although the mosquitoes can eat, they cannot gain energy from their food. The researchers realized that if mosquitoes absorbed this hormone in large amounts, <sup>(6)</sup> it would cause them to die of hunger. They decided that the best way to deliver the hormone would be to use yeast, one of the favorite foods of mosquito larvae. They succeeded in creating a type of yeast that produces the hormone naturally. When this yeast is put into ponds and other places where mosquitoes lay eggs, the mosquito larvae eat the yeast and die before they can become adults. And with fewer adult mosquitoes, fewer people get bitten.

In laboratory test, the yeast was 100 percent effective in getting rid of mosquito larvae. Moreover, unlike the chemicals currently <sup>(7)</sup> being used, the new yeast is effective against all types of mosquitoes. And the yeast is so environmentally safe that it can be put into drinking water with no harmful effects. The researchers who have developed the yeast expect that it will soon become commercially available. When it does, the fight against mosquitoes may become easier for all of us.

(37) Mosquitoes

1. are not as harmful as most people believe.
2. are responsible for millions of deaths each year.
3. are in danger of dying out from diseases such as malaria.
4. are an unpleasant but necessary part of our lives.

(38) The chemicals most commonly used to reduce mosquito populations

1. are causing people to become sensitive to mosquito bites.
2. are ineffective because they only target the larvae.
3. have eliminated over 3,000 types of mosquitoes.

4. have become unable to kill some kinds of mosquitoes.

(39) What did the University of Florida researchers discover?

1. A way to stop mosquitoes from digesting food.
2. A type of yeast that mosquitoes produce naturally.
3. A new kind of mosquito that cannot lay eggs.
4. A method of reducing hunger in mosquitoes.

(40) What do you researchers say about their invention?

1. It will probably be available on the market soon.
2. It does no lasting harm to mosquitoes.
3. It can make water 100 percent safe to drink.
4. It is not as effective as the chemical method.

(41) Which of the following statements is true?

1. A newly discovered hormone is being used to cure diseases carried by mosquitoes.
2. A chemical is now available that destroys the favorite food of mosquito larvae.
3. Researchers have made a new type of yeast that can be used to control mosquito populations.
4. Damage to the environment has been causing millions of mosquitoes to die of hunger.

This reading material about mosquitoes is also for reading only. No grammar questions are openly asked. Test-takers need only good vocabulary and idioms. But look at the underlined part (1) *Anyone who has ever been bitten by a mosquito knows that these insects can make life very unpleasant.* The sentence may give test-takers a bit of hard time understanding if they don't have good grammar. Japanese EFL students are not good at distinguishing an active voice from a passive voice. This has been illustrated in the error finding test created for this dissertation. Of the 35 error finding questions, two are the questions of voice. (4) This job can certainly do by the

end of this week. (6) Have you been seen the new dress Mary bought on Elm Street yet?

Of 150 students tested, 87 couldn't find the errors in these sentences above. This means that the Eiken test-takers can very well misunderstand sentence (1). There are other confusing phrases concerning active vs. passive voices. (2) (5) and (7). (5) can be a hard one because there is an idiomatic phrase, *no longer*, between *are* and *affected*. When this construction appears, Japanese EFL students often lose their way in reading.

This is illustrated in the error finding test (4). *This job can certainly do by the end of this week*. Because there is an adverb, *certainly*, between *can* and *do*, those with shaky grammar fail to see that the sentence has to be in a passive voice. Again, in error finding test section, the Eiken certificate holders scored 77.1% while non-certificate counterparts scored 42.7%.

A compound sentence with an adjective clause is also their weak point. Another point is a causative *make*. Japanese students find causative verbs, *make*, *let*, *have*, sensory verbs, *hear*, *see*, *watch* confusing. In the composition test section, almost none was able to write the correct sentence for (15) *My father had his car stolen last week*.

Another piece of evidence can be seen in the following part of the Eiken reading. Test-takers are supposed to choose the appropriate word out of four possible choices, for the blank. All the words in the choice have the same grammatical properties.

It is widely accepted that keeping ourselves clean helps us to stay healthy. For example, antibacterial cleaners, which are highly effective at killing the bacteria that cause disease, are used in many houses. However, some scientists are becoming concerned that our efforts to make our surroundings cleaner and cleaner may actually be ( 30 ) our health.

(30) 1 preventing 2 controlling 3 damaging 4 supporting

In the above passage, *However* appears at the beginning of the third sentence. *However* indicates that the sentence that follows carries an opposite message, contradicting the sentences before *However*. In order to make a correct choice of the

word, test-takers have to understand the first two sentences correctly. They should be aware of such rules as passive voice, it+that construction, relative words and how they modify antecedents.

Although the Eiken is not consciously testing grammar, test-takers cannot do without grammar. Without it, they cannot be confident in what they read. The research and results to demonstrate this point are in Chapter 6.

There are many people, professionals and lay people, who say grammar is useless and more voluntary reading is better for students' improvement. But Tsugehara, an expert interpreter, gives intermediate learners some suggestions in regard to learning English effectively. She emphasized the importance of rich vocabulary and well-rounded deep knowledge of one's native language. She states that coming to the full grasp of English sentence structures is an absolute must in order to produce good sentences. She encourages a good amount of random readings, but without knowing the rules of the language, there is no way of possibly understanding the contents of the reading materials (Tsugehara, 2001).

## Chapter 6 Krashen's "free reading" strategy is seriously flawed

Over the last three decades or more I have been convinced that reading, writing, speaking and even listening follow from grammar competence. This is the way a majority of students have learned foreign languages in Japan. However, in 2001, I happened to read a book *Six Chapters to Change English Education* (Morinaga, 1996). This book talked a lot about "the input hypothesis". This term was new to me and I investigated further. The book says that the term was coined by Krashen, and Morinaga highly valued this strategy, emphasizing the need to change the conventional English teaching in Japan. Krashen's input hypothesis is discussed in detail later in this chapter. Since it was completely new and opposite to what I've been used to, I had to put it to a test. I had to see if the input hypothesis works better than the conventional method in which grammar precedes and is the indispensable basis of the four skills.

So far, we have seen, in chapter 2, that there has been quite a few of controversial observations, opinions and experiments in regard to grammar instruction in EFL in Japan. Grammar is taught less and less and people are being attracted to Communicative Methods. A main figure that supports this trend is Stephen Krashen. Krashen claims that exposing the second language learners, young and old, to as many reading materials as possible is the best way to help them acquire the target language. Krashen and Terrell call it the Natural Approach (Krashen & Terrell, 1983; Terrell et al, 1997). We learn from Stephen Krashen and Debra Von Sprecken that recreational voluntary reading is linked to positive attitudes toward reading among students of any age, including adolescents (*California School Library Journal* 23 (2): 8-9, 2000).

Yet other views persist. A simultaneous interpreter and author of many insightful books, Masao Kunihiro strongly insists grammar is the very core of language learning. Without it, EFL just wouldn't exist, he says (Kunihiro, 1990). A professor in linguistics and himself a polyglot, Senno says that the only two tools any language



learners need are vocabulary and grammar. These are the two important assets that they cannot do without (Senno, 1986).

This chapter in this dissertation argues grammar is crucially important in EFL in Japan, and Krashen's claim is seriously flawed.

From my thirty-five years of experience in EFL in Japan, I am well aware of the common mistakes learners make at different stages of learning. There are errors that persist many years into learning, but there are other errors that learners learn not to make after a certain number of years and practice. Sometimes a third singular S and a plural S can be confusing to young students, but they very quickly learn the difference. Present progressive is something that seems easy for everyone, but present perfect is a very difficult notion to come to grips with. In Japanese a present progressive exists, but there is no present perfect tense. A foreign language is learned by comparing it with a mother language. EFL students have a harder time with the aspects of the target language when the grammar or the vocabulary does not exist in their first language. So grammar becomes essential in EFL. Without it, it's like playing a sport without knowing the rules.

The following is what often happens in beginners' class. It illustrates my point clearly. When students write the following sentences (1) (2) (3) and (4) either alone or in context, their intended meanings are obvious. Yet the sentences (2) and (4) are wrong. Students usually have a hard time finding out why (2) and (4) are wrong, if they are not given grammar explanation. Left alone, they are forever in the murky water, not being able to see clearly what is going wrong. Both *study* and *busy* end with Y, *and* both seem to show someone's action or state. Yet, (2) and (4) are wrong. It would take hours, even days and weeks for learners to see what is wrong, if they were not told that *study* is a verb and *busy* is an adjective and thus cannot be conjugated. This simple explanation and a few examples and exercises would solve the problem in less than 10 minutes.

1. She was studying.
2. She was busying.
3. She studied at the kitchen table.
4. She busied at the kitchen table.

According to Krashen's idea "free reading", students are supposed to be able to know the grammatical aspects of these four sentences and learn to use them correctly after a certain amount of reading. Krashen and Mason suggest that in their experiment, 2000 pages during two semesters in college would work fine, which is roughly six and a half months. There are two months summer holidays and almost three months spring break.

Here is another set of similar looking but grammatically different sentences. According to Krashen's claim, EFL students should be able to know the difference by merely being exposed to a lot of reading.

1. Jane's got to pay for the car.
2. Jane got paid for the car.
3. Jane has paid for the car.
4. Jane's been paid for the car.
5. Jane paid for the car.
6. Jane is paid for the car.
7. Jane's got pay for the car.

It seems unlikely that the students will be able to know the differences only through reading. We will see if his claim is valid.

## 6.1 Krashen's input hypothesis

Before showing whether Krashen's claim is valid or not, the author would like the readers to be familiar with Krashen's input hypothesis. Krashen puts forth five hypotheses (<http://homepage.ntlworld.com/vivian.c/SLA/Krashen.htm>).

The *natural order hypothesis*; we acquire the rules of language in a predictable order.

1. The *Acquisition/Learning Hypothesis*: adults have two distinctive ways of developing competences in second languages ... acquisition, that is by using language for real communication ... learning ... "knowing about" language (Krashen & Terrell, 1983).

2. The *Monitor Hypothesis*: 'conscious learning ... can only be used as a Monitor or an editor' (Krashen & Terrell, 1983).
3. The *Input Hypothesis*: humans acquire language in only one way by understanding messages or by receiving "comprehensible input".
4. The *Affective Filter Hypothesis*: 'a mental block, caused by affective factors... that prevents input from reaching the language acquisition device' (Krashen, 1985. p.100).

In this dissertation, I am focusing on his third hypothesis, *The Input Hypothesis* in which he claims humans acquire language in only one way - by understanding messages or by receiving "comprehensible input." Comprehensive input, a central article of faith in Krashen's model, is the belief that comprehension is the only factor necessary for successful acquisition (Nunan, 1998:82).

Comprehensible input is a hypothesis that learners will acquire language best when they are given the appropriate input. The input should be easy enough that they can understand it, but just beyond their level of competence. If the learner is at level  $i$ , then input should come at level  $i + 1$ . Comprehensible input is an essential component in Stephen Krashen's Input Hypothesis, where regulated input will lead to acquisition so long as the input is challenging, yet easy enough to understand without conscious effort at learning.

The Input Hypothesis is an idea Krashen thinks to be effective in acquiring a language. Here is a list of his related ideas he claims to be valid.

1. People speak to children acquiring their first language in special ways.
2. People speak to L2 learners in special ways.
3. L2 learners often go through an initial Silent Period.
4. The comparative success of younger and older learners reflects provision of comprehensible input.
5. The more comprehensible input the greater the L2 proficiency.

6. Lack of comprehensible input delays language acquisition.
7. Teaching methods work according to the extent that they use comprehensible input. (Krashen, 1985).

In this chapter the focus is on 5, 6 and 7 of the above.

## 6.2 Research methods

### 6.2.1 A serious flaw in Krashen's hypothesis

One serious problem with this hypothesis is that “ $i$  and  $i + 1$ ” are impossible to identify, so the teachers have to define appropriate input initiatives and come up with materials they think are plus 1 levels. Some other critics share the same view as to the ambiguity.

The concepts of ‘understanding’ and ‘noticing a gap’ are not clearly operationalised, or consistently proposed; it is not clear how the learner’s present state of knowledge ( $i$ ) is to be characterized, or indeed whether the  $i + 1$  formulation is intended to apply to all aspects of language, from lexis to phonology and syntax (Mitchell & Myles, 1998, p.126).

...each of Krashen’s hypotheses is marked by serious flaws: undefinable or ill-defined terms, unmotivated constructs, lack of empirical content and thus of falsifiability, lack of explanatory power...(Gregg ,1984. p.94)

Krashen’s theory fails at every juncture ... Krashen has not defined his terms with enough precision, the empirical basis of the theory is weak, and the theory is not clear in its prediction (McLaughlin, 1987. p.56).

In order to establish concrete data, I designed a research program. I taught three classes of college women differently; one with ample reading without grammar instruction, another with explicit grammar instruction and exercises to reinforce and help them internalize the ideas in context but with very little reading, and a third with both grammar and reading. The first group, I call the Extensive Reading Group (ERG), the second is called the Grammar Group (GG) and the third the Grammar Reading Group (GRG). The first class, ERG, was conducted as Krashen advised, giving students reading materials “challenging, yet easy enough to understand without conscious effort at learning”.

Subjects were 120 first year female students, ages 18-19. No students had been in English speaking countries, none had had an English-speaking friend, and none worked in businesses that required English. The study was therefore done in a pure EFL situation. Each class consisted of 40 students whose academic competence is determined by their college. There are 3 levels defined by the college and all three groups were level 2.

The Extensive Reading Group (ERG) engaged in extensive reading (Mason and Krashen, 1997). They were required to read about 1000 pages in one semester (200,000 to 250,000 words). All students began reading graded readers at the " $i + 1$ " as suggested by Krashen, and stayed more or less on that level and read extensively.

The Grammar Group (GG) received explicit grammar instruction with exercises to reinforce their acquisition. Very little reading was given; just enough to see the grammar points in short passages. They were given no extra reading for homework, but there is no knowing how much reading they did voluntarily.

The Grammar Reading Group (GRG) were given both grammar instruction and reading, but not as many grammar exercises as GG or as much reading as ERG. One significant difference between ERG and GRG is that GRG read a lot of materials within their grammar competence. In other words, GRG students had been all familiarized with the grammar, sentence constructions and most of the idiomatic expressions that appeared in the reading *before* they began reading. They were not supposed to run into unknown grammar points or sentence constructions except for possible rare occasions which could not have been expected. Therefore it is safe to assume they stopped less often than ERG for unknown grammar points and idiomatic phrases in reading. They were in fact reading not at level " $i + 1$ " but at level " $i$ " or " $i - 1$ ."

Listening comprehension was done in all the three classes with the same textbook, *Punch Line 1* (Miller, 2001. Nanundo).

After eight months, the same tests were given to all the students and the results were analyzed.

### 6.2.2 How each class was taught

Here is a detailed account of how each class was taught. Each class was 90 minutes long, once a week for the duration of eight months starting in April, 2003, and the

research results were collected in November. Different methods and textbooks were used for each class except for the listening comprehension material. For listening, a live voice of the author was used, but for the last listening test for the research, a taped voice was used to make uniform conditions in all the three classes.

The reading materials used for the research were *Penguin Readers* published by Pearson Education Limited, *Oxford Graded Readers* by Oxford University Press, *Heinemann Guided Readers* by Heinemann International, and other short stories including mysteries and detective stories. In *Penguin Readers* there are six levels and the vocabulary in each level is controlled as follows:

- 6 Advanced (3000 words)
- 5 Upper Intermediate (2300 words)
- 4 Intermediate (1700 words)
- 3 Pre-Intermediate (1200 words)
- 2 Elementary (600 words)
- 1 Beginner (300 words)
- Easy starters (200 words)

*Oxford Graded Readers* come in five levels. The back of each book carries the following message from OUP.

Vocabulary and structures are graded following the scheme developed by L.A. Hill, and the readers are grouped in five stages at the 500, 750, 1000, 1500, and 2075 headword levels.

A Starter book of *Heinemann Graded Readers* gives the following messages on the front page.

The Heinemann Guided Readers is a graded series of supplementary readers at five levels: Starter (S), Beginner (B), Elementary (E), Intermediate(Int) and Upper (U). Certain features are stressed at all levels of the series:

- control of information
- control of structure and vocabulary
- a pleasing and fluent style of writing

- a wide choice of interesting subject matter

At Starter Level, special attention is paid to control of verb tenses. Tenses are limited to the Present Simple, the Present Continuous, Future with *going to*, and the occasional use of Future with *will*. There is a carefully controlled vocabulary (approximately 300 basic words). This means that students at the very beginning of their course and with a very basic knowledge of English will be able to read Starter Level books with ease and enjoyment (Milne, 1989).

The beginner level books carry the message below as to the structure control.

Special care is taken with sentence length. Most sentences contain only one clause, though compound sentences are used occasionally with the clauses joined by the conjunctions 'and', 'but', and 'or'. The use of these compound sentences gives the text balance and rhythm. The use of Past Simple and Past Continuous Tenses is permitted since these are the basic tenses used in narration and students must become familiar with these as they continue to extend and develop their reading ability (Milne, 1989).

As we can see, it's easy to see the level of grammar and vocabulary in these books, and thus they are helpful in having learners to be exposed to the appropriate level of reading, not "*i + 1*" level.

### **Extensive Reading Group: ERG**

In the ERG, we began with reading materials at the "*i + 1* level" in accordance with Krashen's advice. But it was almost impossible to know what that "*i + 1* level" was, so I told them to start reading from level 4 readers up. The level four readers containing about 1700 words are for an intermediate level. The students in ERG read not only in class but also at home as assignments. Free reading is supposed to be a reading activity without using a dictionary. This is confirmed by Waring in his presentation in 2003. He is an avid supporter and researcher of extensive reading programs.

When students become less dictionary-dependent, reading faster becomes more automatic; in turn, readers should be able to use their cognitive skills to better comprehend what they read. They can then spend

more time analyzing and synthesizing the content of the reading, rather than focusing solely on moving through the passage one word at a time. Part of the joy of reading is being able to pick up a book and comprehend it, without having to struggle through the task of reading (<http://www1.harenet.ne.jp/waring/presentations/waringr%20featured%20speaker.rtf>).

Although “free reading” is supposed to be a reading activity without a dictionary, the students in ERG were allowed to consult a dictionary whenever they felt it was necessary. But because it delayed the reading speed, they did without most of the time.

In order to make sure the reading was actually done, the students were asked to turn in the outline of the story they read. Sometimes I gave them short quizzes to see if they had actually read the story. I made sure the stories were the ones I had read before so that I would know the outlines they wrote. Sometimes the comprehension check tests were included in the books, but other times I made them myself. Here are some comprehension check exercises after reading *Gladiator* (Keen, 2000. Pearson Education Limited). The story was adapted from the novel by Dewey Gram based on a screenplay by David Franzoni and John Logan and William Nicholson. The book is an abbreviated version of the original with vocabulary control and sentence structure control.

#### **Answer these questions**

1. Why does Commodus think his father is really sick?
2. What does Maximus do to show that he is ready for battle?
3. Why do you think the Roman army wins the battle?
4. How does Commodus feel about Maximus?
5. What does Marcus want Maximus to become and why?

#### **Are these sentences true or false? Correct the false ones.**

1. Quintus is woken in the middle of the night by Maximus.
2. Maximus realizes that Marcus has been killed by Commodus.
3. Quintus believes that the Emperor died of natural causes.



4. Comelius takes Maximus down into the trees to kill him.
5. Maximus is wounded with a cut to his neck.

**Who says these things? Who to? What are they talking about?**

1. "They're more expensive than we are"
2. "Some are good for fighting, some for dying. You need both."
3. "Tomorrow you can scream in seven languages."
4. "You go out into the arena as slaves. You come back—if you come back—as gladiators"

No explicit grammar instruction was given in ERG. They kept reading on their own during the summer holidays too.

They were given short listening quizzes before they began reading in class. I read a short humorous story aloud twice, first at a normal speed, the second time a little slower. They had the written text with some blanks. They were asked to fill in the blanks with the words they thought they heard. After everyone filled the blanks, I told them the correct words with which they were supposed to fill the blanks, and they made sure they got all the text in a written form. After that I gave them 10 true or false questions. I read the questions twice aloud. After everyone finished, I called on the students to give their answer either F or T. They didn't have to give the reason. After the true or false questions, I read some question sentences about the contents of the story. They wrote the answer in the text. I showed them the answers on the board and they either copied them or corrected where they made errors. All through the class, no grammar instruction was given

**Grammar Group: GG**

In the GG, students were given grammar exercise books, *Brush-up Exercises Based on Royal English grammar* (Miyagawa, 2000) and *Welcome to College English* (Oshima. Etal, 1999). The former book covers all the grammar points with a lot of exercises. The latter has some grammar explanation and a short essay, about 200 words, in each unit. These essays correspond to the contents of grammar taught in the unit. No extensive reading assignment was given. Instead they had grammar exercises to

do at home and we compared the results and discussed them in class. Some of the grammar points they had trouble with were passive and active voices.

I read a short story aloud for their listening comprehension in the first class. It was a humor story with a punch line. The punch line read, "I've beaten him (the dog) four out of the last five games." I asked some students who won, *the author* or *the dog*. Some students said *the dog* won and others said *the author* won and still others were not sure. I've grown used to their confusion. It's the voice that confuses them. They tend to think the sentence is passive when they see a past participle verb form, in this case, *beaten* in the sentence. Some students who answered *the dog* won thought the sentence was passive, because of *beaten*. But the sentence is not passive, although the tense is present perfect. In order to solve the problem, I gave them some grammar exercises in which they were supposed to change the voice of the sentences. Some of the exercises they did were:

1. The new museum will be built by next year.
2. Everyone knows this song.
3. French is spoken in Quebec, Canada.
4. We painted the kennel white.
5. They were amused with his jokes.
6. Who did you invite to your birthday party?

Listening comprehension was done about half way into the 90-minute class to prevent boredom. I read a humorous story aloud twice and they listened. These are the same listening quizzes used in the ERG and the GRG. They filled in the blanks and I gave them the correct answers. I made sure that they understood the contents by calling on some students to tell me what the particular sentences meant. If they didn't know the sentence construction I showed them. But most of the time they all knew the sentence construction because they were not complex. However there were times when they couldn't fill in the blanks with a correct word. What they thought they heard turned out to be something different. For example, at one time I read, "Have you read the (latest) best seller?". They were supposed to fill in the blanks.

Some students filled the blanks with *ate*. Another time, what I read was "Sure, that's (what) friends are for." But some students filled in the blank with *of* instead of *what*.

<sup>1</sup>

For this GG class, I took advantage of every chance I got to teach the grammar points with exercises and compositions.

### Grammar Reading Group: GRG

For this class, I used both grammar and reading. The students in GRG class were given *English Grammar and Structure* (Iwatani, 1999) for their grammar exercises and *Surprises and Discoveries about Japan* (Miyano, 2000) for their reading. This reading material contains some vocabulary that doesn't appear in easy readers such as levels 1, *The Big Bag Mistake* (Escott, 2002) and 2, *New York Café* (Dean, 2000). They were told to look up any new word for the next class. In this way they built their vocabulary.

One important difference between the ERG and the GRG is that the GRG students did not follow "i + 1 level" method. <sup>2</sup>

Rather, they are ready at "level 1" as best as I can determine it.

The GRG students were motivated differently from the ERG students. What I recommended in the GRG was to read something slightly lower than the present skill of reading, that is, "i-1 level". In this way, students can not only read a lot but also read with ease and confidence. They seldom need to consult dictionaries picking up speed as they read more and more. But when they come across unknown grammar or expressions, they should make it clear either by looking it up in the dictionary or consulting a grammar book or asking a teacher. After their question is answered, they can go on reading more. So my instruction for GRG was to start reading from the easy stories, level 1 (200 words) up but not to go higher than the intermediate level.

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<sup>1</sup>Both cases show that you can't hear what you don't know. To make sure of my assumption, I asked some of them if they knew *latest* and phrase *That's what friends are for*. They don't know. This minor incident reconfirmed my long time experience with listening comprehension. We understand only what we already know.

<sup>2</sup>35 years of my experience and close observation tell me that struggling with the reading materials higher than your present skill doesn't produce as good a result as Krashen says. Reading in this manner just doesn't flow and the readers get stuck on every unknown word and phrase making everything dim. At the end of the story the reader is not sure who did what and why. They may ambiguously see the outline but when asked some details or the punch line, they often don't know.

The evaluation for their reading was done in the same way as in ERG but to a lesser extent. Grammar points were taught but not as deeply as in GG. Listening comprehension was done almost in the same manner but the less grammar explanation was given. The students were not asked to tell the reason for true or false questions. So, they could very well have guessed their choice when they were not sure.

### 6.3 Grammar tests given to ERG, GG, and GRG and the results

Before every first class in April, the 120 subjects for this study were given the error-hunting test. It is a test with 35 grammatically incorrect sentences. The whole test is in the appendix and some of the test materials are analyzed in detail in Chapters 4 and 5. So in this section, only the results are given in chart 1. The subjects were given 30 minutes to find the errors and correct them. Only the correctly corrected errors were counted. No feedback was given to any of them after the first test in April. After 6 months, the same error hunting tests were again given to the same students. Because the three classes, ERG, GG, and GRG received their lessons in different ways for the last six months (two months of summer vacation excluded), different results were expected. The test results of ERG is in chart 1 below.

ERG's score on Test 1 Chart 1

The numbers on the left are the scores in April and the ones on the right are the scores in November.

**Chart 1**

Subjects	April score	November score
1	13	13
2	15	14
3	14	14
4	13	15
5	14	15
6	8	9
7	18	19

Subjects	April score	November score
8	13	14
9	16	14
10	16	15
11	15	14
12	12	13
13	12	11
14	13	11
15	13	12
16	16	15
17	17	15
18	15	14
19	14	15
20	13	14
21	15	14
22	13	13
23	13	13
24	14	14
25	17	15
26	18	17
27	21	21
28	22	22
29	19	21
30	20	21
31	17	19
32	15	14
33	23	22
34	24	22
35	24	25
36	15	14
37	28	29
38	18	19

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Subjects	April score	November score
39	15	14
40	13	12
average	16.1	15.925
%	46%	45.5%

Chart 1 shows that ERG students didn't improve at all during the six months. They read extensively as Krashen advised—2000 pages. Krashen insists that grammar is not a big concern.

In support of the Comprehension Hypothesis are many studies showing that foreign language classes that contain more “comprehensible input” produce superior results when compared to traditional classes: Comprehensible input students do far better on tests of communication and at least as well on grammar tests. Also in support are studies showing that more reading in the second language, specifically more voluntary reading, results in improvement in reading, grammar and vocabulary (Krashen, 1998).

Krashen states “In support of the Comprehension Hypothesis are many studies...”, but he doesn't cite any. In spite of the above statement, chart 1 did not show any improvement in ERG students' grammar, even though, as we will see, the other groups did improve. What can be gleaned from this data is that although ERG students could “feel” something was wrong with a sentence, they couldn't specify the error. This is usually what happens with ERG students. When they read, their lack of understanding is hard to detect, but when it comes to writing and a strict test for true comprehension, the weakness is revealed.

#### GG's scores on Test 1

Next come the results of GG on this test. Chart 2 shows the results of the same grammar test given to the GG group. The GG group received a lot of grammar instruction but not much reading. The beginning score average was 16 (45.71%) and

the average score in November was close to 18 (51.21%). This group showed about a 2 points gain in Test 1. It may not look dramatic, but considering the advanced level of the test, it can be judged as a significant gain. We can only judge that the improvement comes from the grammar instruction given in class. We also will see how GRG did in the same test.

There was also an expected outcome. Of the 40 students in GG, there were 10 students who showed gain of four or more in the November test. 25 % of the students showed a significant improvement compared with the scores of the ERG students. This is a good result. Even the high scorers, who could be assumed to be "smart", didn't show any improvement in the ERG.

**Chart 2 GG**

Subjects	April scores	November scores
1	14	16
2	12	16
3	15	17
4	12	17
5	15	19
6	7	6
7	17	18
8	14	18
9	15	17
10	17	16
11	13	15
12	11	11
13	12	15
14	14	15
15	12	15
16	16	13
17	17	18
18	16	17
19	13	14

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Subjects	April scores	November scores
20	13	15
21	15	15
22	13	13
23	13	15
24	13	17
25	17	17
26	18	15
27	21	29
28	22	25
29	18	22
30	21	25
31	17	19
32	16	18
33	23	22
34	24	26
35	25	27
36	15	21
37	27	29
38	17	21
39	16	18
40	14	15
average	16	17.9
%	45.71	51.21

GRG 's scores on Test 1

The Grammar Reading Group, who received both grammar instruction and some extensive reading, scored 15.775 (45.07%) in April. The score was about the same as the other two groups, GG and ERG.. However, their score in November was 20 (55.64%). This can be called remarkable. It is higher than the average score of



GG. It may be too early to come to a definitive conclusion, but grammar teaching and adequate amount of easy reading together certainly look effective in improving language skills.

**Chart 3 GRG scores**

Subjects	April scores	November scores
1	14	18
2	13	18
3	14	17
4	14	19
5	12	17
6	7	11
7	9	18
8	14	17
9	18	21
10	14	21
11	13	15
12	11	14
13	12	15
14	14	15
15	13	14
16	17	18
17	17	15
18	16	15
19	13	14
20	13	15
21	15	18
22	13	18
23	12	17
24	13	18
25	17	18
26	18	19

6.3. GRAMMAR TESTS GIVEN TO ERG, GG, AND GRG AND THE RESULTS 175

Subjects	April scores	November scores
27	20	25
28	22	27
29	19	27
30	21	26
31	18	25
32	17	26
33	22	26
34	23	26
35	27	27
36	16	22
37	22	25
38	18	25
39	17	23
40	13	14
	15.77	19.47
	45.07%	55.64%

Krashen's "*i + 1 level*" reading often ends up in a lot of cursory reading, skimming through the materials fast without grasping what's in the contents. Students say they read and understood the story, but when given the comprehension check afterwards, they often reveal their lack of understanding. When they see familiar words, phrases, and idiomatic expressions, the meanings run through their mind and they think they understand, but often similar looking sentences don't mean the same. *I've seen the police by the police station* and *I've been seen by the police* are completely different, but a cursory, hurried reading often results in misunderstanding. *I saw some chicken on the kitchen table* and *I saw some chickens on the kitchen table* give completely different pictures, but again a fast reading often leads to misunderstanding.

Another source of misunderstanding and not grasping the contents of the materials is the lack of skills in identifying pronouns, whether they are personal pronouns or impersonal pronouns. The Japanese language doesn't use pronouns as often as the

English language does. As a result, Japanese EFL students are weak in identifying who *he* is in the story and who or what *they* is in the context. This leads the students to serious confusion. Having the students identify the pronoun is also a favorite test question on the college entrance examinations. Here is an example from Mie University in 2000.

"I'm sad, Mommy," my four-and-half-year-old daughter said, as she climbed up on the sofa and sat next to my swollen belly. "I wish I had grown in your tummy." ...Ever since my husband and I had adopted Lizzie as a newborn, we were determined to present her with a positive story about her beginnings....

...After my son was born, I thought Lizzie would have more questions about adoption. But none came for a year and a half. I was caught off-guard on one cool autumn day when she greeted me at the school gate with a forlorn look on her face. "What's the matter?" I asked as we walked down the street hand in hand. "I told my best friend that I was adopted, and she didn't believe me," she wailed. "She said that you and I looked just like each other and I couldn't be adopted!"

**Question 4.**

Translate the underlined sentence into Japanese, making clear who *she* and *you* are (*University Entrance Preparation series*. 2002, Kyouikusha).

Identifying pronouns in the story is such a common exam question that careful reading is absolutely essential in passing the college entrance examinations.

## 6.4 Reading test

### 6.4.1 How the reading test was conducted

In order to see the different outcomes for the 3 groups more thoroughly, reading, composition, translation, dictation, and listening tests were given at the end of the eight months. Here are the contents and results of the reading tests. The same tests were given to ERG, GG, and GRG.

We start with the reading test given to the three classes. Students read a story and answered true or false questions. Sixteen true/false questions were valued. Only the correct ones were counted.

Besides it being new to the students, there is another reason why this particular reading material was chosen for this experiment. According to the error finding test given to all the 120 subjects in April, the students hadn't yet internalized and acquired the causative *have/make* usage. They didn't do well in passive-active voice questions, either. In the following reading material, *The History of English*, a number of passive-active constructions and causative verbs appear. This material thus offers us a good opportunity to see whether or not a mere exposure to a lot of "i+1 level" reading helps students pick up and learn these sentence constructions.

Another reason is that in the second sentence of the following material, *like* as an adjective appears as in *The language which was spoken there was not like English at all*. From my experience, one of the common errors students make is that, when they see *like*, they think it a verb. The second true or false question says *The people in Roman Britain did not like English at all*, which is false. We will see how students responded to this question in the results of the reading test.

### Reading test

#### The History of English.

Thousands of years ago England was not called England. The language which was spoken there was not like English at all.

More than 2000 years ago—in 55 B.C.—the famous Roman general, Julius Caesar, invaded the island and called it Britain. However, Caesar and his Romans did not remain there long. Then one hundred years later, another Roman army invaded Britain, and this time the Romans remained for almost 400 years. During those long years they built strong towns and wonderful roads. As the Romans spoke Latin, this language had a great influence on the people in the towns in the southeast of Britain. Finally, however, as Rome became weaker and weaker, the Romans had to leave Britain.

Next, two strong tribes from central Europe, the Angles and the Saxons, began to invade the island. The people of Britain were not able to protect themselves against these strong tribes. Between 400 and 500 A.D. the Angles and the Saxons kept on advancing as far as modern Scotland

in the north and as far as modern Wales in the west. They made almost the whole country their own and so it began to be called "Angleland." "England" is only another form of the word "Angleland." The people of Britain made the language of the Angles their own. In other words, they began to speak "English".

At the end of the eighth century England was invaded again, this time from the north. The Danes from Denmark and the Vikings from Scandinavia invaded England and advanced farther and farther to the south. The Danes remained in one part of England, however, and in this way many Danish words, such as *sky*, *sister*, and *window*, came into the English language.

Finally, King Alfred stopped their advance. He drove them out of southern England. Then, in order to have peace all over the land, he made many wise laws and chose many wise judges. In order to help young people to learn, he invited many teachers from abroad, had many schools built, and had the history of England written by scholars.

In the meantime the Angles and the Saxons had become Christian. As Latin was the language which was used in church, many new Latin words came into English.

In the second half of the 11th century England was invaded for the last time. In 1066 William of Normandy invaded the island with a powerful army and made the country his own. French was the language of the Normans, and so French became the language of the cities for 200 years. During that time only the farmers and the people in the country continued to speak English. In this way both the grammar and the words changed very much (Flynn, 1996).

Here is the test administered to the three groups in November.

True or False

1. The language spoken before the Romans came was not at all like Modern English.
2. The people in Roman Britain did not like English at all.

3. The Romans stayed in Britain for well over 400 years.
4. The Roman army had left Britain before they became weak.
5. The Angles and the Saxons invaded Britain.
6. The people of Roman Britain created the English language.
7. People in Britain developed their own language to protect themselves.
8. At the end of the 8th century, Britain invaded a northern country.
9. Danish and Scandinavians advanced into Britain.
10. Numerous Danish words came into the English language.
11. King Alfred stopped the advance of the Danes and the Scandinavians.
12. King Alfred had written a new history of England with the help of scholars.
13. King Alfred was invited abroad out of Southern England
14. King Alfred had many schools built to help young people learn.
15. During a long history, English has changed significantly both in grammar and vocabulary.
16. French became the language of English country people for about 200 years.

#### 6.4.2 Reading test results

The test results of the ERG, the GG and the GRG are in chart 4.

**Chart 4**

Subjects	ERG	GG	GRG
1	8	11	12
2	8	11	12
3	10	10	12
4	9	10	11
5	9	10	11

Subjects	ERG	GG	GRG
6	5	8	9
7	7	10	10
8	10	9	12
9	9	13	14
10	11	13	13
11	10	12	12
12	9	12	11
13	8	11	13
14	9	11	12
15	8	11	12
16	10	12	12
17	9	13	13
18	9	11	13
19	8	9	11
20	10	9	11
21	9	12	12
22	8	11	11
23	9	11	11
24	9	11	13
25	10	10	12
26	11	11	12
27	12	12	15
28	11	15	15
29	11	12	14
30	12	14	15
31	11	11	15
32	9	11	14
33	10	15	16
34	12	16	16
35	11	16	14
36	8	9	14

Subjects	ERG	GG	GRG
37	12	15	13
38	9	11	13
39	9	11	12
40	8	10	12
average	9.425	11.5	12.625
%	58.9%	71.8%	78.9%

The numbers seen in the chart 4 are the numbers of correct answers given by each subject. As we can see, the ERG's correct answer percentage is 58.9, while the GG scored 71.8 %. The GRG's highest score of 78.9% shows that the mixture of grammar instruction and an extensive easy reading yields better results than Krashen's level  $i + 1$ , "free reading" without grammar. The fact that the GG's score was lower than the GRG's was that, possibly, they needed more time to score better, because it probably took longer for the GG students to read. Yet, the GRG read faster with more accuracy than the ERG, because the GRG had some grammar instructions.

The questions the students couldn't answer correctly were # 6.8.and #13. Let's look at them again here to discuss in detail.

6. The people of Roman Britain created the English language.

Most of the ERG students identified this question as true. Why? Because in the text, the following sentence (1) appears.

(1) The people of Britain made the language of the Angles their own.

Because of the causative verb *made* the students in the ERG equated it with *to produce*, thus, they thought *The people of Britain* made the language or created the language. Many of the ERG students didn't catch the sentence pattern of subject+verb+object+complement, but a lot more in the GG and the GRG did. This is one of the questions that made a bigger difference in the scores.

Another question they didn't give a correct answer to was #8



8. At the end of the 8th century, Britain invaded a northern country.

The following sentence #(2) was in a passive voice, but many students failed to see the be+past participle pattern.

*(2) At the end of the eighth century England was invaded again, this time from the north*

Passive/active voices are Japanese students' weak points. The next question #13 shows more of the same evidence. The question sentence is in the passive but the sentence #(3) from which the students derived the hint is in an active voice.

13. King Alfred was invited abroad out of Southern England

*(3)...he invited many teachers from abroad...*

## 6.5 Listening test

A listening test was given to all the three classes. In order to obtain uniform conditions, a taped voice was used. The tape was played twice in each class. The students were supposed to fill the blanks and answer the questions in written form. True/false question sentences are not written in the text. These questions come from the tape and the students were supposed to mark whether the sentence was true or false regarding the story.

In usual lessons the students were only asked to mark either an F or a T to show whether the sentence they heard was true or false. But the students could always guess the answer without understanding what the sentence meant. So, in order to see how they heard the sentence coming from the tape recorder, they were told to write down what they thought they heard. The focus here is the questions # 7 and #8 in the true/false section; *Mike's question was answered. The instructor told him to wait until they came back*

The content of the short story, questions, and true/false section are as follows:

**THE SAME BOTH WAYS**

Mike was in the army. He was ( studying ) to be a paratrooper. After his two ( weeks ) of training in ground school, it was time to make his ( first ) jump.

As you know, each ( person ) carries two chutes. One is the regular one ( and ) ( the ) other is for emergencies. If the one doesn't open, the other ( must ) be used.

Just before they got ( into ) the airplane, the instructor said, " There's ( nothing ) to worry about. If the chute doesn't open, ( use ) your emergency chute."

Everybody seemed ( relaxed ) except Mike, so the instructor asked, " Are there any questions?"

Mike held up his hand. The instructor ( called ) ( on ) him, and Mike said, "What happens ( if ) ( the ) emergency chute doesn't open?"

"Save that question for ( when ) you get back," said the instructor. "You'll ( find ) it's not important."

"How's that?" ( asked ) Mike. "Because if your chute ( opens ), you won't ask it again, and if it doesn't open, you ( won't ) ask it then either."

**TRUE OR FALSE**

1. He had two weeks of ground school.
2. Each person carries two parachutes.
3. Mike said there was nothing to worry about.
4. The instructor wasn't worried.
5. Only Mike was relaxed.
6. Nobody had any questions.
7. The instructor told him to wait until they came back.
8. Mike's question was answered.
9. The instructor said it wasn't important.

10. If it doesn't open, he'll ask the question again.

The sentences several students thought they heard varied in the following way:

Students' sentences for #7

What was actually read was "The instructor told him to wait until they came back" but the students thought they heard as follows.

1. The instructor told him to way until
2. The instructor talked him to wait until I've in back.
3. The instructor told him to way making about.
4. The instructor told him to waiting back.
5. The instructor told him to way until when came back.
6. The instructor told to him the way to him back.
7. The instructor tall him talked until get his back.
8. The instructor told him to way until waiting back.

Students' sentence for # 8

The sentence read was "Mike's question was answered" but some students thought they heard as follows.

1. Mike's questions was answers.
2. Mike question was answer.
3. Mike's question was answer.
4. Mike's question has no answer.
5. Mike has answer/answer.
6. Mike's question was anger.

7. Mike's question is answer.
8. Mike's question answer.
9. Mike's question the answer.

Some students wrote correct sentences, but most of them wrote one of the above. The sentences the students wrote tell us a lot. #6 for question 7 has a different meaning.

As to the question #8, very few students heard it as a passive sentence. Few wrote it correctly making *answer* the past perfect form *answered*. As mentioned many times in this dissertation, the passive/active notion is hard for Japanese EFL students. But whether the sentence is in the passive or active makes a big difference. If the student cannot process the sentence she heard correctly, she can't decide whether it's true or false. This small experiment showed that quite a few students didn't hear the sentences correctly. What they thought they heard often turned out to be not what was spoken.

In the ERG, out of 40 students none got both of the answers right. Only 5 students wrote correct sentences, using a passive voice, for #8, and only 3 students wrote down the correct sentence for #7.

In the GG, however, out of 40 students, 15 wrote both sentences correctly using a passive voice for # 8. 16 got one of them right.

In the GRG, out of 40 students, 10 wrote both sentences correctly and 14 got one of them right.

This small data collection shows those who know grammar can hear correctly. Those who don't know grammar write grammatically impossible sentences without hesitation. It is clear that many Japanese EFL students cannot hear the last T sound in *wait* and a D sound in *answered*.<sup>3</sup> They are inaudible. Then how can we understand what we can't hear? That's where grammar comes in. Those who know grammar still write correct sentences, because they know *Mike's question was*

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<sup>3</sup>Epenthesis is one of the most common pronunciation errors committed by Japanese learners of English as a foreign language. Inserting vowels within consonants clusters or after syllable-final consonants is particularly frequent. Epenthesis multiates the syllable and stress structure of English, and epenthetic speech is incomprehensible to native speakers of English even after considerable exposure of Japanese-accented speech. Japanese learners also find it difficult to *hear* the unspoken consonant at the end of English words.

*answers* is grammatically unacceptable. They know that *answer* should be *answered* after *was*.

## 6.6 Translation test 1

Before we discuss translation and its relation with grammar, let's recall a comment by Krashen.

We acquire language when we understand what people tell us and what we read. There is no need for deliberate memorization; rather, firm knowledge of grammatical rules (a feel for correctness) and a large vocabulary gradually emerge as language acquirers get more "comprehensible input," aural or written language that is understood (Krashen, 1983).

My experiences tell me "a feel for correctness" is a dangerous thing, when it comes to using a foreign language. Having been both a life-long learner and a long-time instructor of English, I can safely say that "a feel for correctness" does not correspond to firm knowledge of grammatical rules. Firm knowledge of grammatical rules often contradicts "a feel for correctness".

With respect to Krashen's claim, about which I expressed doubts in the introduction to this chapter, I conducted a small experiment in order to see if this "feel for correctness" is a good thing in discerning similar looking sentences, a small experiment was done. The students in the ERG, the GG and the GRG were given the following sentences to see the differences. In the following sentences, if *Jane* paid the money or not is crucial. Students were asked to tell if *Jane* paid the money or *someone else* gave the money to *Jane* in each sentence. Only the correct understanding was given a point. The results are shown in chart 6.

1. Jane's got to pay for the car.
2. Jane got paid for the car.
3. Jane has paid for the car.
4. Jane's been paid for the car.
5. Jane paid for the car.
6. Jane is paid for the car.
7. Jane's got pay for the car.

### 6.6.1 Translation test results

The chart 6 below shows how well the students in each group could tell the differences between similar looking yet semantically very different sentences. A lot of students with little grammar instruction couldn't tell whether the 's after *Jane* is an abbreviation of *is* or *has*. A good grasp of grammar will instantly tell the students which is which, but it looks difficult for those with poorer grammar. Many couldn't tell the difference between 1 and 2. In 1, *Jane* either paid or is going to pay the money. *Jane* is the one that pays. In 2, *Jane* received the money. Someone else gave the money to *Jane*.

Points were given according to the correctness of their translation, 7 being the highest.

**Chart 6**

Subjects	ERG	GG	GRG
1	3	5	4
2	5	6	4
3	2	6	5
4	3	5	5
5	4	6	4
6	3	7	5
7	4	7	4
8	4	5	3
9	3	4	4
10	3	4	5
11	2	5	6
12	4	4	6
13	4	5	4
14	3	6	4
15	3	7	5
16	2	7	5
17	2	7	3
18	3	5	3

Subjects	ERG	GG	GRG
19	4	6	4
20	3	4	3
21	4	4	4
22	2	5	3
23	2	6	3
24	4	5	4
25	3	5	4
26	3	4	6
27	4	4	5
28	2	7	5
29	2	5	4
30	3	5	5
31	4	7	4
32	5	7	6
33	3	6	3
34	5	4	4
35	3	4	7
36	4	5	7
37	5	4	5
38	2	4	5
39	5	5	6
40	3	5	5
average	3.313	5.325	4.545
%	47.1%	75.7%	64.6%

Chart 6 gives evidence that many more GG students than the ERG students were able to tell whether *Jane* received *the money* or *she* paid *the money*. While not as remarkable as the GG, also the GRG produced a good result.

### 6.6.2 Translation test 2

To verify in another way whether grammar correlates with translation skills, the students were given four different kinds of sentences. The following are the sentences given to the students to translate.

- (1) Sherlock Holmes was a famous private detective whose amazing ability is known to everyone.
- (2) When he was paid, the driver said,
- (3) He always kept his name a secret.
- (4) Your clothes, and especially your hat and black umbrella, tell me that you are an Englishman.

These sentences were set in the following context.

Sherlock Holmes was a famous private detective whose amazing ability is known to everyone. He was able to tell a person's whole history by looking at him or her.

By noticing a man's sunburnt neck and his polished shoes, he could say, "I see, sir, that you have served in India and are now a retired officer." By noticing a smiling lady's frightened eyes, he could tell her, "You are smiling, madam, but you are deeply worried, May I help you?" Those exciting stories about that famous detective were written by an Englishman whose name was Sir Arthur Conan Doyle.

One day Sir Arthur was riding in a taxi from the station in Paris.

He was on his way to a hotel. When he arrived at the hotel, he got out of the taxi and paid the driver. When he was paid, the driver said, "Thank you very much, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle." Sir Arthur was surprised and asked, "How do you know me? I have not told you my name"

"It was quite simple," the smiling driver said.

"I read in yesterday's newspaper that you were in the south of France. Your train has just come from the south of France. I noticed, too, that your hair has been cut by a barber in the south of France. Your clothes,



and especially your hat and black umbrella, tell me that you are an Englishman. So I was able to tell that you are the writer of those exciting detective stories." "You yourself are an amazing detective," said Sir Arthur. "Were you really able to know me with so few hints?"

"Of course," replied the taxi driver, "I saw your name on your suitcase. That was also a good hint." (Flynn, 1996)

Sentence (1) is to see if the students know how the relative word *whose* behaves in the sentence; which noun it modifies. Another point of translation is a passive voice phrase *is known to*.

Sentence (2) has two subjects. They are the same person. This sentence is given in the context, so the students with a good grasp of the story should recognize who *he* is. *He* is the driver himself. The point is again a passive voice. If the students are not aware of a passive construction, they identify this pronoun *he* as the author. Then the situation would be very different.

Sentence (3) is to see if they can understand the subject+verb+object+complement construction in the sentence.

Sentence (4) is tricky for those with shaky grammar. It may be hard for them to find the subject. To them, the sentence might look like two separate sentences or a main clause and a subordinate clause, that is, they take *tell* as an imperative *tell*. The subject of the sentence is Your clothes, and especially your hat and black umbrella. *Tell* is the main verb and the whole *that* clause is the object of the sentence. Many fail to grasp this construction. Now we will see which class did best. The top score is of course 4.

### Chart 7 Translation 2

Subject	ERG	GG	GRG
1	2	3	3
2	2	3	3
3	2	3	3
4	2	3	3
5	2	3	4
6	1	2	4

Subject	ERG	GG	GRG
7	2	3	3
8	2	3	3
9	2	4	3
10	2	4	3
11	2	4	4
12	1	3	3
13	1	3	3
14	2	3	3
15	2	3	3
16	2	4	3
17	2	4	4
18	1	4	4
19	1	3	4
20	2	3	3
21	2	4	3
22	2	3	3
23	2	3	3
24	2	3	4
25	2	4	4
26	3	4	4
27	3	4	4
28	3	4	4
29	3	4	3
30	3	4	3
31	2	4	3
32	2	4	3
33	3	4	4
34	3	4	3
35	3	4	4
36	2	3	4
37	3	4	4

Subject	ERG	GG	GRG
38	3	3	3
39	3	3	3
40	2	3	3
average	2.15	3.45	3.37
%	53.75	86.25	84.37

Chart 7 testifies again that the GG showed the finest performance in translation. Very few of the ERG students got the sentences (2) and (4) right.

## 6.7 Composition test

### 6.7.1 How the composition test was conducted

English compositions can't be done without knowing grammar rules. But some don't think so.

Language acquisition does not require extensive use of conscious grammatical rules, and does not require tedious drill (Krashen, 2002).

Although Krashen has repeatedly denied an extensive use of grammar, "tedious drills" do produce positive results. Recall the word-ordering test in the Eiken test in chapter 4. The word ordering section of the test was not a mere memorization nor an instinct nor a fluke. It was strictly grammar. The Eiken did not ask the test-takers to write the whole sentences due to the difficulty of evaluating a huge number of applicants' handwritings. Test-takers only had to reorder the given phrases to continue the sentence with a word or two given in advance. Let's take a look again at one of them.

(24) Kenji enjoys his schoolwork so much that all (                    ).

1 say            2 study            3 his friends            4 to            5 he lives

There are two verbs *study* and *say*. From the information we get from the first part of the sentence *Kenji enjoys his schoolwork so much that*, we can see that Kenji

likes to study, in other words he lives to study. The subject of the *that*-clause has to be *all the students* because there is no other candidate. *Study* could be a subject but along with *to*, but the structure wouldn't be correct with *all* preceding the clause. The verb to follow the subject *all his friends* is the one that's left *say*. Technically, one could continue with *all his friends study to say he lives*, but what this means doesn't make sense or collocate with the first part of the sentence, *Kenji enjoys his schoolwork so much*. There is one more possible order. ...*all say he lives to study his friends*.... This, although grammatically acceptable, does not make sense either.

Composition indeed needs grammar, sentence-ordering knowledge. In a final test, five Japanese sentences were given to the three classes, ERG, GG and GRG. The sentences they were asked to translate into English were the following five sentences:

1. Boku wa imouto ga doko ni sunde iru noka shiranai.
2. Choushoku ni nanika tsumetaimono ga hoshikatta.
3. Sohu ga shinde junen tatsu.
4. Chichi wa senshu kuruma wo nusumareta.
5. Nagoya niwa sannen mae ni itta kotoga aru.

English translations
----------------------

1. I don't know where my sister lives. / I have no idea where my sister lives.
2. I wanted something cold for breakfast. / I wanted to have something cold for breakfast.
3. Grandfather has been dead for ten years. /It is ten years since my grandfather died. /Ten years have passed since my grandfather died.
4. My father had his car stolen last week. / My father's car was stolen last week.
5. I went to Nagoya three years ago.

There are eight grammar points focused on in these five sentences. For #1, there are two points; verb-subject inversion in the subordinate clause and a third singular S in *lives*.

For the second sentence, the points are how to use an infinitive correctly and how to put the phrase *something cold to drink* in a correct order. Some students put an unnecessary infinitive *to* after *want* when a verb doesn't follow. They write *I wanted to cold something for breakfast*.

For the third sentence, the grammar point is the use of *die* and *dead*. Some of the common errors are; *My grandfather has been died three years*. *My grandfather has dead for three years ago*. *My grandfather has been died three years*.

For the fourth sentence, it is crucial that the sentence is in passive. A large number of students write *My father was stolen...as if Father had been kidnapped*.

For the last sentence, students have to be careful not to use a present perfect tense because there is a phrase *three years ago* clearly indicating the event that took place in the past. Many yet write, *I have been to Nagoya three years ago*.

We will see how the three classes did in this composition test. The points are given for every correct sentence, 8 being the highest, because there are eight grammar points.

### 6.7.2 Composition test results

Chart 8 Composition test results

Subject	ERG	GG	GRG
1	2	5	4
2	2	5	5
3	3	7	5
4	3	6	6
5	2	7	4
6	3	4	5
7	4	4	5
8	2	4	4
9	2	7	4
10	2	6	3
11	4	7	3
12	3	7	4
13	2	7	6

14	2	7	5
15	3	7	3
16	3	6	3
17	3	5	4
18	3	5	5
19	4	5	3
20	4	5	6
21	4	5	4
22	4	5	6
23	3	5	5
24	3	5	5
25	3	5	3
26	4	4	3
27	2	4	3
28	4	5	4
29	4	7	4
30	3	7	5
31	3	8	5
32	4	8	5
33	3	8	6
34	3	8	6
35	4	7	6
36	3	7	5
37	4	7	4
38	2	7	7
39	3	6	4
40	3	7	4
average	3.05	6.025	4.52
%	38.1%	75.3%	56.5%

The chart 8 shows grammar is an absolute must in composition. It is more than obvious that GG students who received an extensive grammar instruction with plenty of exercise in and out of class fared remarkably better than the other two classes. That the ERG did so poorly in this test shows that Krashen's free reading doesn't help students produce meaningful sentence in writing, much less speaking. In EFL what you can't compose in writing you can't speak. It's all a matter of quick composition in mind. Decide what you want to say, make a sentence in you head, and say it. This process, although slow at the beginning, will get faster as we practice, supported by a firm grasp of grammar. What else is clearer than this data? No grammar, no meaningful sentences.

## 6.8 Conclusion: Grammar is inextricably linked to language skills

Now the data in this chapter tells us that it is safe to come to the conclusion that explicit and extensive grammar instruction is absolutely necessary for Japanese EFL students . The more reading, the better, but here also only the appropriate level of reading works. The "*i + 1 level*", which Krashen recommends, means something slightly higher than the learners' present level of reading. However, this is totally misleading. It is much better that students read at or just below their level.

I have reported on teaching three classes using three different methods. One class was taught by the extensive reading (ERG), another was taught by grammar instruction (GG), and the other was taught by both grammar and reading (GRG). Each class was given the same tests before and after the eight month of experiment to analyze the improvement in their reading, listening, and writing.

In the ERG class, students were given "*i + 1 level*" reading materials according to Krashen's theory. In the GG class, not much reading was done but a lot of grammar exercises were given. The students in this class thoroughly learned sentence constructions and grammar rules in contexts. In the GRG class, some reading materials were given along with grammar instruction, but the level of reading was different from that given in ERG in that the level was the same as or a slightly lower than the students' current level, so that their flow in reading wasn't interrupted by frequent consultation with a dictionary.

The results of the tests for the 3 methods were given in charts, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7

and 8. They show that GRG did not fare well, which means a mere exposure to the “*i + 1 level*” reading did not help students acquire grammar, reading, writing, and listening skills as Krashen claims it would. Their scores were the lowest of the three groups in all the tests. Instead, the GG showed higher scores, which means grammar indeed makes a difference. The results of the GRG class’s reading test were better than those of the GG class. This can be attributed to the fact that the GRG students were exposed to a substantial amount of their level of reading so that they were able to read faster. The results convinces us that ample reading of the appropriate (slightly lower) level with grammar instruction produces the best results.

As my data shows, grammar instruction in class is a must tool for EFL students and Krashen’s “*i + 1 level*” is misleading.

I must add this important piece of information to conclude this section. In order to compensate for the lack of grammar instruction in the ERG, which I designed for the sake of this research, I turned the remaining classes in the latter half of the year into explicit grammar teaching. The students learned how important grammar was to understand the contents of reading materials correctly. They realized for the first time that grammar was of vital importance. They now know the difference between *Jane’s got to pay for the car* and *Jane got paid for the car*. The ERG group, which looked to be at a disadvantage, learned the most important lesson; grammar is essential.

### 6.8.1 Start with Simple Stories (SSS) method

What I did in Grammar and Reading Group (GRG) may sound too mundane, but actually there is something very similar to what I have been saying all along. It is called the Start with Simple Stories (SSS).

As the influence of Krashen’s input hypothesis grew, there appeared groups of people who supported similar ideas. A particular one is Start with Simple Stories (SSS) method. Their concept is quite simple. Start with simple stories and gradually go up the ladder to more complicated, longer stories. But what’s new about that? Hasn’t everyone been doing this all along for hundreds, if not thousands of years? So, what is the novelty about this SSS that the advocates claim to be something extraordinary? Furukawa, a strong supporter of the SSS describes it as follows (*The Daily Yomiuri*, July 29, 2005).



The Start with Simple Stories (SSS) is a unique, simple and fun language learning technique that has been enjoyed by groups of people of various language levels and social backgrounds. The SSS approach—an extensive reading method—may not be widely known, yet the number of motivated learners is steadily growing....

Furukawa says that an extensive reading method may not be widely known, but the method has been with us almost as long as the written language was developed. Only now with a new name, the SSS. He uses the term “extensive reading method” that sounds similar to Krashen’s “extensive reading”. This inevitably gives the readers an impression that SSS has been influenced by and is derived from Krashen’s idea. But the article goes on.

...The idea of the SSS (Start with Simple Stories) program was first introduced by Kunihide Sakai, an assistant professor at the University of Electro-Communications,<sup>4</sup> who suggested three fundamental principles of the method:...

So it was not Krashen’s idea but Sakai’s. Let’s see their three principles.

1. No dictionaries while reading.
2. Skip over difficult words.
3. Quit reading when the book is too content-heavy.

In other words, read easy books that can be read without dictionaries, don’t try to understand the content completely and change to another book if it seems more interesting to you.

This is the what we all do in our native language. We don’t stop and consult a dictionary when we read newspapers or magazines, even when we encounter the words we are not familiar with. We often stop reading the article when we decide it’s not to our interest or beyond our comprehension level. Children read children’s

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<sup>4</sup>The University of Electro-Communications is a national university in Tokyo. Sakai started the SSS in 1990.

magazines where most of the words and phrases are familiar to them. They don't read magazines for teenagers, because the articles are not of their interest and the vocabulary is unfamiliar.

From the quote above we can see that the SSS is different from Krashen's extensive reading in that the level of reading materials is *lower* than that of the reader's present reading skill. Recall that Krashen recommends "*i+1*" which means something slightly higher than the reader's present level of reading skill. (See section 5.1)

Comprehensible input is a hypothesis that learners will acquire language best when they are given the appropriate input. The input should be easy enough that they can understand it, but just beyond their level of competence.<sup>5</sup> If the learner is at level *i*, then input should come at level *i + 1*. Comprehensible input is an essential component in Stephen Krashen's Input Hypothesis, where regulated input<sup>6</sup> will lead to acquisition so long as the input is challenging, yet easy enough to understand without conscious effort at learning.<sup>7</sup>

Instead of giving learners level *i + 1* reading, the SSS encourage learners to read easy materials and suggests that they may give up the book any time if they find it too hard to go on reading or not interesting enough. This is good, but at the same time it means there is no feedback except the readers' self evaluation, if they ever do, and self satisfaction. No tests of any kind are given to see if they have understood the contents of the stories correctly. They recommend such reading materials as *Penguin Readers*, *Oxford Reading Tree*, *Macmillan Readers*, *Yohan Ladder Series* and the like. These graded readers have questions, true or false exercises, vocabulary check exercises, and other types of feedback helpers at the end of each book, but the SSS doesn't bother to use them effectively.

This is where I disagree with SSS. Voluntary reading can be done anywhere, anytime, and there must certainly be benefit. We can safely say that language learning does not bear fruit without a substantial amount of reading. But if we are talking

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<sup>5</sup>This is a total contradiction. When the learners understand what they are reading, the material is not beyond their comprehension. If the reading is beyond their comprehension how could they understand the contents?

<sup>6</sup>There is no regulated input in Input Hypothesis. No yardstick is given to measure the learner's comprehensive level. (See section 5.2)

<sup>7</sup>The challenging input and easy enough input do not coincide.

about "teaching and learning methods" there has to be some kind of "conscious" teaching and learning. SSS lacks this aspect. I know from experiences both as a teacher and a learner that too much interference obstructs the flow in reading and takes the joy out of it, but it is absolutely necessary to check if the reading is done properly, that is, whether the reader has followed the plot and sub-plot and got the message of the story correctly.

Furukawa goes on.

...It is often said that Japanese people have no problems reading English texts, but big problems speaking. However, that reading ability is mainly due to the time and trouble that they spend using dictionaries. Without the hassle of looking up lots of words in a dictionary, they can read much faster in a joyful way and at the same time their knowledge of English terms can be developed....

It is true that Japanese students are exposed to far less reading than they should be and there is nothing wrong with getting them to read as many easy books as possible. This promotes the flow in reading, helping learners to acquire the speed with which they read and process the contents. But when and where and how do they build vocabulary? Some everyday nouns and simple verbs are easy to pick up, but what about other verbs describing feelings, such as *need*, *want*, *like*, *love*, *hate*, *feel*, *think*, etc. And also what troubles me is the last passage of the above quote, "...at the same time their knowledge of English terms can be developed...." What does he mean by "English terms"? Does he mean parts of speech or grammar points? It is totally unclear, and we are unable to grasp what is developed through reading. If he meant grammar points, they wouldn't be developed unless taught consciously. The article goes on.

...Through this process, their language ability should soon be good enough to have better conversations in English. There is actually an SSS member in his 30s, who initially had a TOEIC score of about 500 but succeeded in being invited as a visiting researcher to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology after adopting SSS as his language learning tool....

This anecdote is actually absurd. The story above is something unlikely and even miraculous. A TOEIC score of 500 is roughly an equivalent to the Eiken 2<sup>nd</sup> grade, which means the test-taker *has cleared* the level of high school English. It sounds like this successful member of SSS has done nothing but a lot of easy reading to be invited as a visiting researcher to MIT. There is no doubt he must have done a lot of other things to bring his English and research abilities to that level. This last quote is not only false in itself but misleading to the readers. Furukawa must have had an intention of encouraging learners to read and improve their English ability, but the method would not yield good results unless appropriate feedback is given.

I would call this reading with feedback “*i – 1 level*” and encourage learners to follow it.



# Chapter 7 Why is communicative approach popular?

## 7.1 Native speaker prefers Communicative approach

This dissertation has constantly recalled in the previous chapters that there is less grammar instruction in Japan now than there used to be, especially in public schools. MEXT approved textbooks' contents are mostly communicative method materials, that is, dialogues without grammar instructions. Here is some evidence in the following chart 1. The percentage of communicative method materials is shown in numbers (Yamada, 2005).

Book 1 is for the 7<sup>th</sup> graders, book 2 is for the 8<sup>th</sup> graders, and book 3 is for the 9<sup>th</sup> graders. They are all MEXT approved textbooks.

textbooks	Book 1	Book 2	Book 3	Average (%)
New horizon	100	40	38	60
New crown	73	37	37	49
Sunshine	92	73	64	77
Total English	100	84	45	77
One world	92	82	60	81
Columbus	70	59	50	67
Active Comm	90	34	20	43
Average (%)	90	59	45	65

We will see more evidence that MEXT approved English textbooks carry less grammar instruction in 1999 than they did in the 1960s (See. Chapter 4).

In an English textbook for 9<sup>th</sup> graders *New Horizon* (2004), there are only one or two lines allocated for “grammar” after each unit of the lesson. Unit 6 talks about relative pronouns. The sentences for the grammatical elements of Unit 6 read:

1. I bought a book in America.
2. This is a book I bought in America.

3. Carson is the scientist who wrote *Silent Spring*.
4. This is a movie that[which] makes us happy.
5. This is a book that she wrote last year.

In the margin a few words are given in small print in Japanese. The meager explanation for sentence 1 reads: When you reorder the words in *I bought a book* as in *a book I bought* the meaning changes.

For #3, the explanation reads: To give more information about a person, use a relative pronoun *who*.

The explanation for #4 reads: When you want to add some information about inanimate things, use either *that* or *which*.

For #5, the sentence goes: *that* can be omitted. Note that if we put #4 and #5 together, a logical person would conclude “When you want to add some information about inanimate things, don’t use anything.” This is clearly nonsense, so of course it is worse than not saying anything.

It is quite clear from this that there isn’t much grammar in this 2004 textbook. No grammar exercises are given either, and what there is is incoherent and schematic.

However the same textbook twenty years ago had more exercises in addition to the sample sentences. Here are the exercises from the same textbook published in 1985.

Join the two sentences with relative pronouns. See which one(s) can be omitted.

1. This is the book. I bought it in America.
2. Ken is the boy. He came to see you.
3. This is the bus. It goes to the park.
4. Mary is the girl. She was looking for this cat.
5. This is the movie. We saw it last week.
6. This is the picture. My father likes it very much.
7. Let’s sing the song. We sang it at the party last week.

In order to help the students do the exercises above, it must have been necessary for the teachers to give more extensive grammar instruction in class. Otherwise the students cannot have done them by themselves. They need to know how relative words work in joining sentences. The 1985 version of the textbook had more extensive explanation as to the sentence constructions with relative pronouns. There used to be five English classes a week then, but now they are reduced to three classes. Unfortunately there has been little data, if any, on how the textbooks are used in class. But it can easily be assumed that the emphasis on grammar has been shifted towards more communicative lessons.

Despite this neglect in grammar instruction at school, in reality, grammar knowledge has effects. This was made clear in Chapters 3 and 4. In Chapter 3, we learned that the Eiken 2<sup>nd</sup> grade certificate holders do much better in grammar tests than those without, although the Eiken doesn't ask explicit grammar questions. Its first part, consisting of 20 questions, is an almost all vocabulary and idiom test except for the last three, which ask test-takers' tense perception. The second part is a word reordering test, which requires grammar. It actually *is* a grammar test, but communicative approach supporters insist that test-takers can do without grammar, saying reviewing the past test materials can get test-takers familiarized with the patterns and eventually help them do well. The rest of the test is all reading. All test takers need, it looks like, is holistic reading skills here, not grammar. But chapter 4 has shown that it isn't that simple. The Eiken, though not asking grammar questions openly and directly, does require grammar power for test-takers to score high. On closer examination, the test materials reveal that having rich vocabulary and idioms, though they are important, not the only skills test takers need. They need to know the sentence construction patterns. These are beyond mere memorization.

Furthermore, in chapter 5, research showed that grammar instruction produces more competent English users. A Grammar Group (GG) class that received a substantial amount of grammar instruction did much better in all four skills than an Extensive Reading Group (ERG) class where Krashen's "free reading" was employed as the main strategy. Following his advice, the "ERG" students read approximately 2000 pages that were at a slightly higher level than their current reading level. "level  $i+1$ " is the expression Krashen created, meaning something a little beyond the present reading level of the students. But my long time teaching experiences as both an EFL



learner and instructor told me he is wrong. But this might be easily dismissed as my subjective impression, so I did the experiments in chapter 5 to prove my point.

But despite the fact grammar is effective and powerful, the communicative approach is still gaining popularity. We will see why.

### 7.1.1 Native speaker fallacy

There has been a widespread misconception that native speakers are always better teachers than non-native teachers. But it's not difficult at all to see how false this is. The following sub-sections will illustrate what the "Native Speaker Fallacy" is all about. This phrase was coined by Peter Medgyes in 1998 in his best selling book *The non-native teacher* published by Hueber. He is Director of the Centre for English Teacher Training in Budapest, Hungary.

### 7.1.2 Native speakers are believed to be skilled teachers

Assume you are a native speaker of English and are asked to teach English to Japanese students. Typically, for English speakers, you have never received training or lessons in foreign language teaching, but you have a college degree in, say, biology. How would you start? First you have to teach them the alphabet. They had been given a penmanship exercise book and practiced writing the alphabet. You start writing each letter on the board, but the students seem to be puzzled because you write some of the letters differently from the way they'd practiced. The letters you write on the board look a lot different too. But their speaking ability is almost nil, so they can't ask you any questions. They mumble their confusion to one another. Although alphabets can be seen everywhere in Japan, they don't know how each letter is pronounced in a real English way, and they find it difficult to repeat certain letters after you such as L, R, B, V, F, because these are not five distinct phonemes in their native language. But you don't know this. You see their trouble but don't know how to fix it, because you've never experienced any difficulties with these sounds. You've grown up with them. They are so natural a part of your language that you've never even thought to pay any attention. So it comes as a shock to you that there are people in your class who can't differentiate *love* from *rub*, *ship* from *sip*, *five* from *hive*. Not knowing how to fix their problem, you have to move on. Later you learn that the Japanese students know how to write the alphabet in a fixed way and they are, in fact, good at penmanship, perhaps better than you.

Next you teach them some words in the “Communicative method”. Showing them pictures of everyday vocabulary and pronouncing each word slowly, you encourage them to repeat after you. They do, and this seems to work. Now they know *a cat, a dog, an apple, a banana, milk, water* etc, but they don’t have any idea what those *a* and *an* are. Some smart students realize there is no *a* or *an* in front of *milk* and *water* but they don’t know how to find out why. When you teach verbs, you act the verbs, *run, walk, cry, laugh*. Some are easy to act but others are not so easy, such as *like, want, teach, learn*. Here again people seem to have trouble with *live* and *leave, walk* and *work*. You have no idea why they cannot hear the difference. You don’t realize that the English language has more vowels than Japanese. But you shouldn’t waste their time, so you move on.

You try to teach them some simple, basic greetings. You need a lot of visual aids and realia to compensate for your lack of Japanese. You try to teach them how to introduce themselves by telling them your name. You begin “Hi, I’m Mark.” The students repeat after you “Hi, I’m Mark”. You say “No, no, not Mark, your name” But they look puzzled. Until then all they did was repeat after you, and suddenly the teacher says “No, no”. “What’s wrong? What are we supposed to do?” They wonder. After a lot of struggling they now seem to know *You* and *I*. The students still seem to be confused, but so much for the greetings. You move on.

You know it’s useful for the students to be able to say some practical phrases. You begin teaching *Do you like~?* By now some students are using an electronic dictionary. They seem to know *like*. This is better, you think. You start with *Do you like milk?* You ask the students to repeat. They do. You teach them how to answer. You say “Yes, I like milk.” Then you ask the students a question and encourage them to answer. You say “Do you like dogs?” The students enthusiastically say “Yes, I like dog.” You are surprised to hear that, because you know what *I like dog* can mean. You don’t mean to make them say they are dog meat eaters. So you say “No, no, you don’t like dog! You like dogs.” But students don’t get the point. You repeat this several times with an emphasis on the last plural S. But no effect. You don’t realize that there is no singular-plural notion in Japanese. Out of desperation, you want to change the topic now.

You think it might help if you teach them how to express feelings. You want to be flexible. You show them a picture of a happy boy’s face and say “He is happy”.

Showing them a weeping girl's face, you say " She is sad". They have learned by consulting a dictionary that *she* means a female and *he* means a male. They repeat and copy in their notebooks what you write on the board. You teach them inversions. *Are you happy? Is he sad? Is she hungry?* and how to answer them. Then you encourage them to make the simple question sentences by themselves. The students write, *Are you want dog? Do you thirsty? Do he like cat? Is she drive?* Now things are really getting out of hand. You feel like screaming "Help!". But you can't. They have put so much trust in you and after all, you are being paid for teaching.

This is just the beginning. This continues all the way as long as you teach in the target language only. But a majority of native English speakers are still believed to be good English teachers. Things have been almost the same all over the world for many years.

### 7.1.3 Laos and North Korea also had an illusion

The Lao People's Democratic Republic was under the French rule until 1953. Now in the age of IT, the government realizes they need to provide the people with good English education. They invited native speakers from the UK, the US and Australia, but the scheme wasn't successful, because those native speakers didn't know the local language and mentality. So in 2002, The Lao People's Democratic Republic asked Japan for help. They knew Japan had made some achievement in breaking into the international society and shown some substantial success in education including English to some degree. They thought Asian EFL teachers would be better for them because we share the similar mentality (Sawai, 2003).

Another episode comes from Charles Jenkins, the husband of an abductee by North Korea. He recounts his story in *Time* (2004, Dec. 14). Charles Jenkins, a 7<sup>th</sup> grade drop out, arrived at a South Korean Camp in 1964 but ran away from the army and got caught by North Korean soldiers.

...[Jenkins] was forced to study more propaganda and translate English radio broadcasts in Korean. In 1981 the school finally reopened, under the name Mydanghi University, and Jenkins taught there for four more years. In 1985 he was fired for good, he says with a laugh, when the North Koreans realized that his English was actually having a negative impact on the students' skills....

Episodes such as the above are rampant, but nonetheless the native speaker fallacy persists.

#### 7.1.4 Who decides the usage is correct or not?

Another native speaker fallacy is about Standard English. There is an assumption that authentic English exists and it refers to what native-speakers know of their language and how they use it. Proficiency and competence are measured against the yardstick of those native speakers. But here arises a question of who the native speakers are. There have been arguments that this assumption is of questionable validity (Kachru, 1994). The concept of native-speaker competence is itself problematic, because a variety of English spoken vary widely on a number of counts. Speakers are inevitably influenced by their education, areas or countries where they were brought up, personal preferences, social status, family environment, attitude toward languages, etc.

In April, 2005, there was a discussion on a mailing list whether or not the phrase *I amn't* is acceptable (etj@yahogroups.com). The issue was brought up by an English teacher who was asked by one of his students if *I amn't* was wrong and he didn't know for sure. He'd never heard of it or used it but just to make sure, he asked the members on a mailing list. There were many responses from native speakers, many of whom said it wasn't acceptable, but there were quite a few who said it was an acceptable form. Let's look at one of those responses.

...I seem to recall my grandparents using it. My grandmother was born in 1903 in Ireland. She died in the mid-90s.I found this:

In fact, in a wide swath of English dialects, *amn't* exists. This word is common in Scotland and Ireland: *I amn't sure what he said* and *I am going, amn't I* are common in those variants of English. English doesn't like two nasal consonants like "m" and "n" together, however, and in most dialects they merged into *an't*, the spelling of which eventually evolved into *ain't*. *Ain't* then acquired the reputation of a *four-letter* word it has had to endure over the course of the last century....(sic)

Here is another response from a native speaker.

...It's a word. However, I stand my ground in that in my 38 years of speaking English I've never used it and, despite listening to thousands of native speakers from every native English-speaking nation in the world during the course of my life, I don't recall ever hearing it used by any other native speaker. Also, being 400 years old, Shakespearean English is not the same as modern English and, though I'm admittedly ignorant of Yate's works, I'm not sure that they'd constitute a viable corpus of standard, modern English (please correct me on this if I'm wrong). MS Word's spellchecker accepts it, but Lotus Amipro's doesn't. Also, it is not in Longman's Contemporary Dictionary or the Collins Cobuild Student's Dictionary.

...So, what are your opinions or experiences with this word. Do you use it? Have you ever heard it used by others? Is it a linguistic fossil that does /doesn't deserve its place in a dictionary. Is it still in use? If so, is it more prevalent among particular nationalities. Ireland seems to feature strongly in her argument. 'Gut reactions' also welcome.

...I'm not looking for ammunition to continue the argument (though she was rather rude in her tone). I just want to know for myself whether my view is a commonly held one or whether I've been here so long that I'm finally starting to lose my vocabulary. I just wish I had access to a concordance so that I could find out how often this is really used.(sic)

So, what can EFL learners glean from these pieces of information from native speakers? It looks like *amn't* is not an acceptable form in the major parts of English speaking countries, but since there certainly is an area or a country where *amn't* is actually used as a common phrase, should it be regarded as a dialectic form of *am not*? Who decides what is acceptable?

A native speaker's view seems to vary according to where s/he comes from and what the academic backgrounds are. Other factors, such as personal preferences and family tradition may influence her/his view in regard to certain word usage. There is no standard to fall back on. There is no knowing whether native speakers' view is valid.

## 7.2 Native speaker teachers

### 7.2.1 Large influx of foreign workers, the JETs

Now we are aware that grammar is a key to improving EFL in Japan. So it is necessary to find out if average native speakers can impart this grammar competence. J. Emonds, who has lived and taught both in the US and in the UK, (pers. comm.) states that grammar instruction was eliminated in US schools in the 50s and in UK in the 70s. The fact is, JETs are not expected to have any but “ordinary” BA degrees.

The native speaker fallacy persists and more and more foreign teachers began coming in the 1980s. Here recall the previous section in regard to the JET program (Chapter 3. 3.2.3) For the reader’s convenience I will repeat the part of that section.

The first nationwide program was the JET program. JET stands for the Japan Exchange and Teaching Program. It was started in 1987. On the surface, the JET program looks like one of the exchange programs in which many foreigners come from overseas to Japan. A majority of these foreigners are from English speaking countries such as the US, England, New Zealand, Australia, and so on, but there are a small number of participants from France, Germany, and other nations. They work as assistant language teachers at public schools. They are called ALTs. Since most of these ALTs are seen in public junior high and senior high schools, one may have an impression that the Ministry of Education Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) took the initiative in creating the program. The number of the JET program participants grew from 848 in 1987 to 6273 in 2002 (<http://www.mext.go.jp/>). Besides this large influx of JET, language schools where native speakers are employed are mushrooming.

One obvious reason why less grammar is being taught is that many English native speakers are not knowledgeable about their own grammar.

T. Turner, who has taught English both in China and Japan confessed in a personal communication that he had taught instructors of English in China and Japan but one of his most fatal shortcomings as a teacher of English, was his unwillingness, because of his own lack of confidence, to teach grammar.

### 7.2.2 What about the grammar competence of native speakers?

In order to see the grammar competence of the JET participants, I designed a simple testing device, which I will call “competence differentials” to measure the knowledge in basic English sentence structures of native speakers. We will see what has been revealed by these Competence Differentials (Takahashi, 2003).

Native speakers participating in this experiments are some of the JET Program participants and other ALTs (assistant language teachers).

In quiz (A), Sentences (1) and (2) are to see if the English speaking native instructors themselves know the difference between a noun clause and an adverbial clause. Sentence (3) has an unnecessary *it* in a complex sentence, where a main clause and a subordinate clause can be identified. Sentence (4) seems to give native speakers a hard time. Most of them know by their native instinct or “feel for correctness” that there is something wrong with (4), but they are usually unable to explain why. However, this *why* is exactly what Japanese EFL students need to improve their English. They need to know the reason for the incorrectness so that they can be careful not to make the same mistake.

#### Quiz (A)

Why is (1) considered clumsy or even a mistake while (2) is correct? What’s wrong with sentences (3) and (4)?

- (1) I ’ll find out her address if she will arrive tomorrow.
- (2) I’ll find out if she will arrive tomorrow.
- (3) This is the movie that we saw it last week.
- (4) Tom always has his sister does his homework.

Here are some of the answers given by native speakers. The answers given by the JET Program participants are shown in the brackets as (JET). Those given by non-JET ALTs are shown as (ALT). (CES) stands for commercial English school, non-accredited language school instructors.

**Answers to Quiz (A) (1) (2) by native speakers**

Quiz (A) (1) I 'll find out her address if she will arrive tomorrow.

(2) I'll find out if she will arrive tomorrow.

- 1) *I'll find out her address is clear enough.* You don't need *if*...
- 2) The *if*-clause shouldn't be in the future tense.(JET)
- 3) This sounds like we want to know her address. But it is confused by poor grammar.(JET)
- 4) They both sound strange to me.(JET)
- 5) cannot explain.(JET)
- 6) You can't have both the subordinate and in subordinate clauses constructed with the "will" construction. The subordinate clause (*if* clause) must be in the present tense while the in subordinate clause (the "then" clause) employs the "will" construction. – > *I'll find out her address, if she arrives tomorrow.*(JET)
- 7) Clumsy sentence. What is trying to be said—her address, or whether she arrives tomorrow. (JET)
- 8) In the sentence (2), "if" means "whether or not." No problem.
- 9) The speaker will find out whether or not *she* will arrive.(JET)
- 10) Address indicates you care where she stays, so if you are interested in that then the sentence is fine. But if you only care if she will arrive, then you don't need to know where she stays.(JET)
- 11) *if* should be *whether*. *if*... not conditional in usage.(JET)
- 12) Actually, this doesn't sound totally correct to me. "I'll find out if she is arriving tomorrow" sounds better to me because we are talking about an already conceived plan of action, it seems to me. In any event, this is not an *if/then* statement. The "finding out" is not contingent on the girl's arriving tomorrow. In this case, *if* merely means *whether*.(JET)



- 13) When I teach conditional sentences I like to show that such sentences consist of a “conditional” clause and a “result” clause. This seems to be less confusing for students. If the conditional clause is shown first. Sentence (1) is, what is generally referred to as , a “type 1” (true in the present) conditional sentence. In this type of conditional, the verb tense in the conditional clause is always simple present and if the result clause shows strong probability of the condition occurring then *will + v* is used in that clause. In sentence (1), the conditional clause is: “If she arrives tomorrow,” and the result clause is *I will find out her address*.
- 14) The meanings are completely different. In the first sentence, which means that the speaker will ask someone her address if that person arrives the next day, the future tense in the second clause is uncalled-for. It should be present simple. In the second sentence, *if* means *whether or not*. No problem. (JET)

Sentence 2 is not a true conditional and *if* is often replaced by *whether* or *whether or not* in such sentences. For students. it may be clearer to separate these sentences thus:

I'll find out if/whether \_\_\_\_\_.

Do you know if/whether \_\_\_\_\_?

Can you tell me if/whether \_\_\_\_\_?

Will you find out if/whether \_\_\_\_\_? etc., etc. (CES)

The respondents 4,5,8,11 are particularly typical of native speakers who do not know grammar. The respondent 13 is fairly clear, but the sample sentences are focused on the noun clause issue instead of conditional clause, thus do not satisfy the requirement, that is, to help EFL learners see the grammatical difference between the two sentences, (1) I 'll find out her address if she will arrive tomorrow. (2) I'll find out if she will arrive tomorrow.

Let's just arbitrarily match, for comparison, some answers by Japanese teachers of English (JAPTEs) to some JET answers.

1. The first half of the sentence is an independent clause and the tense

is future. The latter half is a conditional clause. In the conditional clause a future tense isn't used.

2. In the conditional clause, *will* can't be used. Use simple present instead of future.
3. Use present tenses with a future meaning in a conditional clause.
4. The main clause is in a future tense, but you can't use a future tense in a conditional clause.
5. Compare the following two sentences, (a) and (b).

(a) We'll call off the game if it will rain tomorrow.

(b) We'll call off the game if it rains tomorrow.

(a) is incorrect because you can't use *will* in a conditional clause even when you are talking about tomorrow. (b) *is*, therefore, correct. No future *will* for a conditional clause.

6. A conditional clause doesn't allow a future tense. The same rule applies to *as soon as*, *when*, *while*, *until*, *after*.

It may be helpful to look at some sentences with present tenses for future meanings.

(a) He will be happy if you call him.

(b) I'll write to her when I have time.

(c) I'll stay home until you come home.

7. Using a future is not allowed in adverbial clauses with subordinate conjunctions such as "if, when, as soon as, until, etc." (Takahashi 2003).

Japanese English teachers all gave practically the same answer in different words, because this is what we learn and are told to teach our students. This explanation helps students compose good sentences.

### **Some of the native speakers' answers to Quiz (A) (3)**

(3) This is the movie that we saw it last week.

- 1) *it* is not needed. *it=movie*. You don't need to repeat the subject.(JET)
- 2) This is used to introduce non-restrictive clauses. In sentence (3) *we saw last week* is a restrictive clause, specifying which movie. *That* should be changed to *which*.(JET)
- 3) One does not need *it* because the subject of a sentence doesn't need to be repeated within the same simple sentence. (JET)
- 4) No *it* needed. (JET)
- 5) *it* is repetition of *the movie*. (ALT)
- 6) There is an unnecessary repetition of the subject here. The same word is both the subject and the object of the sentence and they cannot co-exist in this way. The *it* must be eliminated. (ALT)
- 7) This is present tense, where as *saw* is past tense.  
 Correct answer... "We saw that movie last week"  
 Explain the difference between "past" and "present" tense.(JET)
- 8) This is the pronoun (definite) . *saw* is the verb. *it* is a pronoun(indefinite).  
 Too many subjects (pronouns) for the verb. Correction: This is the movie that we saw last week.(CES)
- 9) You don't need to use (repeat) the pronoun.(CES)  
 This is the movie that we saw last week.
- 10) It just doesn't sound right with *it* in it. Leave it out. (ALT)

As far as we have seen, there is a substantial amount of incorrect "explanations". Most of the answers from the native speaker instructors seem to have come from their "feel for correctness", which inexperienced non-native learners do not possess, and thus do not help EFL learners in Japan.

Japanese English teachers' answers for comparison.

1. *it* is unnecessary. This sentence is a combination of two sentences.
  - (a) This is the movie.
  - (b) We saw it (the movie) last week.

**Step 1.** Change the object of the sentence (b) to a relative pronoun.  
(which, or that)

**Step 2.** Combine the two sentences, placing the relative pronoun as close to its antecedent as possible.

**Step 3.** Don't add an extra element to repeat the relative pronoun.  
In other words, omit *it*.

2. You don't need *it*. First try to compose two separate sentences out of (3). You get (a) This is the movie. (b) We saw it last week. Look for a noun which is repeated in both sentences. You will find *the movie* and *it* are the same thing. Change the pronoun to a relative, *which* or *that*. *the movie* is called an antecedent. Move the relative pronoun *that* to follow the antecedent *the movie*. Move the rest of the sentence (b) to follow that relative pronoun. The key is not to repeat the same element when the sentences are combined.
3. Omit *it*. *the movie* is an antecedent of the sentence and *that* is a relative pronoun modifying the antecedent, *the movie*. In a sentence where a relative pronoun is used, you don't add an extra element that indicates the antecedent.
4. Leave out *it* and you will have *This is the movie that we saw last week*. which is correct.

First try to see that this sentence is a combination of two sentences, namely, *This is the movie* and *We saw it last week*. In order to make these sentences into one sentence, you have to restructure the sentences. Find an antecedent which is the word you want to explain further. In this case it's *the movie*. You want to add a little more information on that. OK, we saw the movie last week. You now see that *the movie* and *it* are the same thing. Leave out *it* and add a relative pronoun after the antecedent *the movie*. Move the rest of the sentence after the relative pronoun *that* without changing the order of the sentence. Be sure not to leave *it*.

5. Repeating the same element in this type of sentence is not correct, because *it* is *the movie*. The sentence (3) is made of two sentences

*This is the movie* and *We saw the movie last week.* *the movie* in the second sentence is changed into a relative word, so that it doesn't have to be repeated.

6. Since this sentence is made of two sentences, you first look at them in the original sentences, so that you know how this sentence (3) was composed.
  - (a) This is the movie.
  - (b) We saw it last week.

Ask yourself which noun is the one that is repeated. *the movie* and *it* are the same elements. Make *the movie* an antecedent which needs modifying.

Japanese English teachers tell the students how to combine two sentences using relative words. They teach step by step to help students to learn and to internalize the rules.

#### Some of the native speakers' answers to Quiz (A) (4)

(4) Tom always has his sister does his homework.

- 11) *does* should be *do*. It sounds better. (JET)
- 12) A friend said so. (ALT)
- 13) Use *do* instead of *does*. It sounds natural that way. (JET)
- 14) Using the word *do* would make more sense. (ALT)
- 15) *does* should be *do*, because you can not use *does* twice within one sentence.  
Just as you don't say *Does he does his homework at home?* You say *Does he do his homework at home?* The same rule applies here. (ALT)
- 16) *Always* is a plural and so *does* should be *do*. That's the only way I can think of it as correct. (ALT)
- 17) I can't explain how it works, but *does* should be *do*. (JET)

- 18) The verb *has* is used so *does* should be *do*. It's rather complicated, so we usually tell the students to memorize them instead of bothering to know why. There are many different ways of explanations according to your analysis. (CES)
- 19) You can not use *does* when the main verb is already *has* (CES)
- 20) When you have verbs like *have*, *let*, *allow* the verb in the same sentence has to be a root form. (ALT)

From the experiment above, a tendency can be seen that the native speakers avert grammatical explanation and choose to have the students exposed to a variety of correct sample sentences, because they don't actually know grammar. They try to teach the students by showing correct usage instead of giving grammatical explanation. Sometimes they give them exercises to work on but they are not always to the point.

Here are some answers from Japanese English teachers.

1. The first verb *has* is a causative verb just like *make* and *let*. The second verb should be a root form, which in this case is *do*.
2. Change *does* to *do*. The second verb always takes a root form with causative verbs such as *make*, *let*, *have*.
3. *does* should be *do*. With a causative *have*, the verb after the object is always a root form. The person who actually does Tom's homework is his sister.
4. You must first realize that the verb *have* is a causative verb. There are other causative verbs like *make* and *let*. They all function in the same manner. The sentence pattern is Subject+causative verb+object+root form of the verb. So *does* has to be *do*, a root form.
5. A root form of the verb must be used with a causative verb, *have*. Never use third singular or past forms with a causative verb.
6. *have* in this sentence is a causative verb allowing only a root form verb to follow the object. That's why you have to use *do* instead of *does*. The same pattern can be observed in the following sentences. *make* and *let* are causative verbs also. In (b) his brother did the

dishes, but because of the causative verb *made*, the verb *do* has to be a root form.

Here again Japanese English teachers explain the rules clearly, making a clear distinction between the causative *have* and *make* and regular verbs.

### 7.3 US/UK native speaker teachers have never studied grammar

Now we have seen that average native speaker teachers are not well versed in English grammar or “good at explaining the rules” or interested in grammar instruction.

It is quite natural that we don't pay attention to the grammar of our native language while acquiring it. Language is such a natural part of our life that we seldom stop and think about it. We occasionally ask parents, peers and teachers usage questions but this doesn't happen very often in daily life.

The major reason native English speakers don't know grammar is that grammar instruction has been essentially eliminated from formal schooling in the UK and US.

Ferris says as follows in her article in *Journal of Second Language Writing*.

...In the UK also, the no-grammar approach is gaining ground. Sarah Cassidy, Education Correspondent says in the Independent Online (19 January 2005) that schools are wasting their time teaching children the rules of English grammar because there is no evidence that it has any impact on pupils' writing skills, a government-funded study has concluded.

Ministers should cut back the teaching of formal grammar and let children “learn to write by writing”, academics from the University of York said. They called for a review of the national curriculum, arguing that there was little evidence that grammar teaching was “worth the time” spent on it....

...The study, which researchers claim is the largest review of existing research on grammar teaching, is likely to embarrass ministers who have put formal grammar teaching at the heart of their drive to raise literacy standards. It recommended that teachers should concentrate on teaching children to combine short sentences into longer ones to improve their writing skills. They found no evidence that teaching the grammar of word

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order or syntax helped pupils aged from five to 16 to write more fluently or accurately. Professor Richard Andrews, who coordinated the research, said his team's findings did not mean that teaching formal grammar was "not interesting or useful in its own right" but he continued: "In a pressured curriculum, where the development of literacy is a high priority, there will be better ways of teaching writing."

"If there is little evidence that formal grammar teaching of syntax works, then practices based on theories such as 'you learn to write by writing' need to be given more credence. Whether there is space in the curriculum to teach syntax for its own sake, or for other purposes, remains to be seen."...(Ferris, D.R. 2004). The "Grammar Correction" Debate in L2 Writing: Where are we, and where do we go from here? (and what do we do in the meantime...?) (*Journal of Second Language Writing*, 13, 49-62).

Nick Seaton, chairman of the Campaign for Real Education, a group which supports a return to traditional education methods, dismissed the findings as "absolute nonsense".

Nick Seaton is an experienced school governor with a good general knowledge of the state education system. He has written for *The Daily Express*, *The Yorkshire Post*, *Parliamentary Brief*, *Freedom Today*, *Education Monitor* (Australia), *Current Concerns* (Switzerland) etc and is a regular commentator in the press and on radio. His pamphlets for the Center include *School Funding: Present chaos and future clarity* (1996); *Fair Funding or Fiscal Fudge?* (1999); *Unfair Funding* (2000); and (with Power to the Parents by John Redwood) *The True Cost of State Education* (2002) (<http://www.cps.org.uk/?page=who>).

"Children have to learn the basics of grammar and syntax before they can really develop their writing," he said. "A knowledge of grammar and English language always must come before creativity. I sense that this might be a fight back against a return to traditional methods. It is worrying if academics are suggesting that we should go back to the laissez-faire attitudes of the 1960s. It could be very damaging."



Judging from Seaton's statement, grammar is not taught to children in school. His remark "return to traditional methods" suggests that at present grammar is not in the curriculum.

Formal grammar teaching forms part of the national literacy strategy introduced in 1998. Teachers are required to teach children aged from five to seven about nouns, verbs and pronouns. Older primary school pupils are expected to learn the names and functions of all the main parts of speech as well as the grammar of complex sentences. However, an evaluation of the pilot year of the strategy by the schools watchdog Ofsted concluded that while there had been some improvements they "were least in sentence construction, punctuation and paragraphing". Nick Seaton, chairman of the Campaign for Real Education pressure group, said: "This research looks like it is advocating a return to the laissez-faire attitudes of the 1960s, when youngsters were not taught grammar because teachers thought it would restrict their creativity. Now we are left with a generation of teachers who don't know grammar." ( January 19, 2005 Time Online).

His remark also shows the fact that teachers don't know grammar.

Michael Plumbe, chairman of the Queen's English Society, said: "I hated being taught grammar at school, but I now appreciate in later life that it is extremely useful. If the tools of language are instilled at a young age in primary school, then children don't even have to think about using language because it comes naturally. Lack of grammatical knowledge is also a key reason for the failure to learn a foreign language." (January 19, 2005 Time Online).

Now we see a part of the picture why non-grammar approach is popular. It stems from the fact that grammar instruction has essentially been eliminated from the regular curriculum, as the resulting controversy shows.

Naturally they prefer other ways to teach, avoiding grammar teaching and explanation as much as possible. This inevitably fueled the communicative approach movement further. Some evidence can be seen in the following email exchange with a native speaker teacher.

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In order to provide effective correction for a student's error, the teacher must first determine exactly what that error is. Understanding is often made difficult by the inherent complexity of grammar, which can be challenging even to experts. Most language teachers are not experts on grammar, so problems are inevitable.

There used to be a strict law that doesn't allow foreign workers of any kind to be permanently employed but this law has been relaxed to a certain degree and some JET and ALTs have been given permanent posts in mainstream English education. They found it easier to teach English their way, that is "free reading" and "flexible communicative way" without grammar. It would have embarrassed them if they couldn't answer grammar questions asked by students.

In the United States, Veda Charrow, the principal investigator on numerous federally funded linguistic and psycholinguistic studies, and the author of a leading textbook expresses her opinion in *Washington Times* (2004.Dec.16). Her article nicely gives a part of the reasons grammar instruction has all but disappeared from public schools in the US.

...I have no doubt that the reason for this profusion of grammatical errors is that most American elementary and high school students aren't taught English grammar anymore....

These elementary and high school students without having been taught grammar go to college and get their BA and some of them come to Japan as JETs.

...Teachers found Chomsky's Transformational grammar was too difficult to teach.... Fortunately, in the 1960s and '70s most teachers knew the English grammar that they had been taught, and so could help their students learn at least some grammar. Within a number of years, however, grammar ceased to be taught as a separate subject, and was just sprinkled through basal readers. Somewhat later, even fewer grammar rules were to be found in school textbooks. But, went the thinking, why should American children have to be formally taught their own language?

This is roughly what has happened in the US. Even the teachers at US schools found Chomsky's TG too difficult to understand, much less teach it to children. They

may as well throw it all away with traditional grammar. There went a baby with the bath water.

In Japan too, TG did catch attention among the linguists but only in a small group of academics in universities. It was never a commonly known theory.<sup>1</sup>

### 7.3.1 Hostility toward grammar

There seems to have been hostility toward grammar teaching in the United States and in the United Kingdom. The following observations have been made in the online discussion forum. (ATEG@LISTSERV.MUOHIO.EDU).

I began my career as an ESL and college English teacher at my community college in 2000. I was amazed to learn that teachers were forbidden to teach grammar. I'm still amazed. It's so puzzling, but then many beliefs are mind boggling to me like using violence to make the world peaceful.

Another poster comments on the same topic. Although I'm not capable of presenting concrete data on how much hostility do teachers have toward grammar, it seems obvious from the EFL teachers all over the world.

It is mostly the college-level people who have taken the incorrect conclusions of the Braddock and Hillocks reports and mounted intense, aggressive campaigns against grammar teaching at both the secondary and the college levels. I'm sure there are exceptions, but this has been my experience. Of course, what the college people say often filters down to the secondary level, either in official policy or just in lore, so either way it does its damage.

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<sup>1</sup>As I mentioned earlier, I buy almost every English language related book advertised in the newspapers and as many as I happen to see at bookstores. I've been interested and pursued the EFL career all these 35 years, but to be honest, it was only a few years before I enrolled at a graduate school that I heard of Chomsky. I happened to see his book in a city library, *Transformational Grammar, don't be afraid of it any more*. I looked at it and brought it home. It was written in the easiest way possible, but still, as the sub-title suggests, was difficult to understand at a first read.

One thing Japanese government and Japanese English teachers should emphasize is that native speakers with no grammar knowledge should not be teaching in Japan. Learning a foreign language without grammar is unproductive. It matters little to us that a no grammar approach is an accepted trend in the United States and England, but there should be a stricter filter to avoid foreign instructors who cannot teach grammar and explain word usage in a meaningful way, so that Japanese EFL students benefit from their contact.

Yet another grammarian on the list comments on the observation he has made as a researcher.

But another reason for wholesale acceptance of the “Don’t teach grammar” message is that those teachers haven’t been taught grammar, or have been taught it so badly that no competent teacher would want to perpetuate the practice. We’ve got a couple of generations of teachers who have been taught this ideology and, quite naturally, haven’t been taught much grammar.

So it seems safe to assume that there is a trend that grammar isn’t properly taught in the English speaking countries. No wonder a large number of native speaker teachers can not give satisfactory reasoning why a certain sentence is grammatically unacceptable.

### 7.3.2 Outcome of the non-grammar approach

Then what happens when the native speaker children are not taught grammar? We will have to find out.

Veda Charrow, the principal investigator on numerous federally funded linguistic and psycholinguistic studies, and the author of a leading textbook expresses her view (*Washington Times*, 2004. Dec.16). She is currently employed by the federal government, but the views expressed in this article are her own and do not represent the views or positions of any federal agency. Her article nicely gives a part of the reasons grammar instruction has all but disappeared from public schools in the US.

...Twenty years later, the elementary school students who had not formally learned English grammar were now teaching English. They had never been exposed to the traditional grammar books of the 1940s and ’50s, so they could not explain even rudimentary grammatical forms. (What is a dangling modifier? What is the difference between a clause and a phrase?) The grammatical “herd immunity” conferred on teachers in the ’60s and ’70s by their own exposure to traditional grammar had worn off, and there was no one to teach grammar to our children—who have become today’s reporters, journalists, writers and newscasters (Veda Charrow, *Washington Times*, 2004.Dec.16).

Now the reason why many native speakers of English don't know grammar is becoming clearer. There are many pieces of evidence here and there showing the native speaker's grammar knowledge is weak. In a personal communication a native speaker asked me whether the often used phrase was *used to* or *use to*. This indicates he can speak but cannot spell or does not know grammar.

"Free reading" and Communicative Approach supporters have always claimed that the exposure to the target language solves the problem and that's the best way to learn. However a linguist Harmer thinks otherwise. Harmer (1998) shows that the exposure does not solve the problem even for native speakers. Not a few native speakers spell *You should've seen* as *You should of seen*. A photo bearing this very phrase was taken at a gas station in the US in 2001. The sign read *You might of seen lower, but don't be fooled by competitors*. If they are well versed in English grammar, they would never spell 've as of, which makes no grammatical sense in this sentence.

This type of error is rampant in "the English speaking" world and some people insist it's not grammar problem but listening or pronunciation problem. Costas Gabrielatos, Dept. of Linguistics & MEL, Lancaster University, UK, says as follows in an email discussion.

The use of "might of" instead of "might have" or "might've" in writing is not a pronunciation problem, or a spelling problem, or a vocabulary problem, nor is it the new way of writing the structure —it's a grammar problem. The way the structure is pronounced is, of course, where the misunderstanding begins, but, as Doris Long Thurber very aptly pointed out, we don't normally spell the way we pronounce. Why?

Because we know what expression/structure it is we're using. Those who write "might of" don't know what grammatical structure it is that they're hearing - their grammatical knowledge is lacking. If it were a spelling or vocabulary problem, then we would expect the users of "might of", "would of" etc. to consistently use "of" instead of "have" or "ve", and write, for example, "I of got a car" - but they don't. The use of "might of" means that they have learnt the structure by ear, and know when to use it, but they don't know what it is. They don't know that it is part of the perfect infinitive (have + past participle). In other words, there is a gap in their grammatical knowledge.

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It is, of course, also a problem of literacy, as Toni Hull correctly pointed out. But isn't grammatical knowledge part and parcel of literacy? I have corrected enough NS student essays to have realised that as long as they use expressions as fixed entities everything is ok, when they attempt to go beyond that and write in a complex or creative style, the ones who lack grammatical knowledge are in deep waters. Whether we consider this gap in their knowledge to be worth our attention will make the difference between helping learners just get by, and enabling them to become accomplished language users.

Interestingly, mistakes like "might of", "fresh apple's" and "it's colour is blue" are made by native speakers, but not FL learners. I think this has got to do with grammar having been out of fashion for the last decades in English-speaking educational systems, but not in EFL. (sic)

We have so far seen what linguistic damage the lack of grammar does to language. SAT (scholastic aptitude test) needs grammar. Let's look at the writing test section of the SAT. It asks two skills, grammar and word choice. Here is some information from its website.

([http://www.pacesetter.org/prof/counselors/tests/sat/about/sat\\_writing.html](http://www.pacesetter.org/prof/counselors/tests/sat/about/sat_writing.html))

Here are some sample questions and its solution.

#### Directions

The following sentences test your ability to recognize grammar and usage errors. Each sentence contains either a single error or no error at all. No sentence contains more than one error. The error, if there is one, is underlined and lettered. If the sentence contains an error, select the one underlined part that must be changed to make the sentence correct. If the sentence is correct, select choice E. In choosing answers, follow the requirements of standard written English.

Example: The (A) other delegates and (B) him (C) immediately accepted the resolution (D) drafted by the neutral states. (E) No error

Oxford University Press publishes a large number of language related materials. Lesli A. Hill is one of the authors who has had his books published by OUP. Among her many books is *Word Power 1500*. The back of the cover reads;

...Dr. Hill's selections of this 4500-word list takes account of the student's need to develop a wide, general vocabulary in preparation for entrance to college....

Recall the section 7.2. where the native speakers' lack of grammar knowledge is stated. Here is a citation for easy reference.

Now we are aware that grammar is a key to improving EFL in Japan. So it is necessary to find out if average native speakers can impart this grammar competence. J. Emonds (pers. comm.), who has lived and taught both in the US and the UK, states that grammar instruction was eliminated in US schools in the 50s and in UK in the 70s. The fact is, JETs are not expected to have any but "ordinary" BA degrees. He has lived and taught both in the US and in the UK. (Chapter 7.2)

Here are some exercises from *Word Power 1500*.

(choose a correct word)

I can't buy anything because I forgot to bring ....

1 many      2 Monday      3 money      4 monkey

Do you like chicken? Yes I'm really ... of them.

1 front      2 fond      3 found      4 friend

How do you open that bag? You open it this ....

1 way      2 we      3 weigh      4 why

Since it doesn't state anywhere that the book was intended for Japanese students, it can be assumed that this word book is for both native speakers in the US or ESL (English as a Second Language) students in the US, such as immigrants from other countries, who use their native language at home, but use English at other places including school. As far as we can see, these exercises suggest that the young US

students can not read. They can not spell either. They don't know grammar, that's why they get distracted by *way* and *weigh*.

But in spite of all this evidence we have seen so far that grammar is power, grammar instruction is neglected in EFL in Japan, partly because a large influx of native speaker teachers who don't know grammar themselves.

## 7.4 The concrete evidence for the grammar-centered approach to English teaching

I started this Ph.D project with an intuition. It was an intuition backed up by long-term observation and experience. My observation in EFL teaching in Japan was that something was going wrong. This intuition persisted ever since I started teaching English as a foreign language in the 1970s and continued gnawing at me all these years up to the present. My observation was that the students' competence in English was going down while MEXT desperately tried to improve the situation. MEXT even issued a statement that they would produce "Japanese with English abilities" (Section 2.2.2). They said they would do everything possible to enhance the students' abilities in English, but what they have done so far is not showing any positive outcome. One of their strategies or rather an attraction was the notorious JET program (Section 2.2.3). Because of a lack of grammar instruction in the US and in the UK, these native speaker "teachers" don't know English grammar. Without grammar they have no choice but to lean toward the communicative method or anything they have to create from scratch. Since the communicative approach has never been successful in enhancing the learners' competence, there must be something very wrong with this approach. In spite of the negative aspects, however, this non-grammar approach has gained ground both in the US and in the UK, and the communicative approach came into the mainstream in EFL teaching methodologies (Sections, 7.3.1, 7.3.2).

One of the prominent figures in the non-grammar centered approach is Steven Krashen, who claims in his famous "input hypothesis" that an extensive reading program without explicit grammar instruction is the best way to the learners' language acquisition (Section 6.1). He has claimed that exposing learners to the level of reading a little higher than their current level of reading is an effective learning method. But this hypothesis is full of contradictions. For the readers' convenience, I will repeat my claim that there is a contradiction.



When the learners understand what they are reading, the material is not beyond their comprehension. If the reading is beyond their comprehension how could they understand the contents? The challenging input and easy enough input do not coincide (Section 6.8.2).

My 35 years of experience in teaching and learning told me that the students were not learning English grammar as much as they should. This is the core of the problem. Without a firm knowledge of grammar in the target language, learners cannot produce meaningful sentences. They risk being misunderstood and making crucial mistakes in communication both oral and written. This is especially true when the mother tongue and the target language are significantly different in grammar and structures. I have observed a large number of successful English learners who have learned grammar, and at the same time a larger number of students fail to attain their aim when they don't learn grammar.

In order to show the people concerned with this issue the efficacy of grammar instruction in EFL classes, I designed two kinds of research. One is to show that the Eiken test, which is known to test the general competence of test takers' English abilities, namely, reading, writing, speaking and listening is actually correlated with the test takers' grammar knowledge (Section 1.2.1). The Eiken is said to be not a grammar test, yet my data shows that successful test takers are indeed proficient in grammar and unsuccessful counterparts are not good in grammar. As I have said earlier (Section 1.1) grammar is defined not as Transformational Grammar but what EFL instructors all over the world know and teach as grammar. In the first part of my research, grammar tests were given to controlled groups of students. The result showed that the Eiken 2<sup>nd</sup> grade holders scored higher than those without the 2<sup>nd</sup> grade (See chapter 5). This alone can suggest that better grammar leads to better scores in English proficiency test, but I needed further corroborating data.

The second part of the research was conducted in college EFL classes. Three different methods were used to teach three classes; an Extensive Reading Group (ERG) where only a lot of input was given without grammar instruction, a Grammar Group (GG) where ample grammar instructions and exercises were given in context, and a Grammar Reading Group (GRG) where grammar instruction and reading were combined (refer to chapter 6). The results show clearly there is a strong correlation between grammar instruction and improved English competence. I have presented

#### 7.4. THE CONCRETE EVIDENCE FOR THE GRAMMAR-CENTERED APPROACH TO ENGLISH

quantified data, scores of various tests administered before and after the three different types of teaching, which reveal that a class taught without grammar instruction (ERG) scored lowest of the three. The highest scores went to the classes where significant grammar instruction and exercises were given (GG). This showed that “free reading” without teachers’ intervention and feedback does not produce competent English users. It thus demonstrated that students cannot process English without grammar instruction.

I agree that grammar can be somewhat prescriptive and hard to define and, if not carefully monitored, it may from time to time produce stilted, textbookish sentences, but nonetheless it is a powerful tool to learn a foreign language. I also agree that the data obtained for this dissertation is rather restricted, because no one is entitled to deprive anyone of language learning opportunities especially when it is almost obvious that a certain method, namely the “communicative method” has exactly this negative effect. As clearly stated in 6.8.1, I gave the ERG an intensive grammar instruction in remedial sessions. I turned the remaining class hours in the latter one third of the year into explicit grammar teaching. The students learned how important grammar was to understand the contents of reading materials correctly. They, in fact, realized for the first time that grammar was of vital importance. They now know the difference between *Jane’s got to pay for the car* and *Jane got paid for the car*. The ERG group, which looked to be at a disadvantage, learned the most important lesson; grammar is essential. After all they learned that grammar is an indispensable asset for English proficiency.

From the result of my research in this dissertation, I can assuredly state that without a sound knowledge of the grammatical basis of a second or a foreign language, the learner is in possession of nothing more than a selection of everyday phrases which are adequate for basic greetings and making orders at a restaurant, but which will be deficient when the learner is required to perform any kind of sophisticated linguistic task. Those students who say they don’t like English or are poor in English just don’t know the basic grammar. It’s like playing chess or baseball without knowing the rules. They could neither understand the games nor enjoy them. First and foremost the important thing is to know the rules.

I also admit that I am a biased researcher just like everyone else, but the subjects in this dissertation are well controlled in their qualifications (refer to 6.2.2), and

the time spent on creating the data for the research is almost a whole year, enough to do fair and well-prepared research. Krashen did a small experiment to test the power of reading, and seek to determine whether output practice, with and without correction, will increase its effectiveness, but very few other researchers, if any, have done any research to see the correlation between grammar and English proficiency. Therefore I present this dissertation with its concrete data to indicate that it is of vital importance for EFL students to learn its grammar of the target language, and that there is a positive correlation between grammar learning and language competence.

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